


A woman with short dark hair and glasses is looking towards a man whose profile is visible on the left. She appears to be in the middle of a conversation. The background is a plain, light color.

Networking

Networking became a business buzz word around the time of the millennium.

It means using contacts made in business for reasons beyond the initial contact and it looks like it's here to stay as a means of getting on in your career.



Networking is a person thing and there's no substitute for face-to-face contact

Old-style networking simply meant handing out business cards at every opportunity in the hope of building a group of useful contacts.

But real networking is about forming trust relationships, building visibility and also raising your profile.

Here are a few tips.

Matrix Structures

Think that because you work in a pharma company with matrix structures and cross-functional teams that you've no need to network? Think again. Extending your network to others outside your teams enables you to use their skills, knowledge and contacts to good effect and help you achieve your team and personal goals.

Introduce yourself

The bedrock of networking is to have constructive conversations with interesting people. There's really no shortage of them out there - the trick is just to go and talk to them. If at all possible, try to find out a little about them beforehand so you have some information about them that may help you gain an early rapport. Simply say hello and ask for their opinion about something. This is usually flattering enough to get a conversation going. Ask then about their job function and remember them, then you have this person as a future contact when you need them.

First impressions are important. So dress appropriately, get eye contact and be upbeat and confident.

Listen

Many people make the mistake of believing networking to be about talking at people.

It's not. The real secret is to listen. After all you're not going to learn anything new if you spend the time talking yourself. You already know what you have to say! Everyone has something useful to say and something interesting to talk about if only you're prepared to listen and ask open questions.

Spend time and energy with them, getting to know them and you may be happily surprised by what you learn

Can you help?

Another misconception is that networking is asking others to do things for you.

It's not. The quickest way to get people to help you is to see if you can do something to help them. If people believe you're the kind of person who can help them in return, they'll want to help you at the outset

Can they help?

It's definitely worth remembering the old saying about the path of your career...

"be nice to people on the way up because you might need them on the way down."

The number of acquisitions and mergers taking place in the pharma sector over recent years means that jobs and teams are subject to organisational dynamics. The importance of strategic network contacts can not be overstated.

Once you've established you're a good listener and a helpful person, you'll be in a position to ask other people to help you.

Some may be actively looking to network themselves - maybe even with you. In a hierarchy, people at the top are frequently keen to help people at the bottom because it makes them feel good about themselves and more at ease with the power they have.





Learn names fast

You can't really claim to know someone if you can't remember their name. Get into the habit of memorising names. The best time to do this is when you first meet. Make sure you repeat their name back to them as this will help get it into your head.

Take people to lunch

Lunch is the ideal occasion to get to know someone in an informal way. You can chat about anything you like. Don't go anywhere too posh though or it may put them off and suspicious that you have an ulterior motive.

Keep in touch

There's no point in making the effort to get to know someone if you don't then maintain the relationship. All it takes is a quick chat on the phone or an occasional lunch meet. Calling someone is usually best because it needs little pretext and you can learn a lot from a short update conversation.

Matchmaking

Often, the best service you can provide to someone is not to help them directly but to put them in touch with someone who can. People are always grateful to be given a warm introduction. It's so much easier than cold-calling.

Putting people in touch with someone useful also builds your reputation for being helpful, even when you're not helping directly.

Networking/Not working

Networking is a person thing and email or voicemail is no substitute for face-to-face contact. Time spent networking can often build strategic alliances that help obviate or solve future problems or resolve business issues.

Beware of sceptics who argue there's one letter difference between networking and not working!