

OVERVIEW

Taking the Work Out of Networking

An Introvert's Guide to Making Connections that Count

by Karen Wickre

Recommendation

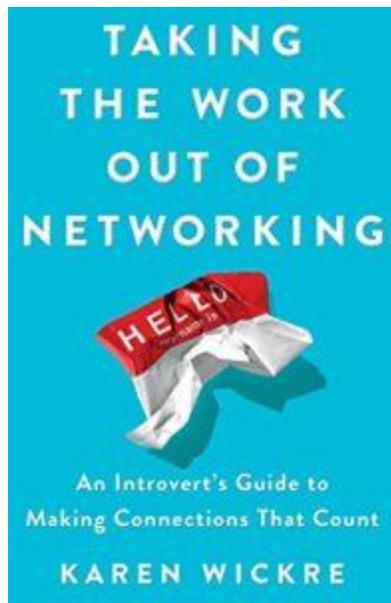
If you hate networking, Twitter and Google veteran Karen Wickre has bad news and good news. The bad: You can't just skip it. The good: Great networking now is not like the awful nametag confabs of your nightmares. She shows how using social media strategically can make connecting easier, and describes painless ways to tap your network for leads, intros, and more. Wickre, a self-described introvert, writes in an upbeat tone, explaining how to craft a social media persona, maintain connections and get comfy with social protocols. Introverts will benefit from her low-pressure routes to connection.

About the Author

Former editorial director at Twitter and Google **Karen Wickre** serves on the boards of the John S. Knight Journalism Fellowships program at Stanford, the International Center for Journalists and the News Literacy Project.

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If you hate networking, Twitter and Google veteran Karen Wickre has bad news and good news. The bad: You can't just skip it. The good: Great networking now is not like the awful nametag confabs of your nightmares. She shows how using social media strategically can make connecting easier, and describes painless ways to tap your network for leads, intros, and more. Wickre, a self-described introvert, writes in an upbeat tone, explaining how to craft a social media persona, maintain connections and get comfy with social protocols. Introverts will benefit from her low-pressure routes to connection.

Take-Aways

- Networking is stressful for most people. It's worse for introverts.

- As people relocate and change jobs more often, networking becomes more important.
- Some introverted traits, such as curiosity and observational skills, prove an advantage in networking.
- Digital communication tools make networking less intimidating, even for introverts.
- Your network should include current and former co-workers, people you meet at conferences and your social media contacts.
- The best connections are those that offer mutual benefits.
- Stay in “loose touch” with your contacts: Comment on their posts, share news items or send them brief emails.
- Your online presence should blend your professional and personal interests and activities.
- Candidates’ social media profiles play a role in most hiring decisions.
- Useful digital networking sites include LinkedIn, Twitter and Instagram.

Summary

Introverts Can Be Natural Networkers

If you’re like most people, you think of networking as necessary but burdensome. The word conjures images of superficial conversations between two strangers, each calculating the other’s potential value. For an introvert, the process can be especially daunting. Pushing yourself and your business cards on others, making small talk, feeling at ease in crowds – such interactions don’t come naturally to introverts.

“Networking is one of those things most of us think of as a chore – an unloved task to undertake when we need something.”

The good news is that making connections doesn’t have to feel stressful or contrived. With the right strategies and digital tools, you can turn networking into a relaxed, even enjoyable process. Many traits of an introverted personality can work to your advantage.

Networking Is Not Optional

Nurturing a personal network has become indispensable to professional life. American workers change jobs much more frequently than they did in the past, and they move more often. More people are self-employed, and many work multiple jobs in the gig economy. To navigate this environment, you need to call on a diverse web of people, not only for job leads but for information, advice, ideas, referrals and introductions.

Networking for Introverts

Most people express some discomfort with the social requirements of networking, but introverts may feel particularly ill-equipped for them. They can excel if they adopt an approach that meshes with their nature.

“Networking doesn’t have to be a chore, and with luck, it will serve a greater purpose for you than just counting up your contacts.”

Recognize that introversion is not the same as shyness. Rather, as psychologist Carl Jung explained, an introvert draws energy from his or her inner world and prizes solitude as a source of energy. Extroverts draw energy from crowds and external events.

