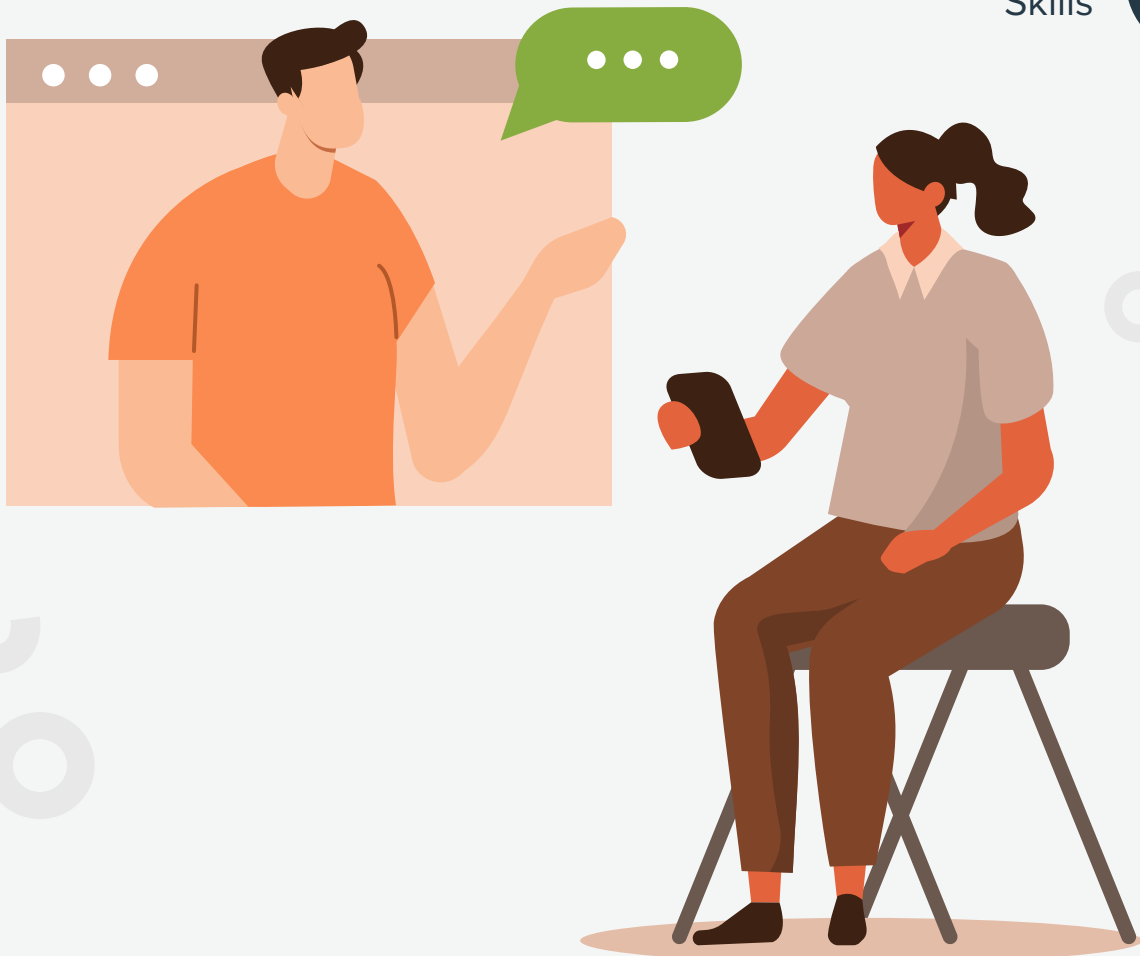


# Skillbook

# Networking Skills

Career  
Skills



Mindtools

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## Skillbook

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# 1. Introduction

**W**hat do you think of when you hear the word “networking”?  
Awkward small talk? Stilted conversations? Name tags?  
Business cards?

For many people, networking is a time-consuming chore. But, it doesn't have to be!

