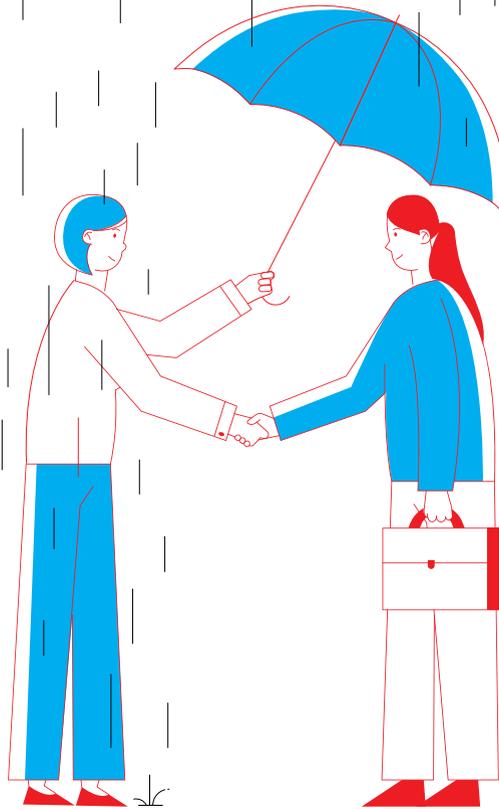


# “How Can I Help?” Five Ways to Make an Impact Through Networking



By Jacquelyn Schneider



After two years of isolation in a pandemic, interacting with professional connections has never been more important, and many are craving connection. Yet, networking can have a negative connotation or be uncomfortable for some. Here we will explore the positive aspects of networking as a source benefiting others in your community and how to get started with your outreach.

Networking does not have to be as painful as you might remember. There are a variety of ways to engage your network that do not evoke negative sentiment. While some think of networking as something transactional, artificial, and entirely self-serving, it does not have to be. In fact, the best networking seeks to achieve a win-win, leads from a place of sincerity, and cultivates a mindset of “how can I help?” Think of networking in a new way — how you can help others.

Connecting with another person can also provide great benefit in terms of helping someone with community building, or career or personal development. At the core, networking is fundamental in how we learn from one another and help each other. Networking is based on making an impact: what you care about, can offer, and can do immediately. This is core relationship building; relationships take time, are built on trust, and must be nurtured along the way. Try seeing these conversations as ones between two close friends.

Here are five impactful ways to reengage your network successfully now and as we move further out of the pandemic.

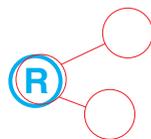


## Networking Tips & Tricks

Here are a few general guides. When conducting outreach to someone you may not know very well, reach out once and then follow up once. If you are wanting to make a big impact, it takes a time commitment—some recommend one hour of networking per week, others recommend networking daily. LinkedIn is a widely adopted tool, yet feel free to use other forms of connecting, including email, phone, and in-person too.

Networks can be built on relationships from the past. Yet, also think about where you are going and what you want to help most with today and into the future. Make sure you are building relationships and fostering connections for where you want to go as well. Your network needs to be composed of relationships with people where you can make the most impact on your mutual goals. Different people may be seeking different things. For example, as a woman, you might want to find a small group of high-ranking female executives to invest in and have a separate group of colleagues that you network with externally.

A colleague's network can also be nested within yours, so also make sure to connect with people on the periphery of your network too. For example, if you are an MBA alum, it is likely you are connected with many MBA alumni from your shared alma mater. Chances are, you share many of the same connections from this shared experience. As you start to reconnect with people, also look for those in your network that you are already connected with who you know from a different experience. Embrace some randomness in order to connect with more diverse colleagues. Especially if you are looking for fresh perspectives, seek people outside this network.



### Help Colleagues With Personal Development

Offering someone your time is invaluable and can offer a rare opportunity for personal development (for you and the person you are speaking with). Listen for ways to help connect that person with continued development opportunities such as leadership academies, continuing education, etc. Over time you might find that this connection develops into a formal mentorship.

**HOW TO GET STARTED** This opportunity might come up more naturally in an ongoing conversation. Someone from your network could also reach out requesting your help with a particular area within your expertise. If you are hearing an opportunity to offer some guidance, you can always ask to clarify, “would you like my insight on that?” or “how can I be most helpful to you right now?” That way you mitigate the risk of over-explaining. Another way to help is to suggest brainstorming solutions together, allowing the person to take options to contemplate further after your meeting. Be the person you wish you had when you were coming up the ranks.

