Effective Networking

Whether you're running a business, looking for a job, or ready for that next career move, learning how to network can bring all kinds of benefits. This module will help you build both your online and offline networks, and put you on the right track to achieving your goals.

1. Getting started with networking

Key Learnings

Networking happens formally and informally, and can be a useful way to develop and maintain your professional community. In this video we'll discuss: * The purpose of networking * The types of networking activities available * Why you should carefully plan your networking approach

Video Transcript

Hello. In this video, we'd like to explain the purpose and benefits of networking, how it can help you, and why it's so important to plan how you approach networking. So let's get stuck in.

The general aim of networking is to meet like-minded people, share information, and seek out new opportunities. It can also help you build mutually beneficial connections with others, develop your career, or even grow your business. While some people might feel apprehensive about networking, it can actually be a lot of fun. And if you can try and feel relaxed when doing it, you'll create a better first impression, too. That's what this topic sets out to help you achieve.

Networking happens every day, either face to face or online. Face-to-face networking is any kind of networking situation which involves your physical presence in the company of others. Online networking can take place through communication on social media platforms, such as LinkedIn or Twitter.

Networking can be informal or formal. Informal networking takes place all the time. It can include socialising with colleagues or engaging with social media. But you can also be proactive about seeking opportunities to network. This is what we mean by formal networking, where you set out with the intention of meeting new people or businesses in order to benefit your business or career. Formal networking includes attending industry events and taking part in structured

networking sessions, at a conference, for example; meeting regularly with professionals in a business similar to your own; or being a member of a professional association with organised networking activities.

In today's digital world, online networking can be seen as equally as important, if not more so than face-to-face networking. With the growth of digital communication and social media platforms, online networking can be quicker, more effective, and further reaching than its face-to-face equivalent. Face-to-face networking is still very much alive, though, and remains an essential business and social skill. Let's now hear from some people that have benefited directly from effective networking.

For me, personally, what networking definitely has enabled me to do over the years is to establish a wide amount of contacts, not just within my area but across the organisation and within other organisations as well. With that, has come lasting working relationships, really. So there's been times when maybe I've encountered a problem and I've thought, hmm, maybe somebody in a different organisation might have come across that, and we've kind of maybe met up and kind of discussed different issues that way. It also, for me, has developed my own learning and development with that, by having a stronger network, where you've, obviously, shared different information, different techniques.

I work as a business psychologist. I run my own business. So for me, it's important to be networking to keep contact with various people that can work with me, but also to be in touch with a variety of clients as well. So networking's key to the way I go about doing business and building relationships.

I met my current line manager online. I was looking to change industry, stick to product marketing but in a different industry, namely software. So what I'd done was have a plan around where it is always I wanted to work, what kind of products I wanted to work on-- that sort of thing.

And then, I started to critique it down more and more. And from there, I identified different areas which I wanted to work in. So I went through LinkedIn and looked for industry leaders in those areas. And I started to contact them. And one of them, the person I work for now-- we just started to have conversations. He would lend me insights as to what he's working on, what kind of projects he's doing, and I would say to him, my kind of struggles in my industry right now what it is that I was looking for-- just that small rapport every now and then.

And from there, he actually had a job role come up, which was ideal for me. So we had a conversation about it-- really informal conversation-- and we met face to face as well. And he said to me, I wouldn't necessarily go for someone with your profile-- OK, you've got the experience, but not so much in the industry in which we work in. However, because we've had the rapport, we've had conversations over the period of time, it would be good, actually, if you went for it. And I myself can be an advocate for you because I've spoken to you, and we know what each other are like, our working styles. So on the back of that, I went for the role-- interviewed with him and other people in the company, and was successful in it.

These people each provide great examples of why successful networks are important to different people for different reasons. But effective networks don't appear overnight. Relationships built on trust take time to nurture. How much time you invest in your networks will determine how effective they are, and it is definitely the case that you get out what you put in. This is why it's so important to carefully plan how you approach networking-- because your time is valuable, and using it ineffectively won't benefit your business or career.

So to quickly recap then, networking is an important skill that helps you find, develop, and take control of new business connections or career opportunities. Both formal and informal networking can bring about mutually beneficial situations with others. And lastly, how you plan your networking strategy will have a big impact on how effective your network becomes.

2. Overcoming barriers and gaining confidence

Key Learnings

Confidence is an important part of networking, especially so if you're doing it face-to-face. In this video we'll explore: * The benefits of face-to-face networking * Examples of how to gain networking experience * Tips for making networking less stressful

Video Transcript

Hello. In this video, we're going to explore some simple communication techniques to help you approach face-to-face networking with more confidence.