Networking can be insightful, interesting, and even fun. It allows you to form useful connections within and beyond your organization. It enables you to exchange ideas and information. And, it may help you to advance your career.

So, wouldn't it be great if you could feel positive about networking?

Even if you're shy or introverted, you likely meet new people every day. And, with every person that you make contact with, you have the chance to build your knowledge and expand your opportunities. When you embrace networking from this perspective, it won't seem like such an unpleasant activity – it's simply something that you do routinely.

This **Skillbook** explores how you can build and maintain your network. In it, we'll look at:

- The benefits of networking, and your networking objectives.
- How to map your network and identify useful contacts.
- Networking techniques.
- How you can follow up connections after networking events.

## 2. The Benefits of Networking

**M**ost of us recognize the benefits that networking can offer. But, all too often, we think of it only in terms of career progression, or as a way to create sales opportunities. And, while it does offer these benefits, they aren't the only advantages of good networking.

In fact, networking has a number of key benefits. These include:

- **Improved job performance and outcomes.** People who make an effort to get to know other people from across their organization, and beyond it, can generally achieve more. For example, the more people you know, the more expertise you can call on when you need something done, or when you have a problem that needs solving.
- **Information sharing and collaboration.** Your network can act as a “sounding board” for new ideas. It can also be an invaluable source of industry news, organizational developments, and advice.
- **Access to skills and knowledge.** This can be particularly useful if you need specialized expertise, such as technical skills or financial advice. A network that includes people from a broad range of industries and who can offer a diverse range of skills will enable you to exchange information with people whose knowledge and experience differ from your own.
- **Improved stakeholder management.** Gaining the support of stakeholders from across your business is an essential part of achieving your career goals and getting your projects off the ground. If you have good relationships with people in your network already, they will more likely assist you in achieving your goals.
- **Career opportunities and progression.** Word of mouth is a powerful recruitment tool. So, having a network of contacts who are familiar with your skills and experience could be invaluable if you are looking to make a career move. This is particularly important for contractors and freelancers.
- **Enhanced visibility.** It can be easy to get overlooked at work, particularly if you work independently or in a large organization. So, networking is essential if you want to maintain your visibility – not only to people inside your company, but outside it, too. If your network is particularly strong, it can also help you to gain a good reputation as someone who is well placed to make introductions, or offer insights on clients and associates.

- **Improved self-esteem and confidence.** The more you put into your network, the more you will get out of it. If you go out of your way to help the people in your network, it will likely boost your reputation and earn you the respect of your peers. All of this can build your confidence, which is particularly helpful if you are introverted or shy.

## Your Networking Objectives

Whatever you hope to gain from networking, it's important to remember that your key aim should be to develop a “give-and-take” relationship with each of your contacts. Not only will this benefit everyone, but it also enriches and strengthens the connections that you form.

If you fail to build this kind of relationship with your network, you risk becoming a “dead end” – a place where no more contacts can be made, where nothing can be gained, and where existing relationships fizzle out.

So, before we go any further, it's important that you define what you hope to gain from your network, and what it can gain from you in return.



### Action:

In the table below, list your key networking objectives. For instance, are you looking to boost your visibility at work, do you want to gain experience or knowledge, or are you looking for expertise on a particular subject?

At this stage it may also be useful to note down the names of some people who you think can best help you to achieve these goals. Also, write down where you think you'll find these connections. For instance, online, on a professional networking site, or at an upcoming networking event.

My Networking Objectives	Name of Connection	Best Networking Channel(s)
1.		
2.		
3.		



### Action:

Good connections are built on “give-and-take” relationships, so now it’s time to think about the things that you can offer to your contacts. For example, do you have a specialized or “in-demand” skill? Or, perhaps you work in a fast-growing, innovative industry and you’re in a good position to deliver valuable insight on it.

Think about the skills, expertise, knowledge and powerful connections you can offer to your network. Then, list them in the table, below.

Skills, Experience and Knowledge That I Can Offer to My Network	
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

### 3. Mapping Your Network

**Y**our existing network is likely made up of a variety of people. From your boss and teammates, to the CEO of your company, leaders in your professional field, or social media contacts, your network will likely be much larger than you initially think.

