

Networking skills that work wonders virtually

Anouare Abdou

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Trying to grow your network online?

While general [networking tips](#) tend to apply in any setting, there are certain nuances between being able to meet people in person and connecting virtually.

“During in-person networking, you tend to be more relaxed and can speak there and then, get an emotional response as well as read body language, which is relevant and helpful in building trust,” says networking coach Victoria Sheridan. “Online networking can mean that people are distracted in different ways.”

Whether you miss the good old days of pre-pandemic business conferences or you’ve mastered the art of making [valuable connections](#) on platforms like LinkedIn, the five [networking skills](#) below work wonders virtually. Master them and you’ll be able to navigate any virtual relationship-building scenario with ease.

Being a memorable virtual guest

From engaging in Facebook groups to joining a video call with new faces, being a memorable guest in any online space can help you create genuine connections. “Say thank you, refer to other members by name, offer help with an issue, follow up inside groups and give encouraging and helpful comments,” says Sheridan. “Make valuable connections by clearly stating what you are looking for but also what you can offer the group and what you have already successfully assisted with.”

And if you want to truly make a great impression, go the extra mile when it comes to helping others instead of focusing on what you can get from them. “Give someone a recommendation or refer to their business. Others will want you to do the same for them and will, of course, do so for you too.”

Having a sense of empathy

Feeling frustrated by being left on read? The best way not to take things personally is to remember that everyone is dealing with their own lives, busy schedules, and behind-the-scenes priorities. Having a sense of empathy can go a long way not only when it comes to navigating the sometimes tricky waters of sending DMs and e-mails, but also gaining an understanding of what kind of alignment there might be with a new online connection. “You must develop the skill of empathy and seeing the situation from other people’s point of view,” says Sheridan.

Staying authentic in your communications

If you're tempted to keep polishing your online communications just because you have more leeway to do so when you're not put on the spot in a face-to-face setting, be careful about appearing too rehearsed. "Speak in a heartfelt, sincere manner — no rehearsed, catchy taglines. Some people may remember them, but mostly they will remember you were slick and, worse, cheesy," says Sheridan. Just like authenticity can inject warmth and charisma into otherwise less personal means of connecting, a lack of authenticity can have the exact opposite effect.

Mastering the art of impeccable timing

Sheridan says that one of the best ways to network with the host of a virtual event is to hop on the video conference early to start chatting and getting to know them. But don't make an early exit unless it's absolutely necessary. "Get on early, to speak to the host beforehand and build rapport. Leave last, for similar reasons, as it shows commitment and interest in the group."

Timing also matters when it comes to moving a connection along into business deal territory. Act too soon and they might back off, wait too long and they might pursue another opportunity. This is where having an intuitive understanding of the situation and tapping into your sense of empathy to listen to the needs of the stakeholders involved will help.

Following up and following through

"You must have strategies to follow up and follow-through," says Sheridan. Networking online doesn't come with the stimulation of environments such as professional workshops or talks, which means people can be less engaged and present. "There is less to fill your senses with," says Sheridan. So following up on your conversations and following through on any next actions — like sending someone the link to an article you mentioned in your conversation — is critical when it comes to building depth of connection.

