



12 WAYS TO OVERCOME YOUR AVERSION TO NETWORKING

If you are one of those people hate to network and avoid it at all costs, all you have to do is change how you approach it! Even introverts can network. It's just a matter of finding the type of networking that works best.

Networking is not about building a mammoth list of contacts or passing out business cards like you're dealing poker. Networking simply means building mutually beneficial relationships.

Many people see networking as a waste of time because immediate and tangible results are difficult to attribute to your networking activities. It also can take longer than you want to see results. And, sadly, some people won't be receptive to your requests to network. But as long as you don't expect instant results and adapt networking to meet your personal style, you can do it!

Switch your mindset and find ways to make networking a regular part of your long-term strategy. Your career depends on it.

1. Start Networking Before You Need a Job

Don't wait until you desperately need a job to begin networking. Building a network takes time. If you wait until you are in crisis mode to put networking into action, you'll feel disappointed in the results. Everyone from corporate leaders to small business owners realize the importance of word-of-mouth referrals and make an effort to carve networking into their schedules. The best time to begin building and revitalizing your network is before you need something.

2. Adopt a Networking Anytime Anywhere Outlook

Networking can occur at any location and any time. Don't limit your networking activity to professional meetings. All you need to do is be open to the possibilities of meeting someone new. The next time you leave you go anywhere – a store, to class or even to the gym, consider potential for meeting someone new and be willing to step out of your comfort zone. Strike up a conversation with the person standing in line or in the elevator, or just say hello to the cashier. If you are an introvert and prefer the intimacy of one-on-one conversations, start with these intimate meetings to develop your confidence and eventually work your way to attending group networking events.

3. Embrace Networking on Social Media

Real relationships can and do result from initial interaction on social media. As a matter of fact, social media is a great way to expand your network and meet people you would never have the opportunity to interact with otherwise.

You can begin by learning about the person via their social media accounts. Then simply add a comment to a discussion, re-share the person's work or just Tweet them a question. Once a dialogue begins on social media, you have the opportunity to set up a phone conversation. Your request for a call is likely to be accepted since you've already established a connection via social media.

LinkedIn makes it easy to discover people and invite them to connect, but you don't want to abuse it's power by spamming people you don't know. Many people are cautious about who they connect with on LinkedIn. When you do reach out, be polite, respectful and err on the side of being more formal if you do not know someone. And don't expect immediate responses from the people you reach out to. Keep in mind that not everyone uses LinkedIn the same way you do. ►



4. Networking Beyond LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a valuable tool, but it is not a replacement for in-person networking. Once you've connected with people on LinkedIn, follow up and arrange an in-person meeting or even video call. Face-to-face conversations help establish a closer bond with people in your network.

5. Stay in Touch

If you've been busy building your network but haven't followed up with any of your new contacts, it is easy for people to forget you, or worse, you may give the impression you do not value the new relationship. It is up to you to stay in touch. Treat each new person you meet like a potential manager or valuable business colleague. Share information or news articles with them, offer to be of assistance on a project they are working on, or invite them to join you at an event. To make sure you remember to follow-up, schedule dates on your calendar for 1, 3 and 6 months out.

6. Be a Giver

Networking isn't all about you. During a conversation listen for the opportunity to offer help or information instead of asking for a job or referral to someone. You may also find a way to introduce your new connection to someone you know. Shift your thinking and focus on giving rather than taking. You want people you meet to want to help you in return and remember you.

7. Learn About the Person, Company or Industry

Learn everything you can about the person, their company and industry before you meet with them. Dig into LinkedIn and review their profile. Google the person's name and the company to look for any recent news. Take notes and prepare questions to delve further into their background, interests and recent publicity. And be sure to circle back to the person who introduced you for any helpful information you should know before you meet. Most people love to talk about themselves; give your networking contact the opportunity to share what interests them most.

8. Leave a Positive Impression

Your only mission when meeting a new person is to make them feel like they are the most important person you've met that day. Be polite, smile, use his/her name, and ask them lots of questions. This may be the only chance you get to make the right first impression. Be genuine and be likable.

9. Be Open to Meeting New People

Networking should involve meeting new people. While it certainly makes sense to stay in contact with people you already know, there are benefits to expanding your connections. Even if you already have one contact inside a company, it can't hurt to have more. Never turn down the opportunity to meeting new people. This can often result in learning about interesting and unexpected things. Reach out beyond your current circle of colleagues to expand what you know.

10. Never Discount People

You know a lot of people and every single one of them could potentially introduce you to your next employer. In fact, you may not even know where some of your contacts work or what they do. Some probably work in a different field. But they can still offer value. Never discount or eliminate talking with someone because their background, company or level of work isn't directly related to what you are looking to do next. Your aunt may play bridge with the father of someone who works in your dream company or the person you know in accounting may have close ties with people in other departments where you want to work. You just never know who people know. A conversation about your goals with friends, relatives and other connections is one more opportunity to get your message out and expand your network.

11. Follow Up on Referrals

During networking meetings, you may be offered advice or receive a name of someone to contact. In either case, you should graciously thank the person and take the recommended action. Once you've taken the steps, loop back with your contact and provide an update. This shows you value the idea and the person. If you have no intention of taking action, politely explain why during this meeting otherwise, the person may think you didn't follow-through. ►



12. Listen Carefully

Introverts have strong listening skills. Leverage these skills by asking follow-up questions that show you are paying attention and interest. Also, be on the lookout for unspoken cues. A networking contact may suggest you check out an article or new company in town. Rather than ignoring the suggestion or blindly taking action, ask your contact why they made the recommendation. You may discover the person has inside information or knows someone you should meet. Keep your ears and mind open.