The first step to building an effective network is to map it out. This will help you to identify the contacts that are the most valuable to you. Your former boss, for instance, may be someone that you speak to on a regular basis. But unless they can help you with your key objectives (or knows someone who can), they may not be a useful contact.

Remember, the number of people in your network is far less important than the **quality** of the contacts you have. According to business relationship specialist [Andrew Sobel](#), most people can only identify 25 or perhaps 30 relationships that impact on their career directly. These are your critical contacts, and the people that you should make an effort to stay in contact with.

#### Action:



Map out your network using the table on the following page. Include only the contacts that you believe are the most valuable to you, and who will most likely help you meet your core networking objectives.

Add the names and details of the specific people in your network in the first column. Then, next to each one, jot down what function they serve (e.g. expertise, industry knowledge, career opportunities) and how you connect with them (e.g. a mutual connection, social media, or your workplace).

An example of how to fill out the worksheet has been provided in the first row of the table.

#### Tip:



If you're not sure how to start mapping your network, take a look at your LinkedIn contacts or check whether your company has a formal organizational structure or internal directory that you can scroll through for ideas. You can also use Influence Maps to identify who has the most influence over you and your career.







### Tip:

You may find it easier to use a visual tool, such as Mind Maps®, to map your network. This can be particularly useful if you want to group your network by function. Alternatively, there are several apps that you can use to organize and keep track of your contacts, such as [CamCard](#).

It's important to maintain a diverse network. When you've finished mapping your network, take a close look at the types of contacts you have and the functions that they serve.

It can be easy to populate your network with the people that you spend the most time with, such as your colleagues – this is the “Proximity Principle” (the tendency to form interpersonal relationships with those who are close by). But, be aware that staying only within the circles that you know well will likely reduce your exposure to new opportunities and experiences.

The more diverse your network, the more opportunities you'll have to achieve your objectives. Try to refine your network by identifying skills gaps, and seek out new contacts that can fill them.

There are three ways that you can make your network more diverse:

1. **Do your research.** Social media and online professional networking sites have made it easier than ever to research and connect with a diverse range of people across the world.
2. **Traditional networking activities.** You may prefer to stick to classic networking activities, like trade shows, conventions, workplace events, seminars, or roundtables.
3. **Identify any “super-connectors.”** These are people who have a broad and diverse network, and are therefore in a great position to advise you on who best to connect with, and to put you in touch with them.



### Action:

Now, think about what you want your ideal network to look like. Start by writing down the gaps that you have identified in your network. For instance, perhaps you'd like to connect with someone who can give you specialized advice, or provide expert insight on a particular industry.

Then, research potential connections that can fill these functions and add their names and contact details to the middle column.

Finally, think about what actions you can take to make these connections happen. For instance, could you connect with them online, ask a mutual acquaintance to introduce you, or go to a networking event that you know they'll be attending.

Your Network Wishlist		
Gap in Network (e.g. skill, expertise)	Name and Contact Details	Networking Action Goals

## 4. Networking Techniques



Once you've mapped your network, you should have a clearer picture of who is in your current network, who you may no longer need to connect with, and who you should be connecting with.

But, how do you get these contacts interested in building a relationship with you?

In this chapter, we'll explore eight techniques for filling your network with high-quality contacts. These techniques are:

1. Doing your homework.
2. Using shared experiences.
3. Being generous.
4. Building your personal brand.
5. Rehearsing conversations.
6. Asking questions.
7. Using body language.
8. Following up.

### 1. Doing Your Homework

Do some background research into the person that you'd like to connect with before you introduce yourself. It can be useful to gather information on:

- Their official title and her current organization.
- Their past experience and roles.
- Common connections that you have with them.
- Notable publications, blogs or websites that they contribute to.

Equipping yourself with this kind of information in advance will make the task of approaching the person who you want to connect with less daunting, and will likely provide you with some great talking points to keep the conversation flowing.

