



The ULTIMATE Networking Guide

Learn:

- Why it matters
- Who's in it
- How to grow it - your way
- How to make the most of it
- ...and have some fun with it



Can you talk, share and help? Then you can network

A how-to guide on creating your personal network:
Who's in it, how to grow it **and** make it work for you

What's a Network & why does it matter?

Have you heard that exercise is important for your health? Unless you're living under a huge rock, of course you have. We all know if our health matters we've got to get some exercise.

But it doesn't make sense to start training for a marathon just to get some exercise. That *might* work for you but there's an equal chance that you won't sustain it without some careful thought first.

You have to figure out for yourself if your health matters, how much it matters and then what you're willing to do to gain - or maintain it. Crossfit? Spinning? Walking? Dancing? There are loads of ways to get exercise - finding the one that you'll sustain is about knowing yourself.

It's no different when it comes to networking. Just like exercise, some people love it but most don't -- often because we're going about it in a way that doesn't work for us.



The Networking 411

The reality? Networking works - and it matters if you want to manage your career. But here's the rest of the story - networking is something you're probably already doing without knowing it.

- Ever asked a friend to help get you concert tickets? You've networked.
- Asked one of your teammates who lives in apartment building you're interested in to connect you with the landlord? Yep, networking too.
- Introduced a friend who wants to be in the class you took last semester to the professor? Again - networking.

For most of us, job and career networking can feel different - after all, there's a lot riding on it. So lots of us try to avoid it.

Here's your out: if you decide your career isn't that important to you, then read no further. But if it is and you want to be in the driver's seat, you need to figure out how to do it - not just at one networking event, but on an ongoing basis. And that means you have to figure out the style that works for you.

Quick definition: the term "networking" was used in the context of computer networks before it was for the interpersonal version.

- A network, in computing, is a group of two or more devices that can communicate. A network is comprised of a number of different computer systems connected by physical and/or wireless connections; networks allow computers and/or individuals to share information and resources.
- This speaks to the fundamentals of how networks work: each of its 'members' help the others out. In other words, a network stops being useful if information and resources remain a one-way street. The same is true when it comes to interpersonal networking.
- Like a computer network, networking between people is the process of connecting with individuals or groups who have connections to other people, groups, or interests. Networking is all about resources: getting access to information, people, or advice that you wouldn't have on your own.
- Networking is a chance to:
 - Learn about a person's career/career path
 - Get insights about a company / company culture / industry
 - Learn about new job opportunities



How can I make it less painful?

Are you someone who's logical, organized, and great at time management? You might find networking easiest by:

- Creating a list of people you want to meet before going into a networking event and a plan about how you might get into conversation with each.
- For those you want to meet via LinkedIn or an alumni network, create a list and a schedule of when you'll reach out to them, as well as notes on what you want to ask them. Keep a list of follow up notes and dates.

Are you sensitive and compassionate and the type of person who often puts others at ease?

- Before starting to network, spend some time with good friends or family, or look at their pictures, listen to your favorite music so you're feeling good about



yourself. Make time to care for yourself so you present the best feeling “you.” Keep in mind that sometimes networking is met with rude, brusque or no response - try not to take it personally.

Are you imaginative and reflective and the mere idea of networking makes you want to run screaming in the other direction?

- Give yourself plenty of time and space before starting to network. If you'll be at a networking event, look for individuals or groups of 2-3 to join rather than breaking into a big group. Remember, you can meet people anywhere, not just in groups. Take time to ask questions and listen.
- Networking doesn't mean you have to attend large venues. Look for smaller groups and one on one opportunities.

Are you spontaneous and creative and unsure of you how you can fit into the network group?

- At an in-person event, go join the groups who are laughing and appear to be having a good time. On LinkedIn, look for people with a non-traditional career path to talk to.

Are you persuasive and resourceful?

- Set a stretch goal for yourself about the number of people whose cards you'll get at an in-person event or the number of coffee or lunch dates you can set up with people.

Are you dedicated and conscientious?

- Study the potential businesses, groups or people that may be attending. Look for potential themes that you may have in common to discuss, such as lobbying to take care of the environment.

