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Networking takes skill

If you can't just strike up a conversation with anyone, having a purpose to initiate the conversation will help.

When I think of networking, I tend to think of a large group of executives all dressed in suits, standing around with a beverage. I envision a lot of shoulder slapping, handing out of business cards, and fake laughter. This is not something I would like to participate in.

However, ContactsCount.com career consultant, Julie Bauke, says in order to take charge of your career being a skilled networker is essential.

“The good news is that everyone can be good at it, or at least better,” she says. “The vast majority of people, when asked to rate their networking skills, give themselves very low marks and many of these people are outgoing, friendly people. I believe it stems from a lack of understanding or a misunderstanding as to what networking is.”

The definition of networking that Bauke likes to use is “the building of mutually beneficial relationships for business, career and personal success.”

So how do we build those relationships? According to our experts, we network all the time.

“Networking can happen anywhere,” says Marcia Hall, author of *Navigating Newbi-ism: 12 Simple Ways To Thrive In Your First Job And Career*. “If you go to a fitness centre, attend alumni association meetings, or participate in a community organization, work networking into these activities. Get to know people both personally and professionally.”

Networking is done every day in ways we don't even think about such as how we find a new dentist.

“When your dentist moves out of town, do you go to the Yellow Pages? Probably not. You call people you trust and ask for a recommendation. That is personal networking and almost everyone is very comfortable doing that,” says Bauke.

“The reason that this process is so easy is because there was a purpose for contact.”

For those of us who can't simply strike up a conversation, having a purpose to initiate conversation helps.

When networking, Michael Salmon, founder of networking training firm M.Salmon & Associates also adds the expression “It's not what you know, but whom you know,” holds true in the business world.”If you come by way of your network and all things are equal, you will have a competitive advantage,” he says.

Kavita Gosyne, 26, is a young struggling journalism graduate. She writes about her transition from student to employee and the issues she faces such as office politics.

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better networking

- What makes a good networker? Listening, says ContactsCount.com career consultant, Julie Bauke. “True networking is about building relationships and listening to people, and listening for opportunities to help people, to meet their needs,” says Bauke. This, she says, will help build a positive reputation as someone who is connected and willing to help others, who will in turn want to help you.