### 2. Using Shared Experiences

Identify whether you have any interests in common with the person that you want to connect with. For instance, you might support the same charity or sports team, or belong to the same online forum.

Shared experiences are an excellent way to get a conversation started and keep it flowing naturally. Finding common ground is also an effective way to bring people from a diverse range of backgrounds together.

### 3. Being Generous

Remember that the best relationships are those that are built on reciprocity.

So, when you want to make a new connection, think about the things that you can offer. Do you, for instance, specialize in a particular field, or can you offer them insight into an industry that they're interested in learning more about? Can you introduce them to someone else that might add value to their own network?

Whatever the case, try to **give** before you take. A conversation that begins with a list of demands will not make you popular and could even damage your reputation. Instead, aim to have a generous spirit and take a real interest in what you can do to help.

### 4. Building Your Personal Brand

Get yourself noticed by potential connections by engaging their interest or piquing their curiosity. Online professional sites that offer built-in audiences, such as LinkedIn, Medium or Slack, are good places to do this.

Try to build your personal brand on these sites by creating a profile that “speaks” to your network. You can do this by:

- Keeping the details of your experience and skills up-to-date.
- Providing examples of your work.
- Joining groups and forums, and participating in conversations.
- Sharing interesting news about your industry, regularly.

Publishing is another great way to build your personal brand, to connect with people online, and to promote your ideas and opinions. You could, for instance, start a blog on WordPress, or set up your own video channel on YouTube.

At the same time, it's important that you consider carefully the type of content that you share online, so that you protect your reputation.

### 5. Rehearsing Conversations

Many of us worry about how we should introduce ourselves to new people. One way that you can combat this is to script and memorize a short introduction about yourself.

This script is often referred to as an “elevator pitch,” so-called because you need to be able to deliver it in 30 seconds – the length of an average elevator ride.

You don't want to waste this time by talking about unnecessary things or going off on a tangent, so try to be as concise as possible by including the following:

- Who you are.
- What you do.
- What career or industry interests you, and why.
- What makes you or your organization unique.
- What solutions you can offer to people.

You can craft elevator pitches for different audiences, and you can even use them to structure your profile on professional online networking sites, or to customize invitation requests that you send online or via email.



### Action:

Prepare an elevator pitch for two different audiences (for instance, one might be for a networking event you're due to attend, and another could be for your online professional profile).

Try to make your pitch as interesting and authentic as possible. Make it conversational, share some fun facts about yourself, or show off your personality using your own particular tone of voice.

**My elevator pitch for...**


**My elevator pitch for...**




### Tip:

Practicing small talk can also help you to boost your social skills, and to approach conversations more confidently. The simple act of having a chat with a colleague or a client can go a long way toward developing meaningful relationships, strengthening bonds, and building rapport and trust.

## 6. Asking Questions

Once you're past the introductions, it's a good idea to have some open questions in mind to keep the conversation flowing. Ask questions that encourage more than "yes" or "no" answers. These questions usually begin with "what," "why," or "how," and encourage the other person to share their knowledge, opinions or feelings.

Some good open questions to ask when you're networking are:

- "So, what brings you here?"
- "What does your normal day look like?"
- "What drew you to your career or industry?"
- "What are the things you like/dislike most about your career or industry?"
- "How did you get to where you are today?"
- "What experiences or skills were key to getting you to where you are today?"

Make sure you pay careful attention to your contact's answers by using empathic listening. This is a great technique for driving meaningful conversations and getting to the heart of what they are trying to convey, intellectually and emotionally.

## 7. Using Body Language

The way we talk, walk, sit, and stand all say something about us.

Even when we're trying our best to hide it, anxiety, nervousness and fear can be easily revealed in our body language.

Try to look warm, friendly and relaxed. Maintain an open posture (arms uncrossed), make good eye contact, stand close to the groups that you'd like to join, and smile!

If you're particularly nervous, holding a cup of coffee or a notepad and pencil is a great trick for keeping your hands still. It's also a good idea to put away distractions like mobile phones or magazines.

