

STAR UPDATE

MONTHLY INSIGHTS FROM THE **MRI** NETWORK TEAM OF STAFFING PROFESSIONALS, TALENT ADVISORS & RECRUITMENT EXPERTS

Best Practices for Networking in the New, Hybrid World of Work

By Nancy Halverson

Like hiring, commuting, group brainstorming, and other aspects of the World of Work, networking has completely changed due to COVID-19. In some ways, the pandemic has made connecting with colleagues and professional acquaintances more difficult. For one, digital channels have become oversaturated, making it harder to keep up with others' careers. Communicating online also comes with its own set of challenges, such as the ["Zoom fatigue" phenomenon I've discussed before](#).

However, the pandemic has also spurred new networking trends and opportunities. Increased flexibility is a major benefit; today, we can network from anywhere and at any time. Not to mention, with a slew of networking tools and platforms at our fingertips, we can gain more direct insight about a person through their online activity — in addition to posting job news, individuals are sharing their views on important topics like culture, diversity, and leadership.

While nothing can replace the power of traditional networking, going digital certainly has its perks. This is good news considering how likely it is that businesses will maintain [a hybrid working model](#) even after the pandemic subsides. So what can you do to build lasting professional relationships in 2021 and beyond?

Figure Out Who's in Your Network

Somebody once told me that everyone should have a good accountant, lawyer, and talent access professional in their life. Perhaps the recruiter comment was made in jest given my occupation — but there is some truth to the statement. When it comes to professional development, there's nothing more important than connecting with people who have diverse backgrounds and experiences.

Ideally your network will include a mix of individuals who you consider to be:

- **Kindred spirits:** Those whose beliefs and attitudes are similar to your own — and who will support and cheer you on through every endeavor.
- **Truth-tellers:** Those who aren't afraid to speak up and share their honest opinion about your decisions and actions.
- **Career guides:** Those who will provide direction through each career move and challenge, and help you to achieve stretch goals.
- **Industry mentors:** Those who are well connected with people from all industries and walks of life (or who know how to find them), and can offer you an introduction.
- **Life coaches:** Those who can give advice on both personal and professional matters.

How do you identify these people? Start by reflecting on your past work experience and noting down who has made a positive impact at every stage of your career.

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Actively Engage and Grow Your Network

Once you've determined who's in your network, it's time to reach out. Whether this occurs online or in person, here are a few dos (and don'ts) to keep top of mind:

Do be inclusive. As mentioned above, a good professional network is made up of a variety of individuals — so don't just pursue relationships with C-level executives or superiors. Make an effort to meet people in all positions and of all skill levels.

Do initiate conversations. Like trust, networking is a two-way street — so don't just wait for others to approach you. However, that doesn't mean you need to agonize over what to say. More often than not, informal questions (e.g. "Do you mind if I introduce myself?" or "How did you hear about this event?") can open the door to longer, more meaningful discussions.

Do share opinions. In order to hold a conversation, it's likely that you'll need to offer a perspective on timely topics or industry happenings — so don't be afraid to take a stance. That said, you should avoid being combative and insulting others' beliefs. Keep your opinions focused on professional topics, such as remote work productivity, and invite others to give their input.

Regularly Check in with Your Network

The phrase "out of sight, out of mind" can apply to a lot of things, but it's especially true in the fast-paced World of Work. Since it can be easy to lose track of people, make it a priority to touch base regularly; I recommend reaching out to valued contacts at least

once per quarter. After all, networking is about more than making an introduction — once you've established a professional relationship, you need to nurture it.

From commenting on your coworkers' LinkedIn posts and hosting virtual happy hours to attending your mentors' online webinars, there are plenty of ways to stay in touch both in person and online. While this may feel like a significant amount of effort and energy, I firmly believe it's time well spent.

The World of Work may be evolving, but the importance of networking remains constant. And more than anything, the COVID-19 pandemic has made everyone realize the value of connecting with others. Whether you're networking online or in person, following these best practices can help you build successful relationships with colleagues, mentors, and industry peers.