GRIT GUIDE

NO. 07

WORK THE ROOM
FOLLOW UP FIRST

How to Work a Room at Your Next Market or Trade Show

Featuring Sarah Lee, Sarah Krey and Ben Couch

Grit Guide by Grit Blueprint · © 2026 Grit Blueprint · gritguide.com · Educational content, not professional advice.

THE PROBLEM

Sarah Lee was walking a show floor when a vendor stepped out and stopped her. “I’m walking by a booth, and a vendor pulls me out of the aisle,” she said on the Grit Blueprint Podcast (14:08). “He recognized my name and my company and said, I’ve been trying to get a hold of you.”

Walk in with a short list, start the conversation, know when to move on and follow up before the week is out.

Grit Guide by Grit Blueprint · © 2026 Grit Blueprint · gritguide.com · Educational content, not professional advice.

THE PLAN

7 STEPS

01 DECIDE WHO YOU NEED TO MEET, AND LOOK THEM UP

02 KNOW WHAT THE OTHER SIDE IS LOOKING FOR

03 PUT YOUR PHONE AWAY, THEN WALK UP

04 OPEN WITH “TELL ME ABOUT,” THEN FOLLOW THE ANSWER

05 WRAP IT UP BEFORE THEY DO

06 WRITE IT DOWN BEFORE THE NEXT CONVERSATION

07 FOLLOW UP THAT WEEK. DON’T WAIT FOR THEM.

Grit Guide by Grit Blueprint · © 2026 Grit Blueprint · gritguide.com · Educational content, not professional advice.

WORDS TO KNOW

BUYING MARKET

A show run by a co-op or distributor where member stores see new products, meet vendors and place orders.

BOOTH

The space a company rents on a show floor to show its products and meet people.

TWO-STEP DISTRIBUTOR

A wholesaler that buys from manufacturers and sells to dealers and retailers, who sell to contractors and homeowners.

FOLLOW-UP

The next contact after a first conversation: a call, an email, a sample or a handwritten note.

Grit Guide by Grit Blueprint · © 2026 Grit Blueprint · gritguide.com · Educational content, not professional advice.

01

STEP 1 OF 7

DECIDE WHO YOU NEED TO MEET, AND LOOK THEM UP

Before you go, write a short list of the people or companies you most want to talk to, and why each one matters. Look each of them up: their role, their company and something they have posted or said lately.

Grit Guide by Grit Blueprint · © 2026 Grit Blueprint · gritguide.com · Educational content, not professional advice.

02

STEP 2 OF 7

KNOW WHAT THE OTHER SIDE IS LOOKING FOR

Everyone on a show floor is filtering. Know their filter before you walk up.

Grit Guide by Grit Blueprint · © 2026 Grit Blueprint · gritguide.com · Educational content, not professional advice.

03

STEP 3 OF 7

PUT YOUR PHONE AWAY, THEN WALK UP

Start by looking approachable. Make eye contact and smile. When you stand with a group, leave a gap so the circle is shaped like a C and someone new can step in. Keep your phone in your pocket.

Grit Guide by Grit Blueprint · © 2026 Grit Blueprint · gritguide.com · Educational content, not professional advice.

04

STEP 4 OF 7

OPEN WITH “TELL ME ABOUT,” THEN FOLLOW THE ANSWER

Ask open questions that let the other person choose where to go. Stefanie Couch’s habit: “I start a lot of my questions with tell me about because that allows people to take it where they want” (6:04). Tell me about your store.

Grit Guide by Grit Blueprint · © 2026 Grit Blueprint · gritguide.com · Educational content, not professional advice.

05

STEP 5 OF 7

WRAP IT UP BEFORE THEY DO

Watch for the moment the other person wants to move on: eyes drifting, body turned away, short answers. Be the one to close it. Shake hands, look at them and say something like “It was so good to talk with you.

Grit Guide by Grit Blueprint · © 2026 Grit Blueprint · gritguide.com · Educational content, not professional advice.

