

24 Networking Tips that Actually Work

[The Savvy Newcomer](#) | June 2, 2015

By James Clear

Reblogged from [ATA Chronicle](#) with permission

The idea of networking makes many people uncomfortable—or confused. It is easy to see why.

When most people think about networking, it seems insincere at best—and selfish at worst. This, of course, is the complete opposite of what networking is supposed to be—friendly, useful, and genuine.

It is easy for most of us to be friendly and useful with people we know. However, because networking is a “business activity,” it is easy to think that we need to act in a different way.

Unfortunately, most networking strategies come across as pushy, needy, or self-serving—even though the people using them rarely act that way in day-to-day life.

Do not worry. There are definitely genuine ways to self-promote. So, in the spirit of helping everyone become a better networker, here are 24 networking tips that, from my experience, actually work.

The Real Goal of Networking

1. The goal of networking should be to help other people. Yes, it would be nice if they helped you out as well, but networking is a two-way street. And your side of the street is all about helping others, not asking them to help you. Asking for favors should only become a possibility once you have learned more about the person and provided some value to them.

2. It is far more important to understand other people's needs before you tell them about your needs. Your goals should not be on the forefront of your mind. You are trying to develop a relationship with others, which means you should be thinking about them. It is your job to understand the people in your network, including where they are coming from and what is important to them.

Setting Expectations

3. You do not need to know the most people, just the right people. There is no need to shotgun your business cards across the industry or to pepper everyone with e-mail. Instead, focus on finding people who are relevant to you. As time passes, you can decide if the interests that you share with someone are worth pursuing further. It is better to have five people willing to help you than to have 500 who simply know your name.

4. Do not expect anything. The fact that you reached out and made contact with someone does not put them in your debt. No one is required to “pay you back.” Instead of approaching networking with the goal of gaining favors, try reaching out with curiosity.

Contact interesting and relevant people and see what happens. Some of them will respond and some of them will not. Learn about the people who follow up. Find out what makes them interesting and how you can help them—and do not expect anything in return.

5. Do not leave networking to chance. Take some time and define what you are looking for in your network. Occasionally you will stumble across someone amazing by accident, but it is a lot easier to find who you are looking for if you know who they are in the first place. Be proactive and create a list of people whom you want to contact on purpose.

6. Go beyond your industry. Connect with people on a variety of levels from a wide range of areas. By growing your network outside of the usual areas you will be more valuable to people who are in your immediate industry. The people with whom you work have personalities and multiple interests, right? With a broad network you can be the person who connects people across industries.

7. Do not dismiss anyone as irrelevant. Maybe you do not think a local blogger would be a good contact because you work at a medical practice. However, when you open a new branch and want to let people know about it, you will be glad you reached out to someone with an audience.

How to Reach Out to Someone New

8. Quantify how much time you are going to take. People are busy and when someone new starts talking to them, the first thing that comes to mind is, “How much time is this going to take?”

Address those concerns from the start by saying something like, “Hi. I have one item that I’d like to discuss with you briefly. It should only take two minutes. Do you have time now?” Asking questions like this not only shows that you respect their time, it also gives you the option of speaking with them later if they are too busy now.

9. Start by offering praise, not requesting help. Unless you have a mutual contact who is putting you in touch for a specific reason, it is best to avoid asking for anything when you meet for the first time. Do not ask for favors, for promotion, for advice, or even to meet up for lunch or coffee. Simply start by offering a short compliment. After they respond to this initial contact, you can begin moving things toward a lengthier meeting.

10. Keep e-mail short. If your first contact is via e-mail, split the message into smaller segments. Instead of reaching out to someone new with a long-winded, five-paragraph explanation of why you are contacting them, use that first e-mail to focus on a small bit of praise. You can send further details to them after they reply. Keep that first message friendly and short.

11. If you must ask for a favor, then ask for permission to continue. There are some situations where you need to ask for something, but do not have the luxury of time to get to know your contact. Most situations do not fall under this category, but if you must ask for something, then weave in requests for permission before you make a request. Here is a real example.

I was talking to the director of an organization recently about offering a new course to his clients. I started by asking for permission to continue. “I’ve run

successful courses on X before. Would you like to know more?” He was interested and we ended up having a great conversation.