Why should I bother?

People generally think of networking when they want a job - which makes sense since [80% of jobs](#) are landed through networking. Add that to the fact that up to 85% of job openings aren't posted online but are instead are sourced through networking, and you begin to see why you hear a lot about networking.

This goes further - getting introduced by someone in your network is a big boost. A job seeker who is referred is [3-4 times more likely](#) to be hired - even up to 14 times more likely according to some sources. That's why employee referral programs are so popular - they're almost [3x as likely](#) to yield a hire than a job board.

And what do you get when you're not looking for a job by responding to a networking request?

- Becoming known as a thought expert
- The opportunity to have doors opened for you based on your expertise
- Expanding your knowledge
- Growing your network of people likely to help you out when you need it

Who should be in my network?

The most seasoned travelers know you get the best advice from asking locals and other travelers.

You wouldn't ask your dentist for advice on your LinkedIn profile, and you wouldn't ask your English lit professor to diagnose that rattle in your car. Your network should follow



the same premise - it should be made up of a wide variety of people with a range of expertise outside of your own.

Doing so opens you up to a broader variety of perspectives, knowledge and opportunities. And that's invaluable when it comes to networking. So who might it include? It will depend on where you are in your career, but here's a good start:

- People you already know: Friends and family, bosses and colleagues, and teachers and professors
- People with whom you have something in common: Alumni, those who are members of a common sports team or organization, fellow industry professionals
- People you don't know: People whose profile interests you; people who work with or know your friends and family or colleagues as well as their third degree connections

And if you're interested in moving up in an organization, the ideal size and make-up of your network also depends on whether you're a man or a woman. For women, having an 'inner circle' in your network primarily made up of women is especially important. More on the topic [here](#).

What do I ask them?

Different parts of your network can help you in different ways. Friends and family may be especially helpful if you're trying to figure out your career direction.

You might ask your family or long-time friends:

- What did I love to do when I was little?
- What careers was I drawn to? What did you think I'd be when I got older? Why?
- Is there something you see me do easily that doesn't come as easily to others?
- What would be a situation or need that you'd think I'd be a great person to help with? Why?
- In what environments do you think of me being at my best?
- What would you say is my superpower?



Teachers and professors, bosses and coworkers may also know you well but through a different lens. You might ask them:

- What types of work or assignments have you seen as a good fit for me?
- What role do you see me playing when I'm part of a group?
- When you think of me, are there jobs that you'd suggest I pursue? Why?

What if I don't know someone who I want to be part of my network?

If you saw someone hit that 500 connections mark on LinkedIn and want the same for yourself, know that it probably took them some time. It also likely took a thoughtful approach. Reaching out to someone you don't know requires a different approach than contacting someone you know. Networking done well is all about creating a connection - so starting out asking for something from someone you don't know rarely yields a meaningful real connection.

Let's say there's a blogger or YouTuber you're a big fan of, and you're thinking It would be pretty cool to meet them. You probably wouldn't reach out telling them your name and asking them to hire you, right? (And if you would - we'd suggest taking a different tactic!) Same goes for networking.

Who do you want in your network? What type of job, company, or experience would you like them to have? Once you've answered this, a LinkedIn search is a great place to start to look for some people. Look at their backgrounds, reach out and let them know why their profile caught your attention, and then what you're hoping to learn from them.

Is there someone you work with whose background or role you're interested in learning more about? Great - send an email, give a phone call, stop by their desk and get to the point - share why you're interested in talking to them and specifically what you'd like to talk about. For example:

- 15 minutes by phone to learn about their career path?
- Meet over coffee to hear about their experience in the industry or company they're working in?
- To stay in touch so you can see more of the interesting news they post?

Whatever it is, be specific about your ask and let the person know why you specifically reached out to her or him.

More specifics please?

Here's a structure you can use for an email:

- Share who you are / How you know each other
- Let the person know what makes you want to talk to them
- Explain what type of help you're looking for - e.g., industry insight, company perspective, job you're interested in
- Describe what you want - e.g., 15 minutes by phone, a cup of coffee, lunch, etc
- Follow up with a calendar invite



There's no substitute for a face to face connection and an in-person networking event can result in great conversations.

