



# 7 ways to make networking less awkward and slimy

ABC Life / By Moataz Hamde



For many of us, the concept of networking feels awkward and dirty, but does it have to be? (ABC Life: Luke Tribe)

When I hear the word 'networking', I can't help but think of weird handshakes, contrived conversation and name tags.

The idea of interacting with others for the sole purpose of advancing my own cause can feel, well... dirty.

The good news is it doesn't have to be that way.

Networking is a necessary skill and one that we can get better at — which is just as well, because there's some truth to the saying 'it's not what you know, it's who you know'. The [Australian Jobs Report 2018](#) revealed that over a quarter of all Australian jobs were unadvertised in the 2016-2017 period.

So, given it's such an important part of professional life, how can we be better networkers?

## 1. Change your relationship with the idea of networking

If you're someone who shudders when they hear the term 'networking', you're far from alone, says corporate psychologist Stephanie Thompson.

"Many of us, particularly those who are quieter in nature, have very negative associations with the concept of networking."

It can bring up feelings of anxiety but that's partly because we build it up as an event.

A more realistic and useful way to think about networking is an ongoing practice of building relationships with people we like. You know, like we do with our friends and family!

"It's about relationships and mutual respect — that's what underpins everything," Ms Thompson says.

## 2. Know that you're already doing it

Whether it's an industry function, a workplace or even something as simple as going out for dinner or drinks with colleagues, you're probably already doing more networking than you think.

"Every opportunity we have where we're meeting with people is a networking opportunity," says career counsellor John Taccori.

Being introduced to others by people we know is one of the most effective ways to network. In a [2018 article](#), Libby Sander, assistant professor of organisational behaviour at Bond Business School, cites studies that show individuals who receive organised introductions make stronger connections and more new contacts.

It's also useful to remember that digital networking is also networking. Online social and professional networking sites make it easier for us to seek out and contact people in our industries and in others. They can also be a great way to get some preliminary information and provide some talking points if and when you meet in person.



Coffee, lunch and leisurely meetings are a great way to make networking feel less formal and more social. (*Unsplash*)

### 3. Chip in more than you take

Dr Taccori says that our approach to networking shouldn't always be about getting something out of it. It's a chance for us to listen and learn from others, as well as contribute. Especially in the beginning.

He explains you should share who you are and what skills you bring and show up with a positive, collaborative attitude.

"Go in there with the intention of providing something for people, rather than filling up your own bag and walking out," Dr Taccori says.

Over time, you'll be the go-to person for your skill set.

Aside from the professional advantages networking affords, it's generally good to 'know a person'. Establishing a wide and varied network makes it easier to do our existing jobs better by allowing us access to people who can help us with the things we don't know and vice versa.

## 4. Learn to listen

Many of us have reservations about small talk and knowing what to say.

Ms Thompson says that rather than working ourselves up over it, we should adopt a different approach by getting out of our own heads and actively listening and asking questions of others.

Not only will this take the pressure off us, it will help us appear more comfortable in conversation and leave the other person feeling heard. It'll also let us walk away with a sense that we've learnt something about the other person.



Don't know what to say? The good news is that you'll get a lot more out of networking by listening. (Pexels)

## 5. Create your own luck by being positive

Often when we're presented with opportunities, it's easy to put it down to luck.

Dr Taccori says that lucky people share a common characteristic: they're likeable.

"Lucky people smile a lot, they're good listeners, they ask very good questions, they demonstrate open, positive body language and they often listen more than they talk," he says.

Emma Isaacs, founder and global CEO of Business Chicks, told [The Pineapple Project's](#) Claire

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Hooper that we should always be positive when networking.

"Never ever bag your previous employer. Always be someone who is seen as positive and upbeat and someone you'll want to hang around all the time," Ms Isaacs says.

## 6. Remember it's a long-term game

If we find ourselves at a dedicated networking event, Dr Taccori says we should avoid being too aggressive and jumping from person to person to meet as many people as possible. Remember that forming meaningful relationships takes time.

"If you're in it for the long haul, you'll eventually meet all these people, so don't be in a hurry to do that," he says.

## 7. Follow up



It's important we don't let too much time pass before we follow up with a call or a friendly email. (*Unsplash*)

We shouldn't underestimate the value of following up after a successful meeting. It establishes a line of communication for the relationship to continue.

Ms Thompson says that while email is fine, she prefers a phone call.

"Be a voice, show how articulate you are, how interesting you are and have a conversation in a good old-fashioned way," she says.

As with any skill, the more you do it the better at it you'll be.

Now, if you'll excuse me, it's five o'clock somewhere — I'm off to 'network'.

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