Equally, try to pay attention to other people's body language, as this will tell you a lot about who best to approach. Someone with an open posture, for example, will likely be more responsive than a person who's huddled in a tight-knit group or who has closed body language (head down, arms crossed).

## 8. Following Up

One of most important things that you can do to maintain a high-quality network is to regularly follow up with the connections and contacts that you make.

Whether you met someone at a networking event or online, it's crucial that you make an effort to strengthen and solidify your relationship, otherwise they may lose interest or even forget you! So, in the next chapter we'll look at what you can do to follow up on networking contacts successfully.





## 5. How to Follow Up Successfully

**H**opefully, you've now identified some really valuable contacts who you'd like to include in your network. You may even have taken the first steps toward forging a connection with them.

Perhaps you've plucked up the courage to introduce yourself at a networking event or at work, or you've followed them online. So, where do you go from here? What steps can you take to develop your relationship further?

One of the key aspects of networking is following up with the contacts you make as soon as possible, whether it's via email or by connecting with them on social media. Otherwise you risk being forgotten! So, send your contact an email one or two days after your first introduction.

It doesn't have to be a long or formal message, but it does need to get the ball rolling. Try to include the following:

- A reminder of where and how you met.
- The reason that you're getting in touch.
- Your interest in their company or work.
- What you can offer them.
- Your contact details.

Try to make your message as engaging as possible by drawing on something that you discussed with them at the event where you met, or by touching on a subject that you know they're interested in.

Below is an example of what your follow-up email could look like:

*Dear [insert name]*

*It was so nice to meet you at the International Trade event last night. Hope your daughter's soccer match went well! We started talking about innovation in the industry and I'd love to continue our conversation. I also think that some of your ideas could be of real interest to a couple of clients we have in Dubai.*

*How does your schedule look for next Tuesday? Perhaps we could grab a quick coffee or have a virtual call to catch up?*

*Best*

*[Insert your name]*

It's also a good idea to create an auto signature to put at the end of your email, which includes links to your LinkedIn profile, Twitter handle, blog, or website. This will make it easier for your contact to connect with you.



### Action:

Using the example on the previous page, write your own follow-up message in the box, below. Try to include the following:

- A reminder of where and how you met.
- The reason you're getting in touch.
- Your interest in them or their company.
- What you can offer them.
- Your contact details.

### Follow-Up Email For:




### Tip:

Don't worry if you don't get a reply immediately. Your contact could just be busy. Don't give up on them just yet!

Schedule a reminder on your calendar to send them another email in a week or a month's time. And try to keep things interesting and current by sending them a recent article or report to pique their curiosity.

If you still don't receive a reply, try a different channel. Send them a friendly tweet or mention them on LinkedIn. But always make it relevant to them and their business, and avoid spamming their message box. A few messages is enough – any more than that can start to get annoying.

## 6. Key Points

**M**any people cringe at even the thought of networking, or see it as “schmoozing” or “sucking up.”

But, the truth is, it’s an extremely important aspect of any job and it can significantly benefit your career. It can open doors to new opportunities, enable you to share information, allow you to access skills and knowledge, promote collaboration, and boost your self-esteem.

To make sure your network is as effective as possible, it’s important to set your networking objectives, and then map out your network in order to identify any gaps in it. Once you have done this, you’ll have a clearer picture of who you should be connecting with.

There are a number of networking techniques that you can use to forge new connections.

Start by doing some research into your prospective contact’s personal background and find out whether you share any interests. Gain their respect by building up your personal brand, and remember that the best relationships are built on “give-and-take,” so see if there’s anything you can offer them.

Developing good conversation skills, building up your understanding of body language, and using open questions are also excellent ways to engage with people and drive meaningful conversations when you meet them face-to-face.

Be sure to follow up on the connections you make, too. You don’t want to be forgotten! If you’d like to develop a network filled with high-quality contacts, it’s essential to keep the lines of communication open with them, as this will help to strengthen and solidify your relationships.