

Networking

Most people hate the term networking but we're doing it all the time without realising it!

Whether you are exploring a career in health for the first time or considering how to develop your career, think about how networking can help you.



There are lots of different ways to network

Building contacts

Your contacts are people you can call upon for advice, information, help or support. Consider building a directory of contacts with whom you can build productive, long-term, mutually beneficial relationships.

Ways of networking

There are lots of different ways to network and raise your profile, including some you may not have thought of:

- personally - face-to-face meetings
- e-mail/e-mail groups
- interactive technology
- social networking (electronically)
- social networking (personally)
- written correspondence
- forums
- discussion groups
- teaching
- mentoring/coaching
- professional organisations
- publications
- conferences
- responding to consultations

Active networking

Active networking involves targeting particular individuals or environments to fill gaps. For example, if you want to know more about marketing, you'll need to find people who work in that field by either asking your existing contacts or attending events where marketing people are likely to be.

You can learn a great deal by talking to people who work in roles you are interested in. Find out where the organisations are locally and ask to speak to someone who could give you more information.

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Networking top tips

 - make the most of any networking opportunities to find new contacts to add to your network. For example, join a professional association, keep in touch with former colleagues, participate in web forums or networking groups and attend events
 - talk to your contacts about yourself, your career and your skills in a way that is clear and memorable
 - find out as much as you can about your contacts so that you can do your best to help them in return
 - work at maintaining the relationship. Get to know your contacts on a personal basis and keep in touch regularly. Don't just contact them when you need their help

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Make networking a priority

Networking is one of the most important activities you can engage in but few of us have been taught how to do it. You'll get better at networking with practice, but remember it takes time and effort to get it right and it may feel uncomfortable at first.

Networking is about creating and developing relationships by sharing things about yourself and discovering things about others. It's a way of making sure you're widening your circles of colleagues/experts as much as possible so your chances for advancement, success and recognition are as good as possible.

As part of your career plan, give priority to networking. Make sure you're seen and heard - and not necessarily just among people who already know what you do and how you work. Networking with peers can be beneficial but make sure other influential people notice you so you can interest them in what you do.

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Right place, right time

Maximise every 'per chance' meeting - you never know when you might meet someone who can help you.

Put yourself in the right place at the right time as much as you can. If you've ever been to an event and been disappointed with the networking results or are shy and find it difficult to approach people, turn the tables around. Consider volunteering to help out or to give a presentation at the next event so that you have a clear role, something to do and a reason to talk to people.

Finally, remember you need to be interested in people to make yourself important to them.

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Networking exercise

Here is an exercise for you to try:

- make a list of people who are known to you from a personal perspective – friends, relatives, members of clubs, community leaders, college tutors etc. Then make a list of people you know through work – employers, previous employers, colleagues, peers, suppliers, customers etc
- take a piece of paper and map out your network. Put yourself in the centre of the paper and place people on the map with those closest to you near you on the page and then as they are less close place them further away. You may find you have clusters of people on the map depending on the reason for their relationship to you and how close you are to them
- remember networks do change over time
- how comfortable are you at the centre of your network?
- are there new relationships you would like to identify? For example, if you have just started a new job you often need to extend your network so you can understand how the job is done around here

Do you?

- feel you are generally well informed?
- usually accept opportunities to meet new people?
- have contacts in a wide variety of groups?
- actively share information with those around you?
- stay in close contact with people in your team and those who supply you with services?
- regularly attend meetings, training courses and conferences?
- know and talk to peers in other departments/organisations?

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