

A complete guide to networking

What do you think of when you think of networking? For many of us, the word brings to mind awkward events where people stand around with a stack of business cards and try to talk to each other.

In reality, networking is about [building professional relationships](#) that are balanced and have a long-term focus. Whether online or offline, networking is something we should all be doing and it can be extremely rewarding, if you do it mindfully.

Why networking is important

“Many job search coaches would say that networking is the most important and most effective way of landing your dream job,” says Leah Lambart, career coach at Relaunch Me. “Essentially, networking is about [finding a job via who you know](#), rather than what you know.”

It can also provide information, advice and [opportunities](#), and open doors that you otherwise wouldn't have considered. A strong network can even support you through challenging career breaks or transitions such as [redundancy](#), moving overseas or [maternity leave](#). Lambart explains, “Having a network around you will help you maintain confidence when you recommence your job search.”

The truth about networking

- It takes time. Networking is all about building relationships, so it's important to maintain a consistent effort. “It takes more than a one-off meeting,” Lambart says. “If you really want to develop a relationship it requires appropriate follow-up in a timely manner.”
- It's a two-way street. At events it can be tempting to make a beeline for people who you think could help you?, but networking is reciprocal, so think about how

you can help the other person. “Both parties should equally benefit from the relationship.”

How to network successfully

- Choose the right kind of event. Networking might put you out of your comfort zone, but it shouldn't make you overly anxious. There are options for all personality types, so if you find large events stressful, go to a presentation, meet-up or panel Q&A session on a topic you're interested in, instead.

Sian Havard, founder of Milkshake Group, a Brisbane-based consultancy, says, “These events can be perfect as not only do you get to learn more about a topic you're already passionate about, but you also get to meet like-minded people.”

- Keep online networking clear and concise. Online networking is just as important as going to events, Lambart explains. “There have been many powerful networks built online through sharing of ideas, supporting the work of others and reaching out for advice.”

In order to use online forums successfully, ensure your initial communication is succinct and professional. “Make it clear from the outset why you're connecting so that it's obvious to the other party.”

- Take an approach you're comfortable with. Many of us find in-person networking nerve-racking, so it's important to choose a style that feels right for you. “If you baulk at the thought of approaching people you don't know at events, try focusing your energy on one or two people,” Havard suggests.

Being genuinely curious and kind will not only help you make a good impression, but also “lead to interesting conversations and long-lasting connections down the line.”

- Exchange contact details and follow up. If you really want to develop a relationship with someone, you need to talk to them more than once. Swap contact information after a conversation, whether that's business cards or email addresses. Then make sure you follow up with them in a timely manner. This doesn't require much – Lambart says a simple “email to say that you enjoyed meeting them” will do.
- Give back. Not only is it important to stay in touch with your network, but it's also imperative to give back. “‘What goes around comes around’ is important when it comes to networking, so remember if people in your network reach out to you, you may be able to add real value to them through your advice, expertise or own network,” Havard says. “Take time to help where you can, or

refer people who contact you to others who may be able to help.”

When done with care, networking can transform your life. As Lambart says, “The more people in your network, the greater chance that you will hear of a job opportunity.” So if you haven’t given it a go yet, start networking today!

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