Who's on the attendee list you want to meet? Keep an eye out for name tags or look up their picture ahead of time so you know who you're looking for.

No attendee list? Then you'll have to be more flexible, and know that sometimes the best surprises are the ones you don't expect.

Networking gets a bad name largely from these types of events. It can also be awkward at the beginning, so being armed with your plan and a few opener questions can help. We're not fans of, "What do you do?" so here are a few alternatives:



- What brought you here tonight?
- (At a speaker event) I loved her spin on fill - in - the - blank topic. What did you think?
- Where's home for you?

What do I ask this total stranger?

So the person accepted your request to chat and you're face to face or on the phone. What should you ask? Well, what do you want to know? Networking is a lousy experience for both people when neither of them have a purpose for the discussion. Figure out what would be useful before the conversation - and focus your questions on what's helpful to you. You've wasted an opportunity - and chances are the other person will see right through you - if you use the discussion to try to look smart by asking the 'right' questions.

That doesn't mean focus only on yourself. Just like you would any other connection, take a bit to learn about the person you've just met. Then ask questions in line with what you said you wanted to discuss or learn about.

- People you admire or want to learn from can provide insights from experience, perspective, and guidance. You might ask:
 - What's been your career path? What's your advice for others interested in a similar job?
 - How did you decide that this was the type of work you wanted to do?
 - What dynamics should those of us just starting out be aware of?
- Those in an industry or field of interest may be able to provide specific guidance on how to break in and what to consider. You might ask:
 - How did you decide on your industry and / or company?
 - How would you describe the attributes of people who are successful in this field?
 - Can you describe your typical week? How planned out vs frequently changing are your days?
 - What's a good way to get started in this field?



The questions above are merely thought starters. The point is to give thought to what you want to know and then ask it - appropriately and tactfully.

If there's a job in the company that person works in, or they know someone who does, it doesn't hurt to let them know you're interested during your first discussion. Since you've just met though, you may want to hold off on asking if they can get you an interview.

Try questions like

- What advice do you have for someone interested in your company?; or
- Is there anyone at that organization you'd suggest I reach out to?

As Oprah Winfrey said, "You get in life what you have the courage to ask for" - but don't go to a networking discussion saying you want advice with the actual intent of asking for a job.

What questions should I not ask?

- Steer clear from some of the more obvious ones like asking how much they make, how old they are, relationship status or religious, political or sexual orientation.
- Stay away from asking questions that include negative comments about others, e.g., "How do you like working in Sue's group? I've heard she's clueless."
- Don't be a walking resume. Instead, be you, let people connect to who you are so when they read your resume they remember the person behind it.
- Although you may be really interested in finding out the logistics of a job - the where, when, how much time a day, how much away time - don't ask! Ask in more general terms: What are the best parts of what you do and what are the most difficult?

Then what?

Follow-up and stay in touch Remember the computer network analogy: it doesn't work if information flows only one way.

First, follow up to thank them for their time and ideally what you got out of the discussion. Next, to paraphrase, "Think not just what your network can do for you but what you can do for your network."

What interests them? Keep an eye out for info or opportunities they might be interested in and forward along. There's nothing like a note that starts "I remember you mentioning X, saw this and thought you might find it helpful / interesting / thought provoking. Hope you're doing well." - with no ask at the end. Doing that on a regular basis is a surefire way to build a network that will try to help you when you need it.

Tough to remember to do this? Make it like exercise...schedule it. Find 10 people in your network you want to follow up with that week and spend 20 minutes reading or watching with them in mind - forward along what you think might fit. Like watering a plant, you may be surprised to see how your network grows...slowly at first and then the pace picks up.

And by the way - you very likely have some expertise or experience others can benefit from. Don't be afraid to share it.

Now - it's time to get out there and put this in action.

You've got this -- just be your awesome self. Remember that networking is a two-way street, so be considerate of others you're asking for help, just like you'd want them to be for you. After all:



A SIMPLE HELLO
COULD LEAD TO
A MILLION THINGS.