

# How to Become a Power Networker: Part One

by Carol Dunitz, Ph.D.

Why do people network? Some expect to establish contacts that will help them advance in their careers. Others are looking for new friends or a sports partners. Others, believe it or not, simply do it because they like people. Whatever your reason is, networking has the potential to improve the quality of your life by helping you find others who will help you advance your objectives.

Before you decide to refine your networking skills it is important to decide what your objectives are. Aimlessly meeting and talking with people is rarely productive and is sure to become arduous and tedious over the long haul. You need to figure out what your expectations are and how they can be achieved. Once you do this, you are in a position to build and maintain a network of professional and personal contacts.

You can meet new people, increase the quality of your relationships, find a new job, become better informed through your contacts and -- well, the sky is the limit. You simply have to decide what your goals are -- and then develop a plan to achieve them. It's all a matter of how wide you cast your net and in which direction.

**Identify Your Network.** Your network like almost all networks is dynamic. It is constantly changing, growing or shrinking based on your activities and the way you interact with people you have met or are meeting while out in the big, wide world.

Networks increase access to information, development opportunities, support and influence. If you are being proactive and not leaving things to happenstance, chances are you are exchanging information with others, finding sources for new business, making new friends, and cultivating and building relationships you already have.

As a networker, you have the potential to not only draw on your own circle of influence (that's all the people you know or have met or are connected to from your entire life) but the circles of influence of all the people you know. Chances are you'd need a calculator to figure out how many people that is. If you extrapolated that number out past your secondary circle of influence to your tertiary circle of influence --and that it still a group of people you can potentially reach -- you'd need a computer to figure out how many people you might have access to! The sheer numbers here suggest power. And we're going to explore how to tap into that source of power.

**Have a Strategic Plan.** Take stock. What do you want from your network? Are you looking for new friends? Do you want more business? How can building your network help you achieve your goals? Once you answer these questions you will have a direction in which to proceed. Be honest with yourself. Networking is work. No one has the time or energy for false starts.

Networking is also a two way street. You need to understand that you have to help others and be available to support them if you expect them to be there for you. What do you have to give?

What are you prepared to give? Understand from the get-go that you need to put yourself out to others to help them in order to engender the kind of respect and reciprocity you would like. This is not an issue of quid pro quo. It's a matter of liking people and wanting to help others. It is easy to identify a networker who is purely self-serving -- and that's not the way you want others to identify you.

**Target People You Want to Meet.** Make a list of people you know. That is your present circle of influence. Now identify gaps in your network to help you figure out who you would like to meet. Think about why you want to meet them, how you can help them and how they, potentially, can help you. Once you know who you would like to meet you can put together a plan on how to go about meeting them. You are about to embark on a lifelong strategy to build relationships for work, fun, and mutual benefit.

Do your homework. Know something about the people you would like to meet and how you might come into contact with them. Who do you know in common? What events do they go to? Where do they work out? Decide what organizations you would like to join and who you might be able to connect with there. Figure out not only what the organization has to offer but what you can potentially accomplish at individual events and all the events on their calendar. Know in advance of going to a meeting who you want to approach (and don't forget the speaker).

Make a point of meeting people from as many different worlds as you can. People in other industries. People from other countries. People of different faiths. People with different interests. You will not only increase your probability of meeting other people from those worlds, you will be in a position to make strategic introductions for your friends and business associates. When you help others it is inevitable that you will find yourself on the winning side as well.

**Learn from the Experts.** Did you ever wonder how the rich and powerful got to be the rich and powerful? Sure, some of them were born into it. But many figure out how to gain entrance to the elite club, and it isn't by being a wallflower. Some go to schools where they get great educations and make the acquaintance of others who help them on their journey to the top. Others join clubs where they can hobnob with contacts who help them. Some join city and country clubs to make great contacts. Political fundraisers can be fruitful. And then, there is always flying first class. This group may not be your target, but it does provide a sense of how the network thing is done.

**Find the Right Places to Network.** Networking is an activity that requires planning to be successful. You need to identify networks in which you would like to participate and then devise a way to access those networks. This can be achieved by joining formal or informal networks. Formal networks include professional institutes and organizations, business organizations, and industry groups. Informal networks include conferences and business retreats, sports and social clubs -- even attending parties and social hours.

Your job is to match your interests and objectives with the plethora of networking opportunities that are available. All you have to do is figure out in which areas you want to expand your circle

of contacts. Then you find groups that match the demographics you are looking for. Potential places to network include:

- Chambers of Commerce
- Business clubs and organizations
- Professional institutes and organizations
- Industry groups
- Social and service clubs
- Volunteer groups and charitable organizations
- Community organizations and special-interest groups
- Faith organizations - synagogues, churches, etc.
- Neighborhood organizations
- Meetup groups
- LinkedIn and other online groups

Whatever you do, remember it is not enough to simply join these groups. You have to get involved. Getting involved requires time but it is time well spent. You will meet new people, make new friends and contacts, and be seen as a person who is interested and can be depended upon. That will over time help you achieve your networking goals. In the meantime, you will be enjoying a rewarding experience that enriches your life as well as the lives of the people you touch.

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