The main benefits of face-to-face networking compared with online networking is being in the physical presence of the person or people you are hoping to connect with. By physically interacting with and engaging others, you experience a connection simply not available through online networking. Body language, tone of voice, facial expression, and eye contact are all elements of interpersonal communication that we take for granted, but which contributes to the richness of the face-to-face networking experience.

An important skill is recognising when there is an opportunity to network and then acting on it. If you're nervous about starting or engaging in networking, don't panic. Even though it may not seem it, most people are nervous to a degree about starting a conversation and networking with others. However, as your confidence grows and you start approaching more people, your network will start to expand.

I think naturally everybody's quite nervous about networking to start with. You don't quite know what to expect. And I think often, people feel that networking is

walking into a big room of people, none of whom that you know, and you need to be fabulously interesting, and that you need to have spoken to everybody in the room before you left. Over time, I realised that actually, it wasn't necessarily that was how networking happened. It can often be one-to-one with people. It can be people that you meet quite in unusual circumstances.

I think it's fair to say that some people have got the personalities that'll definitely help with networking. Maybe you've got that kind of natural trait that you're very much of a confident kind of communicator. But then in other aspects, if you're kind of new to networking, those skills might not be ready there just yet. You may just need to develop your confidence. And I think that's where planning and preparation can be really key.

Sometimes-- I'll be totally truthful-- I've prepared for some events and spend quite a lot of time gathering information and planning and preparing for that key meeting, not used any information I've actually gathered. But the actual cycle of the planning and the preparing enabled me to go into that meeting far more confident and relaxed. And that, in a way, was, I suppose, like a coping mechanism. So sometimes the planning and preparing is a good way to just build yourself up to that event rather than walk into it completely cold.

So with face-to-face networking, I've been to numerous entry events, conferences, meet-ups as well. And they've been really insightful because you have your day of insights and trends where you're discussing different topics. But at the end, you have a bit of wind down time. You get a bit of face-to-face interaction with different people. And that's really useful because one, it's a touch point to speak to them about the day's activities. And also, you can find out what they're doing specifically and their job roles.

I think anybody who's not so confident, I think confidence is something that we learn over time. I think it's maybe when you arrive in the room, look for a friendly face. Quite often, that person may actually know other people in the room that they're then able to introduce you to, and then the whole thing becomes a lot less scary.

So how do you minimise the initial stress of starting a networking conversation with people you don't know?

Firstly, the key to effective networking is to prepare. Assess the situation. Who will be there, and what would you like to achieve? Try to find out in advance about any people you might know there, or if there's someone you'd like to speak to who might be going. If there are people there you already know, seek them out first. It's often much less nerve-racking to be introduced to a new contact via a friend.

Once a networking event is underway, and if you don't like the idea of joining a big group, approach someone individually. You may find others more willingly join you in a smaller group. Plus, smaller groups offer a chance to have more detailed conversations.

If you aren't confident in taking centre stage, then play to your strengths and listen to others by asking open-ended questions. People appreciate a good listener, and often enjoy talking about themselves, sometimes too much. Letting others do the talking will give you time to think of something useful to contribute to the conversation. And finally, whenever you're networking, remember to take a break. It can be tiring listening intently and answering other people's questions, so make sure that you escape the room every now and then.

3. Knowing your strengths

Key Learnings

Networking is all about sharing what you're good at. So, what happens if you're still not sure what sets you apart from the crowd? In this lesson we'll show you: * How to recognise your strengths * How to identify what might be holding you back * A planning model that could help your future direction

Video Transcript

A big part of networking is about letting other people know what skills you have and the kind of person you are. So what exactly are you good at and what sort of person would you say you are? These may feel like difficult questions to answer, but the process of doing so will help evaluate your skills and their importance to effective networking.

Right now, you may be unsure how to accurately define what you're good at but there are a number of models that can help you. None of them are perfect but each one will help you think more about what you have to offer and how to relay that information to others. SWOT analysis is one such model that you may have encountered before. SWOT stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, and these headings are often used by businesses to assess the competitive position of a product or service.

The findings from a SWOT analysis typically help marketers develop new sales or marketing strategies, but this same analytical approach can also be used as a personal tool to help with your networking strategy. Carrying out a SWOT analysis of yourself will help you see your own talents as strengths, and then use these to seek out opportunities and drive your career or business goals forward. Likewise, taking time to analyse your weaknesses will also help you begin to manage these and identify how they might become problems for you in the future.

