



## Leadership Essentials

# Building Networks

A collaborative leader understands the value of internal and external networks



# 'The network of a leader is something they create and grow to the benefit of both themselves as an individual and the organisation of which they are a part of; and the connections in a successful network will see commercial and technical questions answered, useful information shared and leads created.'

It should put the leader one or two steps away from those they want to interact with and do not know. But an extensive network is not a thing of vanity, it should be used with purpose; every person met should be an opportunity to meet three more and every meeting should end with an action or commitment whether to meet again, effect an introduction or share information.' Rob Noble, Executive Director - Chelsea Group Security and Crisis Management

Networking can support you in developing relationships with other like-minded people and can have significant benefits including:

sharing of knowledge and expertise to develop your skills and other peoples'

generating new ideas, more creative and innovative solutions

creating a wider pool of potential customer connections

building your professional profile

## Accessing Networks

Networking can take many forms for both external and internal opportunities via: events, conferences, training sessions and remotely via: social media, webinars and professional networking sites.

If you are looking to access a formal networking event, a good place to start is by asking colleagues which networking events they attend and would recommend. Many networking events will allow you to attend a 'taster' session free of charge so that you can establish whether the network meets your needs.

Variety of formats

Variety of locations

## Overcoming nerves

Many people find face-to-face networking uncomfortable. It can be helpful to take a friend or colleague along the first time you attend a new network event, but if you do, remember to make the effort to engage with other people and not just spend the time chatting with your colleague.

Approaching a group of people who are already engaged in conversation can be daunting, but it is important to remember that everybody is there for the same reason and most people will be very open to you joining in.

It can sometimes be easier to approach an individual who is standing on their own - remember they are likely to be feeling the same way that you are and will be happy to speak to you.

With practice you will grow in confidence and learn your preferred networking approach.

## How to be a great networker

So what can you do to make sure you contribute to effective networking? As a leader you need to model the behaviours that you want your team members to demonstrate, by taking the following steps:

Have a purpose	What do you want to achieve from the networking process? Who do you want to add to your network and what skills, knowledge and expertise can they bring?
Be proactive	Don't wait for others to approach you about networking opportunities. Consider setting yourself realistic but stretching targets, for example attending a minimum number of networking events each quarter. However, remember that it is about quality not quantity, if you spread yourself too thinly, the quality of your network and its potential usefulness is likely to suffer. Make sure that you only attend worthwhile events and join relevant groups.
Vary your approach	Consider using both face to face and online networking opportunities rather than relying on one or the other. You might consider joining a professional network as part of this, such as LinkedIn, as well as attending relevant events.
Introduce yourself	Whether in person or online, this is a vital first step in building your network and you will need to develop your 'elevator pitch' or succinct and engaging introduction. This consists of: your name and position, your organisation and what it does, and why you have chosen to attend a particular event or join a particular network. A good tip is to remember to keep this brief and to focus on professional interests that are likely to create a sense of common purpose with others.
Ask questions	Asking others about their role, professional interests and reasons for joining a network or attending an event will help to engage them. This will present opportunities for you to have more in-depth conversations, which can help build longer term relationships.
Stay in contact	Whether you meet someone at an event or as part of an organised collaboration with another organisation, it is important to exchange contact details and follow this up with an arrangement to meet again in person or connect online, such as via LinkedIn. It is important to maintain regular contact to keep your network active, but make sure this contact is always relevant to the focus of the network.
Help others and say thank you	You need to ensure that you share your own expertise, as well as expecting to learn from others. You can extend this by referring members of your network to others who may have the expertise to help them with a particular issue or challenge, or by providing a link to a useful article or resource. Also ensure that you acknowledge any help or support that members of your network give you, a thank you, in person or in writing, can make a lasting impact.
Establish trust	It is important to ensure that you keep the promises you make and maintain confidentiality. If you are passing contact details on to others, for example, make sure you get permission first.
Learn from your experiences	If you are struggling to build a network, ask a colleague or someone whose networking abilities you respect, for advice. Equally, if you have developed strong networking skills, be willing to share those with others. Reflecting on networking events can be a good way of learning from the experience and deciding what you want to do more of, or perhaps do differently, in the future.

Don't forget that it is just as important to build networks within your organisation, to ensure that you and your team can work effectively with other individuals and departments.

It can help you get things done when you need additional input, providing you with an effective support system when you need advice or guidance and it also helps to build your personal brand (you may wish to refer to Leadership Essentials No. 38 Personal Brand).

The same principles as identified above still apply, and ways of building internal networks and making the most of them include:

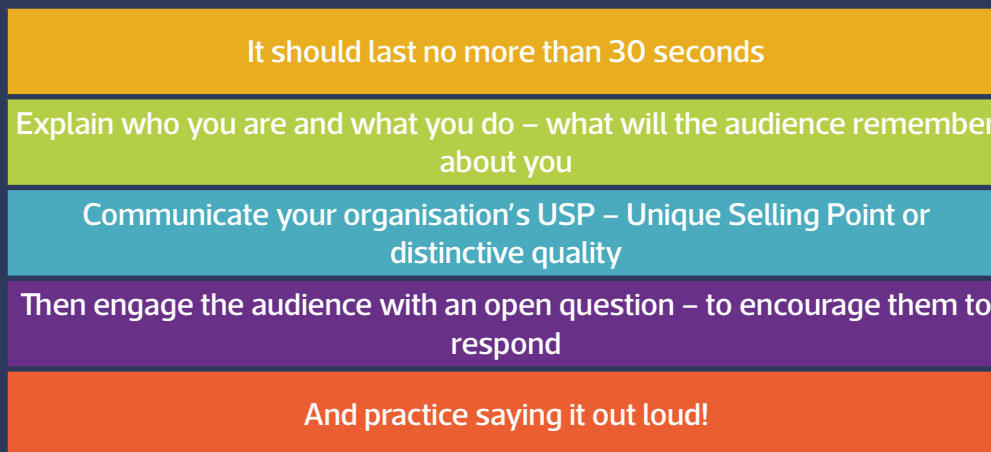
Working on joint projects

Training events and seminars

Meetings

## Final thought to enhance your networking approach:

Think ahead and prepare an engaging 'elevator pitch' – this is the first and lasting impression you will make and it needs to be engaging:



### References

Smith, C (2014). *From Networking a BETT to School-to-School Collaboration* SSAT Blog [www.ssatuk.co.uk/blog/from-networking-at-bett-to-school-to-school-collaboration](http://www.ssatuk.co.uk/blog/from-networking-at-bett-to-school-to-school-collaboration)

Wohlstetter, P, Malloy, C L, Chau, D & Polhemus, J L (2003). 'Improving School Through Networks' Educational Policy Vol.17 No.4 pp.399–430



## Dimensions of Leadership



The Institute of Leadership & Management's Dimensions of Leadership offer, often elusive, insights into great leadership. This is not a static representation but an evolving description of the complex nature of leadership activity.

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