**THE BENEFITS TO OTHERS** The benefit here is truly seeing someone grow and unleash potential. If you are speaking with someone from a different generation, the conversation can be a great way to learn and build intergenerational relationships. Another positive attribute is that these conversations can prompt you to contemplate your own experience and lessons learned along the way. You can unpack and distill your leadership journey for someone else to pick up valuable insights. These conversations can help with coaching, where you might not have the expertise, yet can help another person through a situation with skillful questions.

### Share Your Expertise and Brand

This might seem counterintuitive, but building your brand is a great way to be of service to others. Let people know what you excel in, are interested in, and how you can help communicate to a much broader audience. Note, your personal brand can also include areas you are passionate about beyond your current employment or title. In crafting your brand, consider including elements from the professional and philanthropic, and include some of your hobbies too.

**HOW TO GET STARTED** Leverage tools like LinkedIn to build your personal platform. Generate and share original content or content from others in your area of expertise regularly. You can also send invites to connect with other people in your area to build a knowledgeable community. Engage with other people's content to keep the dialogue alive. Consider what you want to be known for and be sure to share that message with others so you can continue to be of service to a broader group.

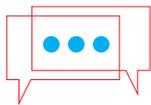
**THE BENEFITS TO OTHERS** Having a well-formulated personal platform can attract new people into your network and help those already in your network leverage your expertise. By sharing the personal and professional areas that you are passionate about, it communicates to others which topics to connect with you on. Your personal platform can be thought of as a conversation starter.

While in-person networking events can be good places to meet new people, this article focuses on building more authentic one-on-one connections. If you are attending an in-person event, research key attendees ahead of time and prepare your approach for meeting in person. Once you have your exchange, aim to follow up using these approaches to continue building the relationship.

It all starts with a conversation with an additional focus on listening and being present. Be open to what the person across from you or on the phone might need, clarify, and be creative on ways you might be able to help. While the premise of this piece is geared toward your outreach, colleagues from your network might also reach out to you for help too. Follow the framework to see how you might be of most benefit to this person.

Also, be considerate of what you offer the other person during your meeting. Be sure to not make promises you do not intend to keep. Only extend offers you plan to deliver on, e.g., make an introduction to a colleague, agree to meet a second time, send a link to the article you referenced during your discussion, etc.

Making the most impact for the people around you starts with committing time, setting the intentionality, maintaining a focus on the other person's needs, and following through on any next steps coming out of the conversation. Cultivate a mindset of being people first, find ways to continue paying it forward, and, in the words of Michael John Bobak, know that "all progress takes place outside the comfort zone."



### Serve as a Confidant and Trusted Advisor

This last area is one that cannot be rushed with your colleague. Serving as a confidant or trusted advisor takes time. Employing these methods mentioned above, you may slowly build rapport in your network and one on one.

**HOW TO GET STARTED** Consider the platinum rule — treat others how they would like to be treated in all your interactions. Actively listen to your colleagues when they are speaking to learn what matters most to them. Seek to understand instead of only responding in your dialogue. Conduct light research on your peer and learn to ask thoughtful and skillful questions in your interactions. Over time, you may uncover what is of most value to this person. Last and most important, be more than likable. Embody the phrase "to know you is to love you."

**THE BENEFITS TO OTHERS** By implementing the approach mentioned above, people feel heard and accepted, and will enjoy spending time with you. Over time, they learn they can confide in you and will be supported through your dialogue and action. Two people can co-create a space for belonging, and this is something truly cherished during these difficult times. In this space, find ways to authentically offer value that aligns with your colleague's top priority. For example, your colleague may value an introduction to a new person, help vetting a new business opportunity, or a solution to a tough challenge their business is facing right now.

### How to Maintain Your Connections

A common question is "How do I maintain professional relationships after we connect?" Building a professional relationship requires some amount of nurturing over time. During your meeting, ask your colleague what works best for them in terms of follow-up (e.g., the method and frequency). Also, capture some notes about what you discussed and any key takeaways. This can inform your approach to maintaining the connection going forward.

Here are some additional active and passive approaches to maintaining connection:

1. Set reminders for yourself to occasionally check in to see how they are doing; this is a welcomed approach during a time of disruption.
2. Based on your conversations or work experience with your colleague, send an article that might be of interest to them with a few points you found noteworthy.
3. There is always passive maintenance through the LinkedIn platform. Post articles with your community and engage with other content your colleagues are sharing.

These are all great ways to stay engaged with your professional network. Also, balance your "gives" and "asks." Basically, be sure you are offering just as much as you might be requesting over the life of your professional relationships. Nurturing relationships takes time but is worth the investment. •

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