

# Networking for Career Development Practitioners

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**ABSTRACT:** Networking for career development practitioners encompasses two aspects—networking for their own careers and helping their clients network for theirs. This article provides a practical examination of both aspects and discusses a recent case study involving the development of networking skills among business students. Networking is a key activity in a person’s career development. Career development practitioners commonly recommend networking to their clients, but how often do these practitioners prioritize their own networking efforts?

## DEFINITION OF NETWORKING

First, let us clarify the concept of networking. Networking is not the outdated, transactional practice of “working the room” at awkward networking events. In simple terms, genuine networking is about building quality relationships with those we encounter. It is about how we treat those around us, show up at work, and nurture authentic connections with people.

Moving beyond events, networking is a habit. It involves being on the ball when you meet someone, connecting, following up, and staying in touch. It is about being genuinely interested in the other person and bringing an appropriate sense of curiosity to any conversation.

The current networking style is collaborative. Rather than approaching a new contact while wondering what they can do for us, better long-term outcomes become more likely if we ask ourselves what we can do for them. Tim Cork—the author of

the book *G3: The Gift of You, Leadership and Netgiving*—coined the term “netgiving” to describe this approach (Cork, 2013).

## NETWORKING FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT PRACTITIONERS

Our network is a vital part of our careers. People within our network often open doors to career opportunities and offer support as mentors, collaborators on joint projects, introducers to new contacts, and sources of new ideas and perspectives. Naturally, the more the number of people in our network, the better our career prospects.

As career development practitioners (CDPs), it is essential to examine our own networking activities. If we are so convinced of the benefits of networking for our clients, we should lead by example.

Here are a few practical suggestions for CDPs:

### Start with LinkedIn

LinkedIn is the quintessential tool for managing professional networks. It is a

platform people commonly use to demonstrate their professional presence. CDPs need to use this platform effectively. Most CDPs are also often expected to support clients in navigating and maximizing the value of LinkedIn. It is important for CDPs to allocate time for LinkedIn and utilize it for their professional development if they are not confident with it yet.

Joining LinkedIn groups of interest is another way to engage with others and meet new people, thus expanding one's network.

### **Mentor**

Become a mentor and/or find a mentor: In addition to developing in various aspects of your profession, your interactions with your mentor or mentee also contribute toward building a stronger connection with colleagues. The mentor/mentee may also be able to help you expand your network. You can ask them to introduce you to others. If they are skilled in networking, they can also coach you in this area.

### **Be More Active in Online Events**

Online events also present opportunities to meet people. This is not possible if you stay hidden behind a blank screen. If possible, keep your camera on. Engage in and contribute to the conversation by posting comments in the chat, asking questions, and demonstrating appreciation. After the event, follow up with other participants, especially if you interacted with them in a breakout room. Connect with them on LinkedIn to stay in touch.

### **TEACHING NETWORKING SKILLS**

When advising people to engage in networking, we often encounter resistance from them. In such cases, our initial response may involve emphasizing the importance of networking. However, instead of leaping to this step, we need to uncover

the reason behind this resistance. Here are some common objections:

- Holding on to the old idea of networking as “using” others and rightly feeling ill at ease with that: We need to start by ensuring that the person we are working with has a clear understanding of networking.
- Introversion: In reality, introverts can be outstanding networkers as they can be more perceptive and better listeners—excellent skills for building relationships. Being equipped with some “go-to” questions or conversation starters is one concrete way in which introverts can appear more confident when meeting new people. Managing self-talk is also important.
- Lack of conversational skills: As numerous people conduct a majority of their interactions online, engaging in in-person conversations can be daunting. As CDPs, we may need to teach people specific communication skills.

Each client is unique, and as we get to know them, we can adapt our approach in a way that is meaningful to them and help them find networking means compatible with their style and personality. This is crucial for clients to be able to engage in networking in an authentic way.

### **CASE STUDY IN TEACHING NETWORKING SKILLS**

This trimester, at Kaplan Business School, Australia, we conducted a three-part, networking series for students. We adopted a scaffolding approach to ease them into the practice of networking. The program involved the following activities:

#### **Part One—Webinar**

This included reframing networking as netgiving. We also introduced the students to

various networking contexts, including interactions with classmates, participating in internships, attending events, and joining professional associations. During the webinar, some students also shared their networking experiences and successes.

### **Part Two—Practical Masterclass**

This activity was conducted on campus. As most of our students are international students, we focused on helping them feel more confident in building relationships within the Australian cultural context. We provided them with various conversation tips. Moreover, we emphasized the importance of following up with people after initial encounters and suggested ways to accomplish this. During this activity, we allowed the students to practice networking skills with each other.

### **Part Three—Networking Event**

As part of this event, we invited some industry guests to the campus. Invitations were limited to students who had already attended the practical masterclass. We structured the event to include two rotations at allocated tables, each providing the students with a 20-minute window for conversing with other students and industry guests at the tables. This was followed by free networking/mingling time. Although we only allocated one hour for the event, most people stayed longer. The students were very engaged and actively participated in conversations with the guests. Several guests also provided feedback regarding the proactive follow-up they received from students, mostly through LinkedIn. Overall, the time we invested in preparing our students for this event clearly bore fruit.

In summary, as evidenced by the enthusiastic participation of students who were well prepared and equipped to network, networking can actually be enjoyable. By

developing the confidence of our students or clients in their networking skills, we can empower them to take charge of their careers and maximize their opportunities. Most importantly, we can start this journey by investing more actively in our own networking efforts.

## **REFERENCES**

Cork, T. (2013). *G3: The gift of you, leadership, and netgiving*. BPS Books.