

Top Tips for Successful Networking

Networking can help you build mutually supportive relationships with other like-minded professionals. It is a great way of sharing knowledge, ideas and expertise and building your professional profile. Following these suggestions will help you get your approach to networking off to a great start, or, if you're an experienced networker, build on your existing skills.

Have a purpose

Think about what you want to achieve from networking. Do you want to develop your career, meet new clients and collaborators, broaden your horizons, or all of the above? Networking is much more productive and enjoyable when you have a clear goal in mind.

Be proactive

Even if you currently receive requests to meet or connect with others, simply waiting for people to contact you will only give you a fraction of the benefits that reaching out to new or existing contacts can offer. Setting yourself a stretching, but achievable **target** can be a helpful way of making sure you remain proactive. Examples of relevant targets could include 'I will attend two networking events next month', or 'I will arrange catch-up meetings with five of my existing contacts this quarter'.

Take a varied approach

Engaging in both online and face-to-face networking can often be more effective than using only one of these approaches. It is important, however, that the networking method you choose is appropriate to the circumstance. For example, when re-establishing links with a former client, arranging a face-to-face meeting is likely to be more effective than simply sending them a brief email.

It is also good practice to build a varied network. This doesn't mean connecting with as many people as possible, but building relationships with people in other **relevant professions and industries**. Having a broad network can help you build your commercial awareness, as well as give you access to a range of different expertise and points of view.

Join a professional networking site

Online sites such as [LinkedIn](#) and [Xing](#) can add a lot of value to your networking strategy. These sites help you make contact with people you want to speak to, reconnect with former colleagues, and keep in touch with your contacts quickly and cost-effectively. If you keep your profile up-to-date and use your chosen site vigilantly, you should only need to use one of the many professional networking services available.

Attend relevant events

The networking events you attend should be appropriate to your personal aims and/or your profession/role. Conduct some research in advance; if your colleagues or friends have been to an event you're interested in, ask them for some feedback. It is also a good idea to find out who else is attending the event you have in mind, as this can give you a good indication of whether or not it is relevant. Ask the organiser for a guest list, or if the event is being co-ordinated online (e.g through LinkedIn), check out who has already agreed to attend. If the confirmed guests have similar experience or interests to you, then the event is likely to be relevant.

Perfect your introduction

One of the most important ways to ensure you feel confident about speaking to others at networking events is to prepare a brief, engaging introduction. This does not mean writing a 'script' as such, but having a comfortable grasp of what you want to say when you first introduce yourself. Your introduction should be fairly brief and should convey key pieces of information about you in a positive and interesting way. In your introduction you may wish to include some of the following suggestions:

- your name (you should always include this in your introduction)
- your occupation
- your organisation, or past organisations (if appropriate)
- who you work with/for (this may be relevant if the other person knows one of your colleagues or your boss)

- what your organisation does (be careful to keep this brief)
- what brought you to the event (e.g. a particular professional interest)

Ask engaging questions

To establish rapport with someone new, it is important to ask some well-considered questions once you have introduced yourself. The purpose of this isn't to interrogate the other person, but to find out more about them and spark a more in-depth conversation. Depending on your reasons for networking, and the purpose of the event you're attending, you may wish to ask the other person about their role and responsibilities, their professional background, and why they were first drawn to the event.

Follow up with people you meet

When you meet someone new at a networking or industry event, it is important to exchange contact details so you can stay in touch. It is good practice to send the other person a brief email the next day or invite them to connect with you on a site such as LinkedIn. If there is something specific you wish to discuss with a new contact after meeting them at an event (e.g. a potential collaboration or new venture), you may also wish to schedule a phone call or arrange a coffee or lunch appointment with them.

Network internally as well as externally

It is just as necessary to build relationships within your organisation as it is to do so with external parties. Having a strong internal network will help you to build your **personal brand**, and can provide you with an effective **support system**.

It is important to adopt a **focused approach** when it comes to building your internal network. Consider your objectives for networking, and give some thought to which individuals within your organisation could make valuable additions to your network. It is also good practice to build relationships with people who are particularly **well networked** within your organisation, as they might be able to introduce you to other relevant individuals.

Once you have identified these individuals, consider how you might be able to start building relationships with them. Working on **projects**, attending **training events or seminars** or even taking part in **meetings** can all represent good internal networking opportunities. As with external networking, be sure to follow up with the people you meet.

Stay in touch with your network

Maintaining your existing network is just as important, if not more so, than growing it. If you haven't been in touch with some of your contacts recently why not send them a brief email or arrange a meeting to catch up? Nurturing these relationships will help to ensure they remain effective and beneficial over time.

When it comes to staying in touch with your network, though, it is important to strike the right balance and leave an appropriate amount of time between each interaction with your contacts. Remember that people are busy and may not always have a chance to come back to you immediately. If you send an email or leave a message for someone and it isn't urgent, give them a few days to respond before trying them again.

Help others

It is important to add value to your network, as well as derive value from it. If someone asks you for help, advice or guidance, try to assist them if you can, or put them in touch with someone else who can help. You might also be able to offer your knowledge and expertise by contributing to relevant discussions on professional networking sites, such as [LinkedIn](#). Depending on your contacts and their needs, you might also be able to introduce people to one another, or share relevant articles or pieces of research with them.

Say thank you

If a member of your network has helped you in any way, it is important to acknowledge this and thank them for their assistance. Sending an email, note or card can often be an effective way of doing this. However, if you would especially like to develop your relationship with the person who has helped you, you might wish to take them out for a coffee, or invite them to attend a relevant industry or networking event with you instead.

Be trustworthy

Trust is vital in any relationship. Never share confidential information you hear through networking unless you have permission to do so; if you're not sure whether a piece of information is confidential, keep it to yourself until you have

found out more. If you need to mention one of your contacts by name (e.g. when pursuing a referral), it is good practice to get their permission first. And finally, it goes without saying that you should always **keep the promises you make** to others in your network; set realistic expectations and be sure to meet them.

It's about quality, not quantity

When you are connected to more people than you can stay in touch with, the quality of your network and its potential to help you achieve your objectives is likely to suffer. To keep things under control, make sure you only engage in relevant networking activities, and ensure your online network is populated with people you know and trust.

Give something back to your network

It is important that you add value to your network, as well as derive value from it. Depending on your contacts and their needs, you might be able to introduce people to one another, share relevant articles or pieces of research with them, or invite one of your contacts to attend a networking or industry event with you.

Seek advice and support

If networking makes you feel anxious, or you feel you're not getting enough from your current approach, it is a good idea to ask a colleague or friend for some advice. They may even be able to accompany you to an event to provide you with some support. If you do choose to bring a friend to an event, however, you should agree upfront to spend the evening speaking to other people, not just each other!

Share your expertise

If you are already a strong networker, you will have a lot of skills and expertise that some of your less experienced colleagues might be able to benefit from. If you know someone who is struggling with networking, why not offer to provide them with some advice, or even informal coaching? If you are interested in sharing your expertise on a larger scale, you could offer to facilitate a training session on networking for the rest of your team or organisation.

Learn from your experiences

As you network more actively, it is good practice to reflect on the lessons you learn along the way: what works well for you and what might you need to improve? These insights will help you to refine your approach to networking and ensure it continues to be successful and effective.

Related Items

Related Resources

- [Networking Skills: Attending an Event](#)
- [Networking Skills: How to Get the Most from LinkedIn](#)
- [Am I an Effective Networker?](#)
- [Top Tips for Internal Networking](#)