To get the best out of a SWOT analysis, try looking at your strengths and weaknesses from another networker's point of view, in other words, what you can offer others. By seeing yourself objectively through the SWOT framework, you can

start to nurture and emphasise the talents that really set you apart from others and that will help achieve your vision. So how do you go about completing a SWOT analysis? Start off with your strengths first.

Acknowledging what you're good at may not be an easy task for everyone so consider asking yourself the following questions; What do you do well or better than anyone else? What are your greatest achievements? What do colleagues or friends and family say you're good at? Do you have any useful connections or resources you can draw on? Once you've identified your strengths, it's time to consider your weaknesses. Again, depending on your mindset you may find this tricky. If you're struggling ask yourself whether there's any training you need or what tasks you find difficult or avoid doing. What do other people say are your weaknesses or bad habits?

Once you've established your strengths and weaknesses, you need to consider what opportunities might arise based on these or might hinder professional or business development. This is the opportunities and threats section of SWOT. To consider your potential opportunities, ask yourself; Is there scope for growth in anything you identified? Are you doing something that others aren't? Can you utilise any of your current contacts and resources? What are your ambitions or goals?

And for the reverse of this, consider the business or career implications of your weaknesses. How might these weaknesses become threats and hold you back or cause you problems? Is there anything that could cause barriers to achieving your goals? Are there any wider factors that could turn into threats? Consider your competition: are any of these threats? Would there be any relevant professional standards you can't currently meet? Completing a SWOT analysis on yourself will give you a much clearer picture of your own personal and professional direction and any potential opportunities worth exploring.

Your findings will also form the basis of a long term plan in which your network will play a vital role. A strong network will also give you the right contact and support from a wide range of people at different stages in their career, and in different positions within their industry. It really is about who you know. And knowing the right people at the right time can significantly speed up your business growth or career development. Being clear about what you do well is fundamental to how you connect with people who are relevant to your goals.

Remember, knowing your strengths is important for networking situations. The SWOT analysis tool can help you clarify exactly what it is you can offer others and vice versa.

4. Developing your interpersonal skills

Key Learnings

Having strong interpersonal skills can help you communicate and interact with others. By regularly practicing and developing these skills, you'll also become a better networker too. In this lesson we'll look at: * The different types of interpersonal skills * Why these skills are important for networking * Tips that can help you engage better with others

Video Transcript

Interpersonal skills are the kind you might use every day when communicating and interacting with others. They include things like verbal communication and listening skills, non-verbal communication, and emotional intelligence.

Verbal communication is spoken, but it's important to remember that it's also about listening. For example, when saying something, a speaker may talk slowly or firmly to emphasise a particular point. And part of that engagement process also includes demonstrating your active listening skills. This could be paying attention by concentrating on what the other person is saying, avoiding interrupting, for example, providing visual cues that show you are listening such as nodding, and responding with appropriate feedback to what was said.

Non-verbal communication includes facial expressions, hand gestures, eye contact, posture, and physiological changes such as blushing. While physiological changes are largely involuntary, being aware of them in yourself and others helps keep you in touch with what is going on in a conversation. For example, how interested someone is in what you are saying.

As with verbal communication, presenting and picking up appropriate non-verbal communication depends on cultivating awareness of your own and others' behaviour. To get the most out of a networking encounter you need to present effective non-verbal communication as well as reading other's non-verbal communication accurately.

Awareness of yourself and others is linked to emotional intelligence and the ability to recognise and regulate your own emotions or dealing with others. People with high emotional intelligence tend to be good listeners and come across as caring and considerate. They are also good at working out problems and stressful situations calmly and decisively. Because effective networking is almost entirely dependent on successful communication, it's certainly worth investing time and effort to improve your interpersonal skills.

This is true whether you are communicating or interacting on a one-to-one basis or in a group and using verbal or non-verbal means. It all comes under the umbrella of interpersonal skills, which are highly relevant to your networking activities. Therefore, developing your interpersonal skills can have a positive impact on your networking approach.

What does it look when we start to put these skills into practise? Imagine you are meeting someone at a networking event for the first time. Firstly, you would offer a preliminary greeting. Introducing yourself and a handshake is considered appropriate in business, but use empathy to consider that norms of physical contact can differ depending on culture.

Following that, you may offer a more formal introduction. You want people to remember you, so make sure they know your name early in the event. Throughout the networking process aim to maintain eye contact. Eye contact promotes confidence and engagement, helping us in self-awareness and self-regulation of emotions. But too much can be intimidating, so vary your gaze from time to time while looking at the other person.

