



How to effectively make connections and build your network

Networking can be done in many different ways, through friends and family, at formal or informal events or by making connections on your own, like having coffee and a conversation with an acquaintance or colleague. Below are some great tips on how to build a network that will set you up for success.

Before you go too far ahead in building your network, remember the basics: *always smile, develop a strong handshake and hold yourself with confidence.*

Move beyond social media.

Social media sites like LinkedIn offer a great opportunity to gather information, make initial connections and manage your network, but you need to make sure that your connections exist outside these online platforms. The first step is to put down your phone and get out there.

Make a good first impression.

Reaching out to someone to make a connection can be a little intimidating. When possible, aim for an introduction – get someone in your network who knows the person you want to connect with to introduce you.

When you reach out, either in person or by email, make sure you share a little bit about yourself and highlight ways you might be helpful to the individual. It should feel like a two-way street.

Always prepare.

Whether you're meeting face to face with an individual or attending an event, you want to invest some time preparing. Research the individual(s) you're connecting with using LinkedIn or your existing network to learn more about their position(s), work background(s) and accomplishments. Consider what you'd like to find out more about. Be sure you're ready to tell your story, and prepare a few questions in advance.

Here are some questions to get you started:

- Tell me a little about yourself and your career journey.
- What are the most important skills you have developed over your career?
- What part of your current job do you find most satisfying? What is the most challenging aspect of your current job?
- What skills are most critical to success in the work you are currently doing?

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- What areas of your industry do you think will offer the greatest opportunity in the coming years?
- What advice would you give to someone who is interested in your field?
- What other fields or related careers would you recommend I research further?
- Do you have any recommendations of blogs, websites, professional groups or other resources I could use to get more information about this industry or position?
- Based on what I've told you about my interests and skills, can you think of any roles I might be suited for in your industry?

Make strong connections.

During your conversation, focus on asking open-ended questions. Open-ended questions cannot be answered with a yes, no or single word; they encourage discussion and allow you to find out more. Demonstrate curiosity and make sure you're ready to hold up your end of the conversation. Take a balanced approach by sharing some information about yourself, but don't dominate the conversation.

Be yourself and make sure you stay fully engaged and present in the conversation (put your phone away).

Manage your network and keep in touch.

Take a few moments to follow up with your new contacts by sending a quick note indicating you enjoyed meeting them. To increase the impact of your note, refer back to your conversation and talk about something you took away from it. You could also share something that might be of interest to them related to your conversation or perhaps even their personal interests. Focus on giving before you ask for something.

Chances are your network will evolve over time and include several different categories of people within it including lifelong relationships, colleagues and mentors as well as other connections that may not be as strong. Focus on the quality of your connections and not the quantity, and be sure you're actively managing the most important relationships in your network.



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