

#CAREERS

# The power of networking for your career

## BUILDING PROFESSIONAL CONNECTIONS

In this digital age and increased connectivity, it is quintessential to build a strong professional network to succeed. A strong network helps you to advance in your desired industry and provides access to new and fresh opportunities. Below, we explain the significance of networking and how you can venture out to build a professional network.

### What is networking?

Networking is the exchange of ideas and information which involves interacting and connecting with other people for mutual benefit, often in an informal social setting. It is a powerful and inexpensive way to explore opportunities with stakeholders and participants of an industry and its interconnected fields.

### Why is networking important?

Networking is an excellent tool for professionals and business owners to both access and create opportunities, facilitating the exchange of values. By networking, you can expand your circle of acquaintances, increase your visibility in the industry, learn about new job opportunities, have access to mentoring from senior experienced professionals, and keep up to date with the latest news and trends in your industry.

For business owners, networking can lead to new sales opportunities, especially for business-to-business (B2B) ventures. It

can also lead to recruitment leads, gaining important business contacts to fill in important roles, and learning more about standard industry practices, different business strategies and values, and the latest innovations in the field.

### Building a valuable network: Attend career fairs and networking events

In order to meet new people, it is important to step out and attend events. But simply showing up is half the battle. When in attendance, try to chat and mingle with new people. Discuss common topics and try to find a common ground that will serve to form a valuable authentic connection. You can find information about such events on social media platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn. You can also reach out to your alumni network and events, or get in touch with your contacts to remain informed of the latest events.

### Be confident

Networking can seem daunting, especially for introverts. However, it is important to overcome this fear to achieve success in networking endeavours. Even if you don't feel as confident internally, be sure to remain calm, collected and maintain a confident demeanour. Be self-assured, stand straight, maintain eye contact, shake hands, smile, and be your authentic self.

### Formulate a game plan

Before going out to network, try to understand your aim in attending such events and figure out how much money and time you can spend realistically to participate. Get clear on what talents, strengths, skill sets and connections you can bring to the table. Map out what you want to talk about and how you can help others, either now or in the future.

### Create an elevator pitch

Even if it sounds off-putting, creating an elevator pitch will smooth out the awkwardness of new conversations and help you be more confident. Craft a 30-second speech, consisting of your personal information, and business interests. Include three key points to help others understand your perspective. If needed, write down the pitch in a document and update timely. Practice your speech delivery to be more efficient in forging connections.

### Be generous

Seasoned networkers will be able to sense the stench of desperation from a mile away. When networking, instead of asking how the other party can benefit you, ask yourself what you bring to the table. Be open, friendly, and honest. Be a good listener and make sure that you communicate your availability to help them out if and when needed.

### Create a business card

A great way to establish a meaningful connection is by exchanging business cards. Create a memorable and attractive business card with proper contact information so that your new connections can reach out to you. Make sure to exchange business cards with prospective contacts. However, never forget the adage "quality over quantity." Your main focus should be forging meaningful networks, not racking up as many business cards as you can.

### Leverage social media and emails to stay in touch

Use LinkedIn to connect with your professional peers across companies within your industry. After the event, do not hesitate to send out a nice thank you message or email to the contacts, as a follow-up. If you have been able to establish common ground, message them once a month with interesting news and other links on said shared topic(s). It can also be a good idea to arrange meetups occasionally with these contacts. Most importantly, do not forget to follow through on any promises made. You can also use social media to join different networking groups to attend their events.

By Maliha Arosha Hasan  
Photo: Collected