Also, consider your body language. Empathy, self-awareness, and self-regulation of emotions also come from body language. Keep your body language warm and open making sure you face the speaker but at a slight angle to avoid a sense of confrontation. Use your arms and hands to emphasise what you are saying or hearing. Smiling can also help self-regulate your emotions and promotes empathy.

When it comes to verbal communication, self-regulation of emotion helps you avoid nervous chatter or rambling. This ensures that people receive the important message you were trying to communicate, but it also demonstrates that you're a good communicator and makes it easier for them to respond.

You can also express your enthusiasm for networking by showing others you are listening. Include positive words or gestures and paraphrase back to the speaker to show you have understood. Leaning into the speaker slightly indicates your interest in what they have to say.

Throughout this process make sure to ask relevant questions. The social skill of asking questions can speak volumes about you self-motivation. If you are genuinely interested in other people you will ask relevant questions which demonstrate that you have been listening. Such questions often elicit additional useful information that could help build your network or give you further insights into what you can offer someone.

Finally, close an interaction by agreeing any follow up plans with the other person. Doing so presents a great opportunity to demonstrate consultative decision making so you are both sure of the next steps in your relationship. Combining all of these tips will enable you to confidently and effectively communicate with others, offering a huge boost to your networking skills.

5. Analysing your networks

Key Learnings

Actively networking and gaining lots of new contacts can be a great way to benefit to you or your business. From time to time though, you'll need to re-evaluate these connections and adapt your networking plan. In this video we'll look at: * The importance of taking stock * Advice from other networkers * How to make the most of your network

Video Transcript

From time to time it's necessary to take stock of the current quality and future potential of your networking relationships. This is because regularly evaluating your networks ensures a relevance of the connections you have in relation to your current business situation or professional goals. In such evaluation, be careful not to get sidetracked by what can be readily measured instead of what's important.

Online networking statistics are a case in point. You might feel heartened by having a large number of connections on LinkedIn, hundreds of followers on Twitter, and lots of friends on Facebook. But what counts is the quality of the interactions as expressed by comments and replies to your contributions on those platforms and ultimately the real world results they create.

It's also important to remember that networks change over time, as will your personal and business goals and those of your connections. As a result, some relationships will naturally become more productive or useful over time than others. Deciding which relationships to focus your time and resources on can be difficult. Analysing your network relationships in this way may seem strange at first. However, what you are doing is determining which people you are most valuable to and who can be most valuable to you. This analysis ensures a mutual value that underpins an effective network. Taking a positive strategic approach enables you to realise the best possible opportunities for your business and professional growth.

To conclude this lesson, we are going to hear from some people just like you, people who are actively interested in networking to help them achieve a business or career goal while helping others. What advice can they offer from their own experiences and approaches of networking?

I think it's about being clear about your objectives for networking. Who are the sorts of people we want to meet? How many people would you need to meet to enable you to achieve your personal and business goals? And then being positive, going to meet people. Most people are really, really lovely. Occasionally, you might meet people who aren't, but usually they're the minority, rather than the majority.

I think networking has to be viewed as a long-term approach. Putting pressure on yourself to make some fabulous contacts the first day that you go out to network, I think, is probably quite a tough starter. So as a long-term strategy, think about how to actually stay in touch with those people. So once you've made the contacts, once you've shared contact details with each other, how are you going to then reestablish connection later on?

The advice I'd give is go in with no expectations. If you get something out of it, great. If you don't, still great. You have to go in kind of blind and say whatever I take out of it is going to be useful to me in my future career. So that would be things like making everything relevant. You know, you could be at a networking event and think, I'm not really gaining anything from it. But look a bit deeper from it. Was there someone that you've been able to get in touch with from a different industry that was able to give you different opinions and insights? Is there someone there that perhaps can lend you advice about blog rising or something that you're interested in? There's always something to take away. And it's what you make, you know, it's the value that you draw out of it. And also I'd give the advice of don't be too needy. Don't rush things. Don't be fake. Be true to yourself. Show off your personality and you'll be fine.

And what great advice that is. So remember the more networking opportunities you engage in, the more diverse your network will become. But always stay true to your personal and professional goals. Make sure you evaluate your network frequently. Keeping your network relevant is key to ensuring that it's effective.

Ultimately, you're seeking to collaborate with like-minded business people and professionals. Open up and share opportunities and learn from each other. Follow these simple steps and you'll soon have a successful network, which can greatly benefit your business or career.