

NETWORKING

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Introduction

Networking is an essential skill for anyone looking for new career opportunities – whether you're a researcher, project leader, lecturer, communications professional, or administrative assistant. This guide explains what networking involves, how to build and maintain your network, and how to increase your visibility both online and offline. You'll also find practical tips and examples.



What is networking?

Networking is about creating and nurturing relationships that can lead to new insights, opportunities, and collaborations. It's not just about finding a job – it's also about sharing knowledge, experiences, and ideas. While these are often professional connections, they can also include personal relationships with family or friends who share useful advice or information.

You're already networking, even if you don't always think of it that way. You stay in touch with friends, acquaintances, (former) colleagues, neighbors, people you work with, or folks from your sports club. Maybe you got your current job—or a previous one—thanks to your network. Or you found your home, relationship, or new friends through tips from people you know.

Networking is a two-way street, built on reciprocity and trust. You don't just ask for help; you also offer value to others. It's about showing up with genuine interest in the people you engage with. You might exchange insights about your research field, discuss process improvements, or share organizational best practices. Or you could ask someone about their role, responsibilities, or the organization they work for.

Examples of professional network contacts

At a conference, you strike up a conversation with someone working in a similar research field. You exchange ideas about methodologies. Afterwards you send him a LinkedIn connection request. Occasionally you check in about their research progress and offer your assistance.

At a university-wide event, you meet a colleague from another department. You discuss ways your departments could collaborate more effectively and schedule a follow-up meeting.



Do you have a formal networking meeting coming up and feel a bit nervous? Practice the conversation with someone you know and ask for their feedback.

The power of networking: why it matters

Networking offers numerous benefits that can significantly impact your career. Here are the key advantages:

1. **Access to Hidden Job Opportunities**

Many positions are filled through referrals before they're even advertised. The more people know you're open to new opportunities, the higher your chances of being recommended for a role or hearing about openings early.

2. **Knowledge Sharing**

You learn from others, stay updated on industry trends, and gain fresh perspectives. For example, a colleague from another faculty who worked at a consultancy firm might offer guidance if you're considering a similar career move.

3. **Collaboration Opportunities**

A strong network makes it easier to form partnerships, whether for research projects, grant applications, or interdisciplinary initiatives. Meeting a researcher at a conference could lead to a joint funding proposal.

4. **Support & Problem-Solving**

Your network can help you navigate challenges or connect you with the right people. Mentioning your interest in municipal work at a networking event might prompt someone to introduce you to a contact in local government.

How to build & maintain your network

Expanding your network

When you want to expand your network, you may consider following these steps.

1. **Define Your Goal**

Are you job hunting, seeking expertise, or looking for collaborators? Clarity helps focus your efforts.

2. **Map Your Existing Network**

List colleagues, alumni, mentors, and collaborators—you likely have more connections than you realize.

3. **Identify Gaps**

Who's missing? Target professionals in different fields, universities, or sectors who align with your goals.

4. **Reach Out Strategically**

Use LinkedIn, emails, or events to introduce yourself. Be concise: explain why you're contacting them and what you're seeking (e.g., advice, insights).

5. **Stay Visible & Engaged**

Share knowledge, comment on posts, attend relevant events, and contribute to discussions.

Maintaining your network

Maintaining your network can be time consuming. Especially if you have a large network and want to manage it thoughtfully, it's important to decide how personally you want to engage with your contacts and how much time you can realistically dedicate.

Check in periodically: Congratulate contacts on achievements, share useful articles, or send updates. Share personal information or special moments, like a publication, presentation, dissertation.

Offer help: Introduce connections, endorse skills, or repost job-seeking peers' updates.

Follow up: If someone assisted you, update them later on how their advice helped. This fosters goodwill and strengthens relationships.

Examples

You want to make a transition to a different research field. You contact with researchers and experts in that target field on LinkedIn, request informational interviews, and share relevant studies to stay engaged.

You want to learn more about project management within the university. You invite a cross-departmental colleague for coffee to discuss shared challenges. Later, you follow-up with a thank-you and an interesting article about project management.

De do's en don'ts

Do's	Don'ts
Show genuine interest in the other person.	Only reach out when you need something.
Prepare well: know who you're meeting and what to ask them.	Go to conversation unprepared.
Ask open questions, listen actively.	Talk only about yourself.
Share knowledge, tips, contacts.	Withhold information.
Be visible, both online and offline.	Invisibility or neglecting your network.
Respect the other person's time.	Being long-winded or asking too much time.
Request introductions when relevant.	Add people to group chats without asking.
Be patient: relationships take time to build.	Ask for a job immediately without building rapport.
Follow-up with a thank you or update.	Let contact fade after the first conversation.

How to increase your visibility in online and offline networking.

Online visibility

Online networking is essential – it's an accessible way to present yourself, share knowledge and build connections.



