

BUILD. EMPOWER. CONNECT.

Professional networks lead to more job and business opportunities, broader and deeper knowledge, improved capacity to innovate, faster advancement, and greater status and authority. Building and nurturing professional relationships also improves the quality of work and increases job satisfaction.

Here are some tips to help you network effectively:

- **Come prepared with a clear goal in mind**

Ask yourself: "Who do I want to meet, and why?" Certain event registration platforms will share attendee lists on the registration page. If a guest list like this is available, take a moment to scan it. You might discover potential clients, mentors, or employees you want to connect with. Having a specific goal in mind will also allow you to prepare effectively and keep you focused during networking events.

- **Have some conversation starters ready**

When you are talking to someone you've just met, coming up with good conversation starters that aren't just boring small talk can be a struggle.

Here are some examples of some conversation starters:

- ▶ What do you think is the most valuable part of your work — to yourself and others?
- ▶ What problems do you want to help others solve?
- ▶ What aspects of your work do you enjoy most and why? What do you enjoy least and why?
- ▶ What roles and positions have led you to where you are today? Which ones taught you the most?
- ▶ What places have you lived in and traveled to through your career or studies? Which ones have had the biggest impact on you? Which was your favorite and why?
- ▶ What is something people are always surprised to learn about you?
- ▶ Where do you want to be in five years?
- ▶ What's the next exciting event you have coming up?

- **Ask people questions about themselves**

When the small talk is up, it's easy for the conversation to go south. You can avoid this by making them the topic of conversation. You may be thinking, how can I make connections if we just talk about them the whole time? Well, showing genuine interest in another person can say more about you than talking about yourself could. Besides, if a person doesn't reciprocate the behavior and encourage you to tell them about yourself afterward, then they probably weren't a valuable connection to begin with. Next time a conversation is flailing, ask for them to elaborate or tell you more about themselves and you'll find talking points you'll be able to expand on.

- **Practice active listening**

One of the biggest challenges of networking is learning how to actively listen to others. When we're networking, we're often so focused on sharing that we might not take the time to really listen to the other person. This is essential for building strong relationships – it shows that we're interested in what the other person has to say and that we're paying attention. One way to practice active listening is to paraphrase the other person's statement. This signals to the other person that we understand them and shows that we're engaged in the conversation. Another technique is asking questions,

which shows a genuine interest in others and invites them to keep engaging in conversation. Active listening is a key skill for networking and will build the foundation for strong and productive relationships.

- **Follow up every time**

Networking can be a great way to make professional connections, but it's only effective if you follow up. Exchanging business cards is only the first step in building a relationship. If you want to make a lasting impression, you need to take the time to follow up with the people you meet. So how do you follow up effectively? First, send a personalized email or LinkedIn message within 24 hours of meeting someone. This shows that you're interested in keeping in touch. Second, invite the person you met to coffee or lunch so you can further connect. After that, it's just a matter of staying in touch by sending occasional emails, reaching out via social media, or meeting up.

- **Leverage Social Media**

Social media is an effective way to get to know important contacts better and without the pressure of a face-to-face meeting that you may not be prepared for. Seek out like-minded or key contacts you would like to know better within your LinkedIn profile. Try commenting on a link they post or responding to a comment they make, start a conversation with them and offer them value in return. When you have the opportunity to meet them in person it will be easier to reference previous communications with them.

- **Don't Ask For A Job**

Networking is not asking everyone you know for a job, in fact, when you network you should never ask someone for a job. You should ask people for information that will assist you in your job search. Your main networking goal should be to build a relationship and establish rapport so when a potential opportunity may arise in the future, your contact may be willing to refer you.

- **Ask For Suggestions on How to Expand Your Network**

One of the main goals of networking is not only to meet one or two people, but also to tap into the network of the people you are meeting with. Ask your contacts if they can recommend a professional organization or the names of some of the people you should be talking with.

- **Always Remember to Say Thank You**

Building a network is about creating a genuine, caring relationship. Thank your connection for the information they have given and see if you can help them in any way. Share any knowledge you feel would be useful for them. Keep notes on what you learn about your contacts so your future correspondence can have a personalized touch.

- **Online Presence**

Ensure your online profile is always up-to-date and appropriate. Recruiters often use social media platforms to probe potential candidates, and even to check out your skills and experience.

- **Identify Common Interests**

The next step in making networking more palatable is to think about how your interests and goals align with those of people you meet and how that can help you forge meaningful working relationships. When your networking is driven by substantive, shared interests you've identified through serious research, it will feel more authentic and meaningful and is more likely to lead to relationships that have those qualities too.

- **Say Their Name**

When you meet new people, use their name immediately in conversation. It will make them feel more comfortable. It shows you are paying attention, and it makes the group seem like a group of friends rather than a faceless mass. It also helps you to remember that person's name — at the event and in the future — so it's also a smart social skill.