

How to Stay in Touch with Networking Contacts

Networking, if done correctly, should rarely begin and end with the first conversation you have with a contact. A successful networking approach is one where you strategically and respectfully maintain and develop your connection, ideally resulting in a mutually beneficial relationship. Below are some action steps you can take to keep your networking connections alive.

Start By Saying Thank You. Send a thank you e-mail or card to show your appreciation for the contact's time and assistance. Point out something you enjoyed about the conversation or something you learned. Mention that you look forward to staying in touch. If you use LinkedIn, mention you will be sending them a connection request as a means of doing so.

Track Your Networking Contacts. Keep a spreadsheet or document to help you track pertinent details such as who you met, their job title, company name, key information learned from the conversation, date met, and any follow up items. This will help you stay clear about your networking progress and next steps.

Prioritize Your Contacts. Be strategic. It is easy to add people to LinkedIn or collect business cards. Prioritize who you want to have more consistent connection with by asking yourself some of the following questions: Who was closely aligned with my career goal? Who appeared open to a continued relationship and helping me moving forward? These are the people you will want to put in the extra effort.

Utilize a good mix of these strategies to maintain networking relationships:

- a) **Use LinkedIn.** Like, comment on, or share posts that your connections are sharing. In doing so, you are continuing to engage with the connection, and hopefully presenting as a thoughtful professional. Browse through your LinkedIn Home Feed to see how your connections are engaging with their networks.
- b) **Find Ways to Connect That Don't Involve Asking for Anything.** How can you help your contacts? Did they mention anything they are feeling stuck with? Perhaps you know a great article, book, or event that they would appreciate. You will stand out to your contact by making the relationship reciprocal.
- c) **Seek Their Input from Time to Time.** Ask if they have any insight about a role that their company is hiring. Seek their input about things such as a technique, program, or professional development opportunity related to their industry. Find genuine touchpoints to reconnect. **Note:** this strategy should not be used too often; every couple of months or even less frequently is ideal. Mix this up with others for a delicately balanced approach.
- d) **Take advantage of Special Occasions/Holidays.** Did they recently get married? Send them a congratulations card in the mail. Send them best wishes at a holiday thanking them for helping you. These serve as minor touch points. You should not be asking for anything when using this strategy.

Take time to Evaluate your Networking Efforts. If there is someone who simply has not been responsive, it may be wise to move on and stop trying to regularly reach out. Consider your list of priority contacts. Is the list still the same or have your priority contacts shifted? As you grow and change, so do your needs and the connections that can help you. It's never a bad idea to share something with your network if you happen to come across it, whether they are on your priority list or not. You never know just how much impact it may have on them and your relationship.