

5 Networking Tips for Introverts (and Anyone Else)

A new study reveals the make-or-break factors for developing networking skills. **by Willy Das and Samantha Dewalt**

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Professionals who are extroverts are better equipped than introverts to form social connections, right? After all, they're outgoing and more comfortable talking with strangers.

Wrong. Contrary to popular opinion, anybody can master the art of connecting with others. It's more of a skill than an innate talent. Even the most introverted of introverts, naturally shy about approaching people, can learn to network successfully.

In a recent [study](#) that we conducted for our organization, the [Lehigh@NasdaqCenter](#), we surveyed 450 professionals from various occupations to determine the make-or-break factors for developing networking skills. We found that regardless of age, gender, career stage, or level of extroversion or introversion, networking skills can be developed to accelerate your career.

Our study identified the following five key factors that can boost introverts' propensity to get out there and network.

1. Cognitive Flexibility

Our study revealed that cognitive flexibility — the ability to adapt your thinking swiftly in response to changing situations — increases your likelihood to network (by 19%, according to our survey). That's because the more cognitively flexible you are, the more you will seek new information and are open to contrasting viewpoints, which makes it easier to maintain existing relationships and form new connections.

[Research shows](#) that simple changes to your daily routine, like taking a different route to work or working from a new location, can enhance your cognitive flexibility by forcing your brain to adjust its thought patterns to adapt to new circumstances. Activities like [playing video games](#), particularly those requiring rapid decision-making and multitasking, can train your brain to optimize its process for cognitive flexibility. Maintaining a healthy lifestyle and [practicing meditation](#) can also improve your capacity to switch between tasks and respond flexibly. During networking events, for example, you're better equipped to handle interactions with other attendees, navigate different personalities, and effectively respond to social cues.

2. A Promotion Focus

People fall into two categories when it comes to competition: They either have a *promotion focus*, where they strive for positive outcomes, or a *prevention focus*, where they aim to avoid errors and negative results. People who have the latter are afraid someone will have little or no interest in talking with them and fear rejection if they try to engage; consequently, they're loath to network. Our study reveals that those with a promotion focus, who aim to win, are more likely to network successfully (by 17%, according to our survey).

People who tend to have a prevention focus can take actions to change it. Start by participating in social events, both in person and online. Set networking goals, remind yourself of your achievements, and never take rejection personally — realize that when a networking attempt doesn't work out with somebody, it may just be a mismatch of needs. Monitor your progress as your network expands. How many connections you make will serve as positive reinforcement that spurs you to keep going.

3. Perceived Prowess

How you rate your prowess in networking — or your perceived “networking self-efficacy” — may weigh more in your favor than whether you have any objectively demonstrable hard skills or talents for it. This perception of yourself, based on your confidence in your ability to network successfully, can profoundly shape your behavior. In short, if you believe you can network, it's more likely that you can.

Self-efficacy can boost networking propensity (by up to 25%, according to our survey). To develop it, be aware of your emotions before networking events to minimize stress and anxiety. Replace negative thoughts with positive self-talk, such as “I can do this,” “It's okay to be nervous,” and “I have prepared and I'm ready.” Model yourself after peers with personalities similar to yours who are successful networkers.

Finally, solicit some encouraging feedback from individuals who are good networkers to reinforce your belief in yourself. Ask, for example, “How am I doing?” or “What did I do well?”

4. Persistence

As with everything else in life, persistence is a key factor in successful networking. It can boost your networking prospects (by a massive 51.5%, according to our survey). The more persistently you network, the greater your chances of success.

With that in mind, dedicate time each week for networking, even if it’s just an hour or two. Discipline and consistency are essential. The method — in person, by phone or email, or via LinkedIn — depends on personal preference, but what matters is that you follow through. Keep going, even in the face of rejection and discouragement. Patience and commitment over the long haul will ultimately train you to master the skill of networking and amass enough social capital to get ahead.

5. A Future-Focused Temporal Orientation

Your temporal focus — how much attention you devote to thinking about the past, present, or future — significantly influences your decision-making about networking and therefore your behavior in pursuing it. We found that of the three dominant kinds of temporal focus, a future-oriented focus, where you contemplate upcoming events and envision what lies ahead, can boost your propensity to network (by 12%, according to our survey).

How to achieve this? Dedicate more time to thinking about your future. The more clearly you focus on the future, the better you can set specific short- and long-term goals and orient yourself toward the outcomes desired as well as anticipate potential challenges and opportunities. Establish a sense of how networking can help you

arrive at your destination. Research the events you plan to attend, the organizations responsible, and the individuals likely to be there. Practice conversation-starters and your elevator pitch. By doing so, you will be better prepared for whatever lies ahead and reduce your anxiety about networking.

Learn how to switch gears, combat a prevention focus, believe in your ability to network, persist in your efforts to expand your professional connections, and concentrate on your future. Even incremental improvements in these areas can have a substantial impact on your willingness and ability to network. And this applies to introverts as well as extroverts. Anyone can be a successful networker.

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