An additional benefit of this strategy is that you are getting the other party to say “Yes” to you. As a general rule, if you can get people to say yes three times, then the odds of your offer being accepted by them drastically increase. You do not need to ask permission for everything, but if you are opening a conversation where you will need to make a request, then it can work wonders.

How to Build the Relationship

12. Try to provide as much value as you possibly can. The more value you create, the more it will come back to you many times over. Focus all of your networking efforts on helping the people you contact.

13. Start by focusing on being friendly and helpful. This is the number one tactic you can use to build your network. Simply spread information in a friendly and helpful way. Did you read a book that others in your network will enjoy? Tell them about it or send them a copy. Are you using a resource that would help a friend with a project on which he or she is working? E-mail the information to your friend. Hear some new music that others might enjoy? Send it their way. Building your network is the same as building friends. Be interested in what they are doing and offer friendly suggestions when you can.

14. Develop the habit of introducing people. Connecting like-minded people is a powerful way to enhance your network. The idea of doing this seems foreign to many people, but it is actually quite easy. Do you know two people who enjoy reading the same type of books? Or like the same sports teams? Or love reading about history? Or work in the same industry? You get the point. Do not make it hard. Just introduce the two of them by sharing their common interest. They can decide if they want to pursue the relationship further.

15. Ask if people want to be connected. If you are apprehensive about connecting two people, then ask one of them if they want to be connected. “I know another person that’s doing Y. Would you like for me to introduce you sometime?” Even if they are not interested, they will appreciate the offer.

16. Nurture your current network. Most people think of networking as reaching out to new people, but do not forget about the network that you already have. (Hint: You probably call them your friends and co-workers.) There is no need to wait to meet new people to start connecting others or sharing useful information. Network within the groups that are already close by.

Making Networking a Habit

17. Try to contact one person per day. If you reach out to five new people every week, that would be about 250 per year. Sending an e-mail or making a quick call will only take about five minutes of your day. Not everyone is going to get back to you, but if you contact that many new people, then you are bound to make significant progress.

18. Do not take “No” personally. Everyone is busy. For most people, it is simply a matter of timing. If you catch them on a good day, then they will happily talk or meet with you. If they are swamped, however, then a simple “No” might be all you get. Do not take it personally. In most cases, it is not a reflection of you or what you said.

19. Make it a point to follow up. One or two days after meeting someone for the first time, follow up with a brief e-mail or note. This is an opportunity to develop the relationship by bringing up something you discussed before or making a comment on an interesting topic. Following up with relevant conversation helps to anchor your previous interaction in their mind and displays more personality than just sending a message that says “Thanks for talking!”

20. Did you fail? Try reaching out in a different way. You do not want to pester anyone, but if you give the person a few weeks and do not hear a response, then there is nothing wrong with being persistent. For example, dropping in to talk face-to-face has resulted in great conversations with people who ignored my e-mail previously. Sometimes switching it up is all you need to do.

Things to Remember

21. Network with the intention of helping other people, not yourself. People enjoy doing business with those they trust and like. The only way to build

that trust is to engage with others in a helpful way. Yes, trust takes a long time to build, but insincerity takes even longer to overcome. Once you have developed a relationship and created a bond, then you can move on to negotiating for favors and asking for help.

22. Networking is more about listening to what people say than saying the right

things. Take the time to listen to people's stories. You can only provide something of value to them if you listen to who they are and what they do.

23. Sometimes the best networking opportunities involve real work. Volunteer for events, committees, or projects that will involve interesting people. Working on a project or task with someone is one of the best ways to develop a relationship. For example, volunteering for a nonprofit can be a great way to get to know an organization's influential board members.

24. E-mail is easy to send—and ignore. Yes, e-mail is quick, simple, and can be sent to anyone, anywhere. E-mail is also very easy to filter out and ignore. If you really want to meet someone, then do not be afraid to pick up the phone, propose a video chat, or arrange a face-to-face meeting. These communication channels are usually less crowded and more personal, which means that your message will be more memorable. E-mail can be a great tool, but do not be afraid to mix it up.

Take the First Step: Reach Out

You do not need to be a master to start building your network. Just taking a moment to reach out is a big step that will help most people. Sharing useful information and connecting likeminded people are simple actions that everyone will appreciate. Focus on being useful and do not make networking harder than it has to be.