

Networking

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The essence of networking

Networking is the exchange of information or services among individuals, groups or institutions, or the cultivation of productive relationships for employment or business opportunities.

Networking involves creating opportunities through:

- Meeting people
- Making contacts
- Building strong relationships

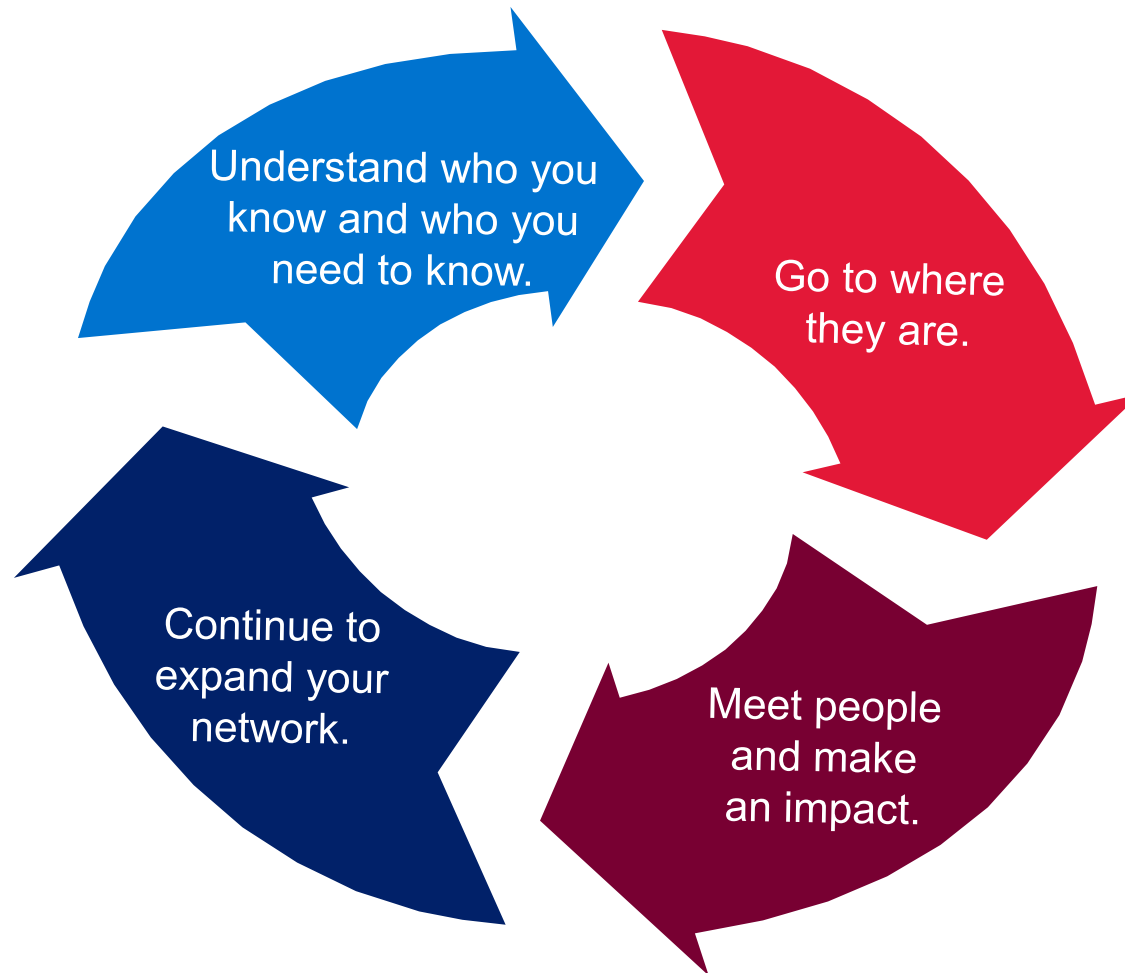
These relationships grow over time and form other contacts, relationships and opportunities.

Your network can be a significant resource for helping you find employment and grow in your career.



