

How to build your personal network



Networking is a powerful and essential part of progressing your career but can often feel complex and daunting to master. This toolkit will take you through the process to understand how you can simply overcome the initial awkwardness of small talk, map your network's strengths and grow opportunities.

Why is networking so important?

A professional network can offer you many things, the most talked about, is career growth. The more connected you are to people within different job levels, inside and outside your organisation, the more likely you are to know about new opportunities.

Networking can help you:



Promote your value



Connect upwards



Identify and learn new skills

What can you do to build a stronger network?

Identify your value

It is important to first identify what your personal strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats are by conducting a **SWOT analysis** on yourself. What makes SWOT especially powerful is that it can help you uncover opportunities that you would not otherwise have spotted. You'll better understand your weaknesses and know how to manage and eliminate threats.

Strengths

- What advantages do you have that others don't have? For example, skills, certifications, education, or connections.
- What do you do better than anyone else?
- What do other people see as your strengths?
- Which of your achievements are you most proud of?

Weaknesses

- What tasks do you usually avoid because you don't feel confident doing them?
- What do the people around you see as your weakness?
- What are your negative work habits?
- What feedback have you been given in the past?

Opportunities

- What new technology can help you?
- Is your industry growing? If so, how can you take advantage of the current market?
- Do you have a network of strategic contacts to help you, or offer good advice?
- Is there a need in your company or industry that no one is filling?

Threats

- Are any of your colleagues competing with you for projects or roles?
- Is your job, or the demand for the things you do, changing?
- Does changing technology threaten your position?
- Could any of your weaknesses lead to threats?

Mastering the art of small talk

Small talk is an essential part of building and maintaining relationships in both a personal and professional setting. Structuring how you engage in small talk will help remove the awkwardness, in turn boosting your confidence over time. Here are six easy steps to help you navigate small talk and break through those early conversations:

1. Choose topics

Good topics: Sports, hobbies, movies, books, travel, occupation.

Topic to avoid: Religion, politics, finance, relationships, personal gossip.

The aim:

- Find common interests with others.
- Be sensitive to each other's cultures.

2. Start a conversation

Start with a simple and natural opener, greet them and introduce yourself.

Ask their name and repeat it back to them when greeting them.

The aim:

- Break the ice.
- Learn their name.

3. Ask questions

Ask people questions about themselves.

Avoid questions that could make people feel awkward.

Ask open-ended questions.

The aim:

- Give them a chance to speak.
- Learn more about the person.

4. Be a good listener

Listen for cues to keep the conversation going.

Recall previous things they have said and connect the talking points up.

Show the other person you are listening to them through:

- Body language (e.g., eye contact, nodding, smiling)
- Verbal cues (e.g., "I see," "Right," "Okay")

5. Share something

Say something personal but keep the conversation light.

Bring up your experiences to build a stronger connection.

The aim:

- Display your openness.
- Encourage them to do the same..

6. Be memorable

Make a lasting impression by sharing something about yourself that relates to the person you are speaking to.

The aim:

- Create a lasting impression that will make that person want to speak to again or more.

What are the different types of networkers?

Central connectors

These are people at the centre of a network. They will have the highest number of direct connections to the people contained within that network.

How do you become a central connector?

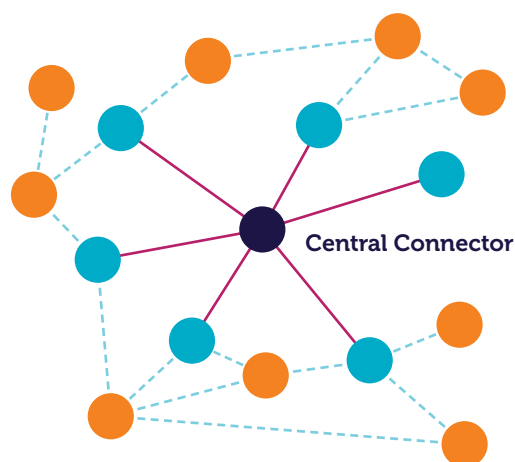
Be a resource – when you are a go-to source of knowledge or information it helps raise your profile and visibility, helping you connect with more people.

Follow up – make it your business to track your network and stay aware of their plans to maintain connection.

Think ahead – research before you attend events and learn about the people who are attending. This will help you ask pointed questions, listen and learn how you could support others.

Join groups or organisations – don't hesitate to attend ad hoc meetings or groups about topics that interest you or you are knowledgeable in.

Go out of your comfort zone – be the person that help others make new connections by facilitating introductions.



Network brokers

These are individuals who connect separate networks, forming them into one large network, that is more diverse in knowledge, experience and background.

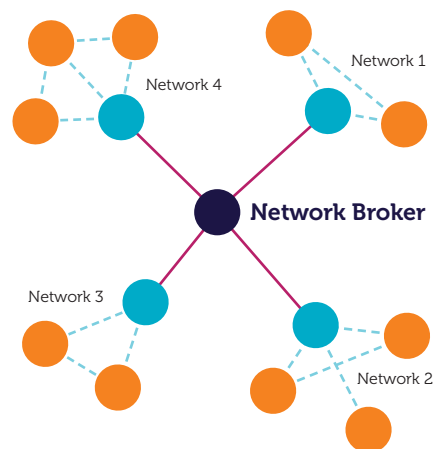
How do you become a network broker?

Information – brokers will often have access to information from various networks.

Credibility – it requires you have a track record of honesty, expertise and consistency.

Promote others – they'll often acknowledge the expertise and opinions of their peers.

Cultural awareness – finally, brokers will bridge diverse perspectives, understanding different cultural norms and practices more than others.



What can you do to better understand your network?

Network mapping

The aim of this exercise is to discover who has the greatest influence over your network, identify which networking environments are most productive for you, and learn how these connections can impact your career.

Their name	Who introduced them to you?	Where did you meet them?	What other introductions were made?	What was the outcome or impact?
List all the most important contacts in your network – the people who provide expertise and advice or who inspire you.	Who made the introduction? If you introduced yourself to the person, put "Me".	Think of where this introduction took place – was it at an event, a meeting or was it by chance?	List anyone that either the contact introduced you to or that you introduced them to.	State how this introduction impacted you – did it open new doors, or teach you something new?
				
The outcome: you realise the size of your network.	The outcome: this will reveal who the broker in your network is.	The outcome: you'll discover which environments or situations contribute most to your network.	The outcome: you will see how you have acted as a broker, or how wider connections were made.	The outcome: reflection will help you identify which individuals in your network had the largest impact on you.



Top tip: this activity can be completed in reverse. Instead of looking at your current network, explore how you want it to look in the future. Doing this will help you know what path you can take to reach your networking aspirations.

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