



# Is Your Networking Plan Still Relevant?

BY MARNY LIFSHEN

**W**ith all of the challenges and decisions professional women face daily, perhaps it is not surprising that evaluating and revising our networking habits is not on top of our “to do” list. But our careers—and our lives—are constantly in transition. And because of that, it is especially important to regularly step back and evaluate your networking goals and strategies to make sure they are still relevant and delivering results.

Your circumstances, goals, priorities and resources all change over time, so your networking practices should change as well. Too many people tend to simply renew memberships to the same organizations, grab lunch with the same people, and

attend the same events year after year simply because it is comfortable. What you may need is a new and different networking approach that will help you be more successful today and get to where you want to go tomorrow.

Start to make this change by first reviewing the organizations you belong to, the events you attend and the members of your network—both the inner and the outer circles. What were your original motivations for getting involved with these groups and building relationships with these individuals? Have they been an effective use of your time and money?

Now consider your current professional status and personal situation. Have there been major changes since you established

your networking plan? Perhaps you have been promoted, changed industries, relocated to another city, re-joined the workforce after staying home with children or started your own business. Are your networking activities still relevant to your current position?

It is also important to evaluate your personal circumstances today. You might have gotten married, gotten divorced, bought a new home, started a family, been diagnosed with a health condition or sent your kids off to college. These factors affect the time, energy and money you have to dedicate to networking, and must be taken into consideration.

Now establish your goals for networking today. What are you trying to accomplish? Defining your networking goals will clarify your motivation and your direction. Why do you network? You will probably have multiple reasons, perhaps a blend of personal and professional ones. Think beyond “to help my career” or “to expand my circle of friends.” Drill down by asking yourself questions that crystalize your goals.

As you begin to set your new goals, you may need to do some research to find the organizations, events and contacts that will help you attain them. You don’t necessarily need to quit current organizations, but you may need to change your role within them—perhaps evolving from simply being a member to volunteering on a committee, or to serving on the board of directors. It can be hard to let go of old networking activities, but stepping out of your comfort zone and pursuing new opportunities might be just what you need.

It is equally important to evaluate the people who are members of your network, and whether they are helping you reach your goals. You certainly do not have to leave your friends and professional associates behind; just make room for new ones. Times of transition are an especially good time to bring an infusion of new energy into your network, simply by meeting and getting to know new people in new environments.

One networking strategy many women seem to struggle with is building their network up—and our male colleagues seem much more comfortable doing this. It is usually easy—and important—for us to have peers in our network. But we also must have relationships with professionals that are farther along in their career and can help us by providing advice and access to resources. By reaching out to and building relationships with leaders and influencers in your company, industry or profession, your network will become much more

powerful. It can be intimidating to ask someone from the C-Suite to lunch, but taking this risk can deliver amazing results.

It is often challenging to integrate networking activities into a full schedule. The secret is to first make networking a priority, then create a plan, and finally, make it a habit. Adjust your mindset to include networking as a required part of your job, short-term and long-term. Put it on your to-do list and on your schedule! Be realistic about your resources—time, money and energy. Now relax. Networking does not have to take an inordinate amount of time.

While making a commitment to networking may seem daunting, it really is quite manageable once it becomes a habit. The key is to reach out to people you don’t already see or talk to on a regular basis. Having coffee with a co-worker or calling a client is important, but it doesn’t really constitute networking.

The benefits of networking may seem intangible at times, which is why evaluating your results and revising your tactics is so critical. It will help keep you motivated and focused, and it will give you much-needed confidence. If networking is no longer delivering the results you need, it is probably time to take a fresh approach. ⓘ

---

*Marny Lifshen is an author, speaker and marketing communications consultant with more than 25 years of experience. She is the author of the award-winning “Some Assembly Required: A Networking Guide for Women,” and released the second edition in the fall of 2015. In 2009, she was named a winner of the Profiles in Power and Women of Influence Awards hosted by the Austin Business Journal. She is a nationally recognized expert on strategic networking, communication and personal branding. She is a seasoned keynote speaker and workshop leader for corporate, association and university clients across the country. She is scheduled to present the seminar “Building Bridges: Forging Productive Professional Relationships” during NAWIC’s Annual Meeting and Education Conference, Aug. 17-20, 2016, in San Antonio, Texas.*