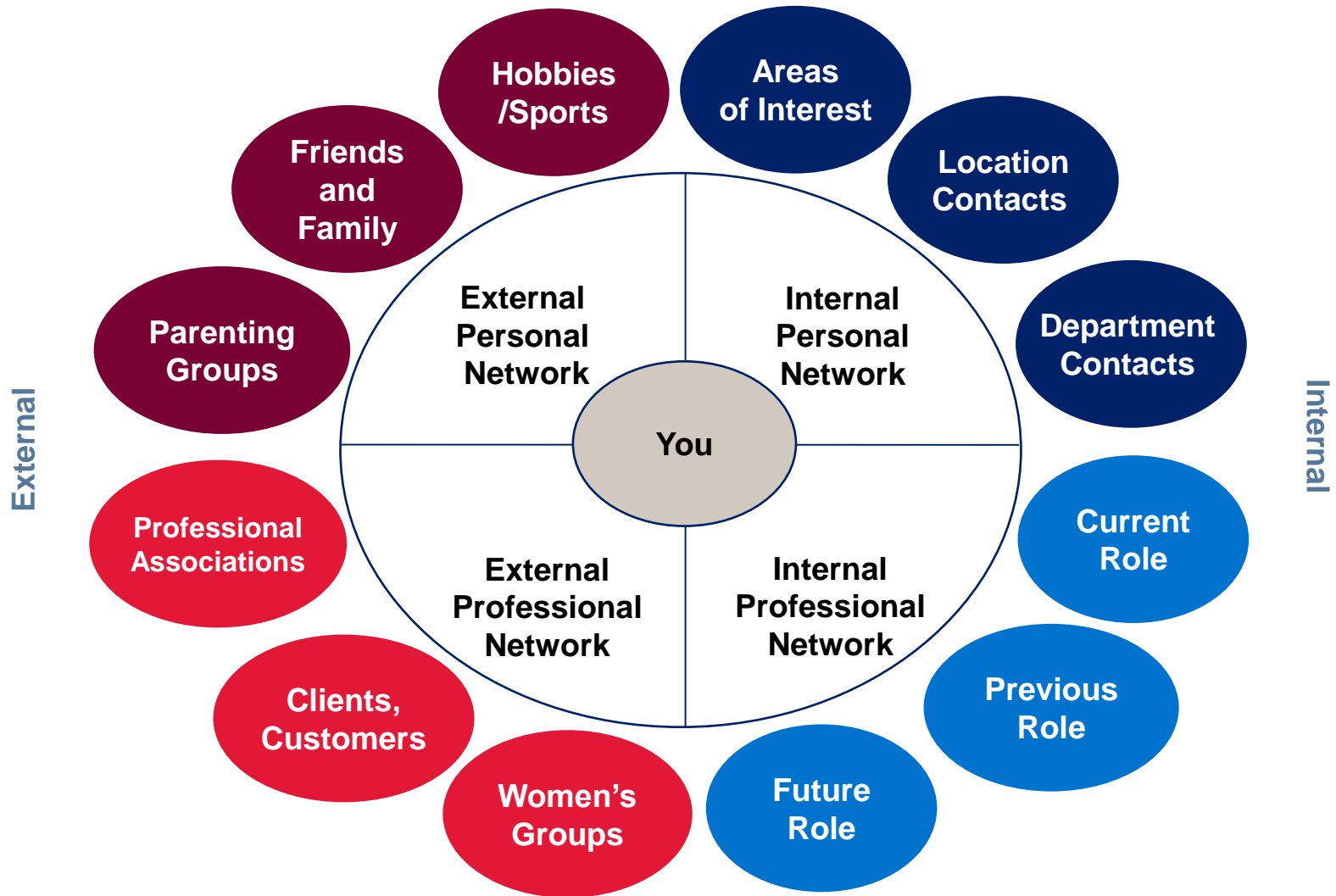
How do you build a network?

Building and maintaining your network is a continual process and should become something that you incorporate into your everyday life.



Network map example

Your network includes individuals from all aspects of your life.



Basic networking principles

Prepare for networking

- Take advantage of social and networking opportunities.
- Get involved (veteran organizations, business groups, community/church, professional networking groups and hobby/interest groups).
- Do your research! Keep up on news and current events.
- Leverage contacts from professional network.
- Prepare your elevator speech and walking web page. (Refer to the [Writing Your Elevator Speech Quick Reference Card](#).)

During conversations — remember:

- Don't be afraid to simply introduce yourself.
- Be aware of your language and tone.
- Listen.
- Talk about your interests.
- Ask open-ended questions — who, what, where, when and how.
- Be genuine and approachable (smile, be interested and nod).

Tips for initiating a conversation

Effective networking relies on building and leveraging relationships with others. Meeting new people and having productive conversations are a key part of this. Consider the following tips to set yourself up for success:

- **Set a goal** to meet new people and not just stay with people you already know.
- **Do your prep work** — know who is going to be at an event/meeting, if you can.
- **Position yourself** in places where people tend to gravitate (for example, food or bar areas, or by windows).
- **Initiate a greeting** (make eye contact, offer a firm handshake and introduce yourself).
- **Find common ground.**
- **Ask open-ended questions** versus yes or no questions (refer to next slide for examples).
- **Listen** more than you speak (apply active listening techniques).
- **Find opportunities to say the person's name** in the conversation so that you will remember it.
- **Bring business cards** (but not your resume).
- **End conversations by planning for a follow-up** (if appropriate).

Conversation tips

Possible conversation starters

- How long have you been with your company? Why did you join? What keeps you at the company?
- How do you explain your job to your family?
- What university did you go to, and what did you study?
- Favorite or most challenging project or experience at your company?
- What advice would you give to your younger self, professionally and/or personally?
- What do you consider to be the most valuable aspects of your job: people, benefits or the work? Why?

Tips during conversation

- Don't interrupt the person speaking. If it is important to interrupt, you can interject with something like, "Sorry to interrupt you, but ..."
- If three or more people are in discussion, be patient and look for an opportunity to contribute to the discussion on a relevant point.
- Don't say anything negative about a past job experience or professional affiliation.
- If possible, ask questions to find out what challenges the organization you're interested in is facing. Every challenge presents an opportunity for you to show capability of adding value.
- "Name drop" (or provide names of people you know, who will serve as good references) when appropriate.

Final tips

Networking will play a important role as you establish and grow in your career. As you begin to grow your network remember these final tips:

- **Put yourself out there.**
 - “Accept the challenges so that you can feel the exhilaration of victory.” — George S. Patton
- **Think broadly about your network.**
 - Professional affiliations, volunteering events, sports teams and veterans organizations are among the great places to expand your network.
- **Do your homework.**
 - If you were going on a blind date, wouldn't you at least try to find out if you had anything in common? Why not do this with others whom you meet?
- **Differentiate yourself.**
 - Dare to be different. Find out what employers are interested in and highlight your skills that apply (be careful not to over-embellish).
- **Follow-up after the network event, if appropriate.**
 - Lock in a follow-up meeting through a phone call and follow through.
 - If appropriate, send a thank-you email.
- **Be conscious of your virtual network.**
 - Virtual networks like Facebook or LinkedIn are great tools to help network, but be aware of what you post for the rest of the world to see. (Refer to the [Managing Your Online Presence Quick Reference Card](#).)

Source: “BrainyQuote,” last modified on 26 March 2014, http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/g/george_s_patton.html.

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