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# Six Top Tips For Networking In The New World Of Work



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Leadership

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Reach out to people you've lost contact with 

The Covid-19 pandemic may have accelerated the shift to online working, but it hasn't diminished our desire for authentic human connection. It has, however, made it much harder for us to network with colleagues, clients and business partners. A poll of nearly 500 current and future business leaders by CEMS, the Global Alliance in Management Education, found that 90% believed the pandemic had adversely affected their opportunities for networking.

While many of us are looking forward to having more face-to-face contact in the workplace as social restrictions ease, the reality is that virtual working practices will continue for the foreseeable future in many industries. So how can we continue to network effectively in the new world of work? Six business leaders and academics share their advice:

### **1. Reach out to people you've lost contact with**

“Make a concerted effort to reach out to contacts you have lost touch with, or enquire about how your colleague’s business venture is progressing,” advises professor Greg Whitwell, chair of CEMS Global Alliance in Management Education, and dean of the [University of Sydney Business School](#). “You don’t need a specific reason to connect with your network other than being genuinely curious about each individual’s situation. Concentrate your efforts on deepening existing relationships virtually and building new ones should you have the opportunity to network in person.”

### **2. Sow the seeds now for long-term networking success**

“You don’t plant a crop when you’re hungry,” says Audrey Clegg, group talent director of [Coca-Cola HBC](#). “It’s the same with growing a network. You sow carefully chosen seeds in carefully prepared ground. And you tend them as they come up. Whether you’re networking online or hybrid, it’s a long, slow build. So, invest time now in getting your story straight. What are your unique selling points? Where do you want to get to? Who do you need to connect with? What do THEY need help with? Answer those questions and when you open your mouth to talk or write a post, you’ll add value. And if you can do that, your network will grow.”

### **3. Be early to video calls**

“One of the most challenging aspects of working in hybrid and virtual setting is that it becomes ‘all business’,” says Bianca Wong, global head of rewards at construction technology company [Hilti Group](#).

“We dial in to a meeting, with a planned agenda, and immediately start the serious conversation. When it finishes, everyone drops off immediately. To build a network in this setting, we must find opportunities to show our authentic self and display interest in others. Try to call in to the meeting a couple of minutes earlier and use the time to get to know your team mates. You will be surprised how much you can gain even with just a couple of minutes.”

#### **4. Be someone whom others can turn to**

“I believe that as we gradually return to the next normal, the hybrid model will be the new normal and we have to find alternative ways of engaging, connecting and networking,” says Heidi Robertson, group head of diversity and inclusion at electrical and electronic manufacturing company [ABB](#).

Noting that early career professionals, in general, are having to navigate in the world of work with more limited physical access to colleagues, guidance and support, Robertson believes they should be proactive in “reaching out both internally and externally for guidance and support, but also to offer the same”.

“We are moving from an organizational hierarchy into networks where interactions and collaboration take place across levels, borders and functions,” she says. “Take charge, be courageous and lead that change. More importantly, be someone others like to be around, work with and turn to.”

## **5. Be clear on why you want to build a meaningful connection**

“Successful networking means being clear on why you want to build a meaningful connection and that it is about long-term give-and-take, not just a one-sided relationship,” says professor Sunita Malhotra of the [Louvain School of Management in Belgium](#). “With this in mind, maximize your education and workplace networks, connect with senior role models and approach them to mentor you, and give your time and expertise to help colleagues through volunteer work or guest lectures.”

She also recommends joining webinars, chats, conferences and social events to connect with similar-minded people around the globe – people “who might one day help you expand your career outwards and who you might be able to help”. “Importantly,” she concludes, “be sure to reflect carefully on your experiences and use them as development opportunities.”

## **6. Remain relevant**

“In the context of networking, make it your business to keep abreast of current trends within your field of interest, your industry and your organization,” says Dr Beverly Shrand, of the [University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business](#).

“Seek out knowledge, find out who the relevant thought leaders are, watch webinars and read widely,” advises Shrand. “And with this knowledge, create opportunities to engage with key people who can help you get ahead, whether by using the chat function in webinars, asking intelligent questions, or commenting on a blog post, using social media. Ensure that you are interested in what others are saying. Often expressing an interest in something goes a long way toward getting yourself noticed.”