Optimize your LinkedIn profile: Keep it complete and up-to-date. Post regular updates about your work, publications, or interesting articles. Engage with others by commenting on posts and congratulating them on achievements.

Join relevant groups: Participate in discussions on platforms like LinkedIn, ResearchGate, or Mendeley.

Showcase successes: Share posts about completed projects, tagging team members to highlight collaboration.

Offline visibility

In-person networking remains highly valued, often fostering stronger connections.

Attend events: Go to seminars, workshops, or social gatherings where you can meet relevant contacts—both those who can help you and those you can assist.

Introduce yourself: Don't hesitate to approach new people. If opportunities arise, give presentations or lead workshops to demonstrate your expertise.

Stay active: Participate in committees or working groups. For example, pitch your research during a lunch seminar or contribute meaningfully to cross-departmental discussions on current topics.



Pitch: how to introduce yourself

When preparing for networking events—whether at receptions, seminars, or other gatherings—having a concise, compelling introduction (or "pitch") is key. This short summary should communicate who you are, what you do, and your unique value.

Basic pitch examples:

Behavioral Scientist - Family Coach

"I guide children aged 0–12 in playfully discovering their sense of self, empowering them to participate independently in society as they grow."

Communication Advisor

"I help university departments improve internal communication so their teams feel informed and engaged with the organization."

Expanding your pitch

Add depth by sharing your *motivation* and *future goals*:

Data Analyst

"I've always been fascinated by how technology improves daily life. As a data analyst at VU, I help research teams interpret data for better decision-making. Next, I'd love to apply this expertise in an impact-driven organization, like healthcare or education."

Lecturer - Educational Development

"I'm passionate about making knowledge accessible. As a lecturer, I've developed curricula and mentored students. Now, I aim to innovate education—through digital tools or interdisciplinary programs."

Adding a networking question/goal

Pair your pitch with a clear request to spark collaboration:

Administrative Professional

"I streamline administrative processes so teams can focus on core tasks—something I've done at VU for two years. With my role ending due to restructuring, I'm exploring opportunities at municipalities, government agencies or safety regions. I'd love an introduction to someone working in these areas."

Researcher

"I study how to optimize complex systems, currently focusing on sustainable energy solutions while mentoring students. My next goal? Leading innovation projects that bridge science and industry—at organizations like TNO, energy providers, or startups. I'd appreciate connecting with Innovation managers or Project leads in these fields."

Key tips for an effective pitch

- **Keep it brief:** 15–30 seconds.
- **Show passion:** Share *why* your work matters.
- **Be specific:** Name target roles/organizations to prompt actionable help.
- **End with a question:** "*Do you know anyone working in ____?*"

This approach balances professionalism with approachability, making it easy for others to support your goals.

Networking for introverts

Many academics and support staff recognize themselves as introverts: they prefer listening over speaking and feel more comfortable in one-on-one interactions than in large groups. While they may view their extroverted colleagues—who effortlessly mingle at events—as "better" networkers, introverts often excel at networking *differently*. Their natural strengths—deep listening, thoughtful preparation, and genuine curiosity—create meaningful, lasting connections.

Why introverts are powerful networkers

Introverts bring unique qualities to networking:

- **Attentive listening:** They focus intently, making others feel heard.
- **Preparation:** They research contacts and plan questions in advance.
- **Empathy:** They intuitively understand others' needs, fostering trust.
- **Depth over breadth:** They prioritize quality conversations over superficial small talk.



Post-event fatigue is normal for introverts, who recharge alone or in quiet settings. This isn't a weakness—it's a cue to design networking around their energy.

Practical tips for introverted networkers

1. **Prepare thoroughly** Write down key questions or topics beforehand (e.g., *"What excites you most about your current project?"*).
2. **Choose your setting** Opt for small gatherings, one-on-one coffee chats, or walking meetings. Online platforms (LinkedIn, email) can ease initial contact.
3. **Ask open-ended questions** Prompt others to share: *"How did you enter this field?"* or *"What challenges are you tackling?"*
4. **Leverage your listening** Nod, paraphrase, and ask follow-ups. Your engagement stands out.
5. **Start small** Set achievable goals: *"Today, I'll have one meaningful conversation."*
6. **Follow up thoughtfully** Send personalized messages after meetings (e.g., *"I enjoyed learning about X—let's continue the conversation!"*).

Examples of introvert-friendly networking

A researcher emails a speaker after a seminar with a compliment and a question, sparking a collaboration without crowded socializing.

An admin professional schedules focused coffee meetings instead of large mixers. And sets micro-goals: 'Talk to one person,' 'Share my project once.' It removes pressure.

Final insight

Networking isn't about performing extroversion—it's about authentic connection. Introverts thrive by playing to their strengths: curiosity, preparation, and depth. By reframing networking as "*learning from others*" rather than "*self-promotion*," they build relationships that endure.

Sources

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Liesbeth Smit: Ik moet nog even kijken of ik kan – de stille revolutie van de introverte mens