Connection Before Content

The New Rules for Networking in 2026

MI ACE Conference Pre-Con | Sunday, June 14, 2026

Presented by **Mimi Brown**

This is UNnetworking.

No Elevator Pitches

Leave the rehearsed lines at the door.

No Working the Room

Quality over quantity, always.

No Pretending

Show up as exactly who you are.

Your Only Job

Be curious and kind. That's it.

Here's How the Evening Works

Your First Assignment

> Turn to someone near you. Share your "Ask me about" line. That's it. 2 minutes. Go.

🎵 Step back. Let the room buzz. Keep music softly playing. After 2 minutes, pull them back and transition to the mini-talk.

Stop trying to network.

Start trying to be **valuable**, **memorable**, and **real**.

Relationships

Over Transactions

Giving

Over Taking

Depth

Over Volume

Presence

Over Performance

Four Books. One Big Truth.

Never Eat Alone

Walk in with a plan. Who do you want to meet? Why?

Give and Take

Lead with *"How can I help?"* — not *"What can I get?"*

Superconnector

Your superpower = introducing others. *"You should meet..."*

The Charisma Myth

People remember how you made them feel. Be present.

Before We Start — Arrive.

Close your eyes. Feet on the floor. Three slow breaths.

Every person in this room is carrying something. A hope. A worry. A new beginning. Connect from that place tonight.

ROUND 1 OF 3

Beyond Job Titles

Theme

See the human before the role.

- No job titles allowed in this round

⏱️ **Timer: 5 Minutes**

ROUND 1 – PROMPTS

Answer Both Prompts in Your Group

1	2
Prompt A Your name + *"I'm here this week because..."* (1 sentence)	**Prompt B — Pick One** *"Something I'm currently learning or stretching into is..."* *"One thing I'm excited about in the next year is..."*

⚠️ **RULE: No job titles in your answer.**

⏱️ **Timer: 5 Minutes**

ROUND 1 — CURIOSITY

After Each Person Shares, Practice These:

"Can you say more about that?"

"What pulled you in that direction?"

> Your goal: Be curious, not impressive.

⏱️ **Timer: 90 Seconds**

ROUND 1 — DEBRIEF

Reflect with Your Group

Take 90 seconds to discuss:

> "What did it feel like to introduce yourself without your title?"

> "Whose share are you going to remember?"

ROUND 2 OF 3

The Listening Lab

Theme

Let others feel deeply heard.

- Groups rotate — new mix of people (by badge color)
- Pair up within your group: Person A and Person B

ROUND 2 — FRAMEWORK

The Listening Framework: S-A-N

S — SEE

Make real eye contact. Turn your whole body toward them.

A — ASK

When they finish, ask one curious follow-up question. Just one.

N — NAME

Reflect back a specific word or phrase they used. *"It sounds like stability is really important to you right now."*

ⓘ ⏱️ **Timer: 5 Minutes**

ROUND 2 — PAIR PROMPTS

Person A — You're Up First

> Share a recent moment — big or small — when you felt alive, proud, or like yourself.

Person B: Your only job is to listen using S-A-N.

No Interrupting

No Advice

No "That Reminds Me..."

See. Ask. Name.

2 minutes each. Then switch.

ⓘ ⏱️ **Timer: 90 Seconds**

ROUND 2 — DEBRIEF

Reflect with Your Group

> "What felt different about being listened to that way?"

> "What did you notice about yourself when your only job was to listen?"

You probably felt more connected when you were listening well — not when you were trying to be interesting. **That's the new rule.**

ROUND 3 OF 3

Connection Contracts

ROUND 3 — PROMPTS

ⓘ ⏱️ **Timer: 5 Minutes**

Reflect Out Loud

> "During this conference, I'd love to..."

→ **Meet people who...**

→ **Learn more about...**

→ **Feel more...**

✓ **Then say:** *"Here's a type of person I'd love to meet this week. If you know someone like that in this room — I'd love an introduction."*

ROUND 3 — MICRO-COMMITMENTS

Replace "Let's Keep in Touch" With This:

"Can I walk into the opening session with you tomorrow?"

"Want to grab coffee before the first break?"

"Would you like to swap notes after the keynote?"

"I'd love to grab a meal together during the conference — are you in?"

Small. Specific. Real. That's a connection contract.

ROUND 3 — DEBRIEF

Make It Real

Did anyone make a micro-commitment just now? Say it out loud.

"That is how relationships are actually built — one small, real moment at a time."

Take 5 Minutes. Just for You.

Time: 8:30-8:40 PM

1. **Whose name do I want to remember from tonight?**
2. **What did I learn about myself in these conversations?**
3. **How do I want to feel at the end of this conference?**
4. **One tiny action I can take tomorrow morning to feel connected is...**

Phone, notebook, whatever you have. **Capture it.**

Identify 1–3 People You Want to Stay Connected With

Who Counts?

Not everyone — just the ones where something **real** happened.

Exchange a Connection Card with them now.

Your Card Includes:

- Name
- How We Met
- What We Want to Follow Up On

> "You are allowed to ask for the follow-up. A simple 'I'd love to grab coffee this week' is enough."

Find Your Day One Ally

Time: 8:50–9:00 PM

> Turn to 1–2 people nearby. If you're open to being Day One Allies — someone who waves, says hi, or sits with you at least once tomorrow — exchange your name or contact now.

No Huge Commitment

This is a low-stakes, high-value agreement.

Just Say This

"I'll look for you tomorrow."

You are no longer walking into Day One as a stranger.

Names

You Have

Real people you'll recognize tomorrow.

Faces

You Have

Familiar faces in every room.

Agreements

You Have

Tiny, real micro-commitments made tonight.

That is what Connection Before Content looks like.

Your Networking Playbook for 2026

Lead with Curiosity

Ask: *"What are you working on that's exciting you?"*

Be the Connector

"You two should know each other."

Give First

Share a resource, idea, or introduction before asking for anything.

Be Present

Eye contact. No phone. Full attention.

Follow Up

24–48 hours. Reference your conversation. Add value.

> **Tomorrow starts with the connections you made tonight.**