06

STEP 6 OF 7

WRITE IT DOWN BEFORE THE NEXT CONVERSATION

Right after each good conversation, write on the back of their card or in your phone: where you met, what they told you and what you promised to send.

Grit Guide by Grit Blueprint · © 2026 Grit Blueprint · gritguide.com · Educational content, not professional advice.

07

STEP 7 OF 7

FOLLOW UP THAT WEEK. DON'T WAIT FOR THEM.

Do not wait for them to reach out. Busy people, and especially people who run companies, will not. Within the week, send each person what you promised and one line that shows you listened.

Grit Guide by Grit Blueprint · © 2026 Grit Blueprint · gritguide.com · Educational content, not professional advice.

“If it can stop me, and I’ve seen countless amounts of product at retail, that’s the first filter: does it get my attention? Second: can my stores be successful with this product?”

Sarah Lee (10:49)

Grit Guide by Grit Blueprint · © 2026 Grit Blueprint · gritguide.com · Educational content, not professional advice.

THE CHECKLIST

YOUR SHOW-WEEK CHECKLIST

- [ ] I have a short list of people to meet and know why each one matters
- [ ] I looked them up and asked the organizer how the event runs
- [ ] I know what the people I am meeting are looking for
- [ ] I walked up, opened with “tell me about” and asked a follow-up question
- [ ] I ended each conversation myself, with a handshake and a way to follow up when it made sense
- [ ] I wrote notes on each good conversation the same day
- [ ] I sent every follow-up I promised before the week was out
- [ ] I put a reminder on my calendar for each “not now”

Grit Guide by Grit Blueprint · © 2026 Grit Blueprint · gritguide.com · Educational content, not professional advice.

OUR TAKE

MOST OF A TRADE SHOW HAPPENS BEFORE AND AFTER IT

Companies that say a show did nothing for them often did only part of the work. They paid for a booth, put out a tablecloth and a few products, talked to whoever stopped by and never called anyone afterward.

Grit Guide by Grit Blueprint · © 2026 Grit Blueprint · gritguide.com · Educational content, not professional advice.

FINISH LINE

A short list of people to meet, notes on each good conversation written the same day, and a follow-up sent to each of them before the week is out.

- Every good conversation has a note with what they told you and what you promised.
- Every promise is kept, in writing, within a week of the show.
- Each person on your list has heard from you or has a reminder with a date on it.

Grit Guide by Grit Blueprint · © 2026 Grit Blueprint · gritguide.com · Educational content, not professional advice.

THE SOURCES

1. The Powerful Secret to Career Growth: Embrace The Messy Middle (Grit Blueprint Podcast, Sarah Lee with host Stefanie Couch) Grit Guide
2. The Relationship Rule That Changes Everything in Sales (Grit Blueprint Podcast, Sarah Krey with host Stefanie Couch) Grit Guide
3. Marion Pulse on Confidence, Patience and Finding Your Place in Fenestration (Grit Blueprint Podcast, with host Stefanie Couch) (December 2024) Grit Guide
4. The Real Reason Customers Buy Again (Grit Blueprint Podcast, Michael Tull with host Stefanie Couch) Grit Guide
5. The Power of Metrics, Drive & Team Culture in LBM Sales (Grit Blueprint Podcast, Eric Knox with host Stefanie Couch) Grit Guide
6. Building a Million Dollar Network: How to Make Better First Impressions With Confidence (Grit Blueprint Podcast, Stefanie Couch and Ben Couch) Grit Guide

Quotes © their speakers, used with attribution. For educational purposes. General information, not personalized professional advice. AI may assist content creation. Use your judgment, verify information, and consult a qualified professional when needed.

GRIT GUIDE

BY GRIT BLUEPRINT

READ THE FULL GUIDE

gritguide.com/how-to-work-a-room-at-a-trade-show/

© 2026 Grit Guide by Grit Blueprint. gritguide.com. Free to share unchanged, with credit and the link. Not for sale.

For educational purposes. General information, not personalized professional advice. AI may assist content creation. Use your judgment, verify information, and consult a qualified professional when needed.