Extroverts seem to have all the networking advantages, since they are more at ease with schmoozing, but introverts have a few aces up their sleeves. Introverts are often curious about others, and are good listeners and perceptive observers. This makes it easier to spark natural connections. Draw on your curiosity to employ one easy technique for managing social encounters: Ask a few questions, and let the other person do all talking. These traits make introverts valuable players in the networks they join. Because they discern so much about other people, they excel at making recommendations for open jobs or introducing people with similar interests or goals to one another.

Building Your Network

Your network should include people from a range of roles – friends, present and past co-workers, former employers, professional contacts, recruiters, and people you meet at conferences or workshops. It should include virtual contacts – connections you make on LinkedIn or people you follow (or who follow you) on Twitter and Instagram.

“Learn from others – whether it’s for a job opening, medical advice, travel destination, career change or really getting any kind of foothold.”

Be open to any encounters with new people – don’t limit yourself to those you think can help with a particular goal. The power of a network comes from the range of contacts, and their mix of views and knowledge. Even a brief conversation with a new person, with no agenda in mind, may yield information or insights. Strive to make new connections all the time, not only when you need help. Seek connections according to what you can offer other people, rather than what you hope to get out of them. You’ll stock up on good karma and feel more comfortable when you ask for help. Whenever you agree to make a referral or perform a favor, you must follow through. If you don’t have the time or resources to help someone, say so.

Connecting Virtually

Strategically integrating digital communication tools makes networking less time-consuming and labor-intensive. Three useful sites for networkers are:

1. **LinkedIn** – LinkedIn helps users build professional networks and connects job seekers with employers.
2. **Twitter** – This site allows anyone to broadcast short messages worldwide and to his or her specific followers. This results in a nonstop stream of news, observations and jokes about every topic imaginable. Twitter is a good job-seeking tool, since many companies and recruiters maintain a presence. That eases connecting with them and gathering

information. Twitter offers a simple way to find people with similar professional or personal interests.

3. **Instagram** – This social media site is a showcase for photography and other visual posts. It is popular with visual artists, designers and performers. It's a great place for creative people to connect.

Your Social Media Profile

If you use social media primarily to support your professional life, consider the “persona” you present. Your online persona varies depending on your goals and line of work. Be “authentic” online – true to your personality, abilities and attitudes. Professionals’ online personas frequently fall into one of three broad categories:

1. **“The minimalist”** – This persona shares relevant news stories, videos and memes with little or no commentary. This is good practice for maintaining connections with members of your network whom you don’t know well. Topics with wide appeal offer a route to new connections.
2. **“The commentator”** – This persona likes to post about business and society. These posts can attract new connections if they offer valuable, practicable information.
3. **“The uplifter”** – This persona spreads cheer by sharing good-news stories. This upbeat approach meshes well with professional goals.

The Unending Conversation

Participating in the unending online conversation can be intimidating. First, try “lurking” – reading social media, blogs or forums without commenting or posting. This will give you an idea of the social norms governing interactions on the site. Begin with brief comments on other people’s posts. If that feels like too much exposure, express your opinion via the “like” button or with an emoji.

“Everyone you know, have met in passing or even follow online is a potential connector to others and a potential link to job leads.”

Using online media to express your general attitude toward life and work can produce concrete results. Recruiters and school admissions officials keep an eye on these forums. When they encounter a name on an application or through a referral, they search online to learn more. Recruiters are significantly less likely to follow up with a candidate who lacks an online presence.

Presenting Your Real Self

Even in the days of paper-only résumés, sharing your personal interests and activities added depth to your professional profile. These days, the right balance between the professional and personal faces you show to the world matters more than ever, because recruiters can access a lot of your life via the internet.

“If you’re adept at communicating online, you can make meaningful connections well beyond the people you’d be likely to meet in person.”

It may seem logical to minimize the personal aspects of your social media sharing so you present a purely professional public profile. But if you scrub your profile of your distinctive traits, you risk appearing “inauthentic.” Instead, offer a reflection of your personality. Safe approaches include posting photo galleries of pets, hobbies or travel. Put up items about music or books, or write about a charity you support. Personalize your profile “header” with a picture of your favorite team, a painting or a quote that resonates with you.

