

THE REAL SOCIAL NETWORK

Step away from the screen and connect with others face to face, says April Warriar, audit supervisor at RSM UK, and you'll soon notice the advantages



In a world increasingly reliant on social media and high-speed fibre optics, the only networking some find themselves doing is accepting a LinkedIn request. This, however, needs to change. Networking involves far more than clicking accept and scrolling through a profile. It should be about exploring interpersonal networks outside of your comfort zone. It may only take one inspirational person to kick-start your motivation, expand your horizons or enrich your life in both a professional and personal capacity.

The biggest advantage to networking is building a support system. You could meet someone to phone for technical advice, future business opportunities, or career guidance - the possibilities of what people can contribute are endless.

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influence on your career. The adage that your network determines your net worth, while not always the case, has a ring of truth. The broader and more diverse your network, the better it will serve you in the future - provided that you nurture and continue to expand it.

An obvious, but still important, point is that regular attendance at professional and social networking events (even around your own office) will help increase your profile and build your reputation as someone who can offer help, support and advice to others. And through networking you may find inspiration, innovation and new angles that you may not have encountered before. Everyone is unique and speaking to new people may help you discover a new perspective.

Some people choose not to network because they don't feel safe in an

environment where they are faced with meeting new people, and struggle to find a common ground for conversation. There are, however, some easily adopted strategies for approaching uncomfortable scenarios. Below are some of the tactics that will help you approach any networking event with the confidence to start making some lasting connections:

- Doing some brief research on the event in advance will help you understand what to expect and hopefully give you an idea of some of the people you might encounter. This can help to calm some of those initial nerves, and means you're not going to encounter any surprises.
- If you're likely to have one-to-one time with someone at an event, especially with an individual at a more advanced stage of their career, go prepared with a

few questions. A simple one to start with is "how did you get to where you are today?" Not only will this help with the nervousness of engaging someone new, but also it will help you get the most out of the discussion.

- When you first arrive at an event, try to overcome the fear of approaching a circle and introducing yourself. A way to go about this is to remember that everyone is in the room for the same reason. Also keep in mind that it's very likely the people you are approaching faced the same fear only moments before.
- The best advice is to be natural. It is important to realise that people will be interested in getting to know you and may be able to tell if you're playing a part. Even if you don't feel confident speaking to people just remind yourself

that everyone has something to offer. The best way to get better at networking is to go out and do it, and the only way to build a strong network is to meet and connect with new people. While these are just some introductory tips on ways to approach an event, networking is one of the most valuable skills you can have and is something everyone can improve upon and perfect. ●