

Secrets of networking

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You've probably heard the term "networking" many times. But what does it actually mean? How does it work? And how do you start?

Networking=connecting

Basically, networking is getting to know people who can help you grow personally and professionally. It may seem as if you need to be very outgoing to succeed at networking. But that's not always true.

Everyone already has a network. It's just a fancy name for people you've worked with or know. Your network may include old school friends, family members, coworkers, neighbors or people you know who are in business or professions.

How does it work?

When you're looking for new opportunities in life, the shortest route may be through networks of people you know.

Thinking of taking your career in a new direction? Want to turn a hobby into a second income? Looking to relocate or move to a new area? In each case, knowing and talking to the right people can help improve your opportunities.

How do you start?

Networking is a social behavior. People are always networking — whether they're aware of it or not.

For starters, listen when people talk about the projects or fields they're involved in. Learn who does what. Consider making notes about what different people do, what interests you about them and more. Gather information that may help you later.

Second, like all social behaviors, networking follows certain rules. They include:¹

- **Make a good first impression.** Whether you're meeting someone online or in person, remember that you can only create a first impression once.
- **Be prepared to give and take.** Successful networkers look for ways to help other people rather than just to see how people can help them. Networking is a two-way street.
- **Follow up.** If someone gives you a lead or an idea, do the legwork to follow up. Remember that each new step you take or door you knock on can help expand your network.
- **Leave your comfort zone to meet new people.** If you're shy, you're not alone. Even if you find it hard to extend yourself to new people, practice doing it. Join a new interest group or fitness club. Situations like these provide ways to meet new people with whom you already share or can develop common interests. That can make it even easier to open up conversations and get to know others. And that's how networks grow.
- **Be patient.** A major part of networking is practicing patience. You may meet someone today and perhaps a year from now, you'll turn to that person for assistance. Build friendships and social networks and you'll find that your connections can lead you to unexpected rewards and opportunities.

¹www.about.com