Keep in “Loose Touch”

Tend to your network daily to keep your connections intact. Don’t wait until you need something to consult your network: You may lose touch with people who could be helpful. When you’re facing the pressure of a job hunt or another important need, the last thing you want to deal with is the burden of getting your network into shape. Tending your network is not difficult or time-consuming. You can devote as little as 10 minutes a day to keeping in loose touch with your connections.

“Another key to overcoming your fears about networking for a need is to practice a little bit every day – and do it when you don’t need specific help.”

Staying in loose touch doesn’t require in-person meetings; it doesn’t even require conversation. Dashing off a brief email, sharing a relevant article or commenting on a contact’s posts can bring you to a person’s consciousness for a moment. That’s all you need to keep a connection alive. Maintaining loose touch is easy and more stress-free because so many channels for “asynchronous” communication exist. In asynchronous communication, you don’t run the risk of catching a person at a bad time, because the conversation needn’t unfold in real time. Unlike calls, an email, text or direct message, it carries no obligation to respond immediately.

“Weak Ties” Can Be Powerful

Your network should include people who are only slight acquaintances. In some fields, weak ties are a more fruitful source of job leads than strong ties. Your weak ties most likely inhabit social and professional circles distinct from your usual orbit. They may offer access to information and leads that are different from what you normally encounter. You’ll find weak ties among former co-workers, college acquaintances, and people you meet at conferences or on social media.

How to Join a Crowd

Although you can relegate much of your networking to the digital sphere, it’s impossible to avoid the real world. Most professionals must attend obligatory work-related events. Consider the rich networking possibilities in conferences, workshops or other optional affairs. Some obligatory events, such as company “offsites,” meetings and group lunches can offer rewards,

so attend and do the best you can. For less-promising events such as company parties, adopt strategies to handle them with a minimum of stress. You might arrive early, circulate to let the powers-that-be know you were there, and leave.

“Here’s the good news about most small talk: It doesn’t last long.”

Other optional events, such as conferences, informal meet-ups or lectures, can be gold mines of networking opportunities. Participate only in ways that feel authentic to you. You don’t have to schmooze with everyone there. Outline a few goals before you go: Choose the sessions that offer the chance to learn something new, and identify interesting people or companies you would like to connect with over time. Think of any gathering as an opportunity to fill out the weaker ties in your network.

“The Art of Small Talk”

Introverts generally have an aversion to small talk, with its reputation for superficiality and awkward moments. But such chatter serves an important function as a “social lubricant”: It leads to connecting. Push yourself to develop small-talk skills. If you seriously hate chit-chat, bear in mind that it’s usually over quickly. This is a good situation for the “ask-questions” gambit to get the other person talking. Ask about the person’s job or his or her impressions of the event you are attending. In an office, tuning in to the small talk going on around you can give you insights into your co-workers that facilitate working together.

“Taking the next step in your professional life can be stressful, so if you’ve been nurturing your connections, you’re far more likely to find your way.”

Job interviews often begin and end with small talk. The interviewer generally uses casual pleasantries to put the candidate at ease. Small talk can offer insights into a candidate’s attitudes. The interviewer can observe if the candidate appears engaged, curious or distracted. For the job candidate, such chit-chat offers an opportunity to learn more about the company. If you are the job candidate, be cautious about sharing elements of your personal life. Stick to topics relevant to your professional capabilities.

“Here’s a little secret: At some point, every one of us is going to need help from someone we don’t currently know.”

In professionally related social events, small talk can play a part in an introvert’s strategy for dealing with a potentially overwhelming situation. At a professional or social event, make a circuit of the room, chat briefly with a couple of people you recognize, and then retreat to a “quiet corner” to enjoy the presentation or whatever constitutes the main part of the affair. Using the digital version of small talk will make it easier to connect with strangers online or get in touch with your weak ties. Commenting on someone’s posts is a good way to start the ball rolling, because people are appreciative when someone takes an interest.

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