Build Your Professional Network Without Attending an Event

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It’s impossible to overstate the [importance of networking](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/top-career-networking-tips-2062604) in building your career. Research shows that many candidates learn about jobs through referrals from friends as well as professional connections.

Jobvite’s 2019 Job Seeker Nation survey reports that almost half of respondents heard about jobs from friends, 37% learned about open positions through professional networks, and 35% found job openings on social media.1﻿ Technology firm SilkRoad, meanwhile, found that 54% of hires came from employee referrals.2﻿ If you neglect to make any of these types of connections, you could find yourself missing out on your dream job.

One way to forge those relationships is by attending [networking events,](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/types-of-career-networking-events-2059736) such as career fairs, professional conferences, or trade association mixers. These range from formal to informal and have various focuses. There are also [virtual networking opportunities](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/virtual-networking-tips-for-remote-professionals-5073724) you can take advantage of to help grow your career.

A [job fair](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/tips-for-getting-the-most-out-of-a-job-fair-2061616) is often fast-paced and focused on meeting as many employers (or recruits) as possible—sort of like the career version of speed dating. A mixer might be more informal and focused on building long-term professional relationships between workers in the same field.

Big or small, formal or informal, there’s one thing all these networking events have in common: if you’re an [introvert](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/networking-tips-for-introverts-2061377), socially anxious, or just plain shy, the idea of attending one of these probably makes you want to move to another state and change your name.

5 Ways to Build Your Professional Network

The good news is that you don’t necessarily have to attend networking events to build your professional network. With a little ingenuity, you can create a support system without ever again sticking a name tag on your shirt and reciting your [elevator speech](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/elevator-speech-examples-and-writing-tips-2061976) to a stranger.

Here’s how.

1. Maximize Your Social Media

Not so long ago, networking meant meeting people face-to-face. Now, we have social media to do some of the legwork for us. Thanks to social networks, it’s possible to make connections with professionals in your field while sitting at your desk (or scrolling through your phone).

When it comes to professional social networks, [LinkedIn is still the gold standard](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/how-to-use-linkedin-2062597). With more than 660 million users in 200 countries, LinkedIn boasts the widest reach of any career-focused network.3﻿ Chances are, most of your colleagues are on there already—not to mention recruiters and employers you might want to contact during your next job search.

But LinkedIn isn’t the only game in town. Although you might not think of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc., as professional-focused social networks, you can use all of them to [help you achieve your goals](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/best-social-media-sites-for-job-searching-2062617). Remember that networking isn’t just about finding jobs to apply for and people who can provide you with referrals for open positions. It’s also about connecting with others in a genuine way outside of an immediate need for employment.4﻿

With that in mind, the best social network for your career development is always the one that you’re willing to use.

If you love Facebook but can’t really get into LinkedIn, you might do better to make your connections there. Just be mindful of what you post and [what impression you’re creating](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/what-not-to-do-on-facebook-when-you-re-job-searching-2060613) when you do.

2. Network at Work

If you have a job, you already have a professional network whether you realize it or not. Your colleagues, direct reports, managers, and clients are all people who can help you (and vice versa).

In fact, some of the best networking you do might be at your current job. Start by being excellent at what you do. Then look for opportunities to extend your circle beyond the people you work with every day.

Are there chances to work with other teams outside your department or on projects that will allow you to meet new people and try new things?

Don’t wait until you’re ready. Stretch assignments can help you grow as a professional while also allowing you to extend your circle of acquaintances. The end result may be not only a more robust skill set but also a stronger professional network.

3. Help Others

Want to make sure you’ll have people in your corner when you need them? Help others, even when you don’t need anything in return.

[Provide referrals](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/how-to-ask-for-a-job-referral-2062989) for qualified connections. Write recommendations for former coworkers who are moving on to better things. [Endorse](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/how-to-use-linkedin-endorsements-2062325) or recommend contacts on LinkedIn.

In short, be there when your connections need you. It’s not just about getting on their good side so that they’ll help you find a job someday. It’s the right thing to do.

4. Ask for Introductions

Maybe attending a networking event with potentially hundreds of strangers is too nerve-racking, but what about a [coffee date](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/successful-networking-meeting-tips-2062611) set up by someone who knows you well?

These kinds of informal networking get-togethers are often less stressful than large-scale functions, but they can yield real results. You’d be surprised at how many people are willing to meet with new folks and [share their knowledge](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/how-an-informational-interview-can-help-your-career-2058564) and insight.

5. Invest in Your Life Outside of Work

Do you have a hobby or a passion outside of work? If so, you don’t really need formal networking events. You can connect with others in the best possible way: through shared interests.5﻿

Think of it this way: there’s a reason that employers keep box seats at the local stadium for their salespeople to use when they’re wooing clients, and it’s not just that it’s a flashy perk. The fact is that people connect better when it’s not forced. If you share a passion for local sports, you and your client (or colleague or potential contact) already have a point of connection.

One of the best things you can do for yourself and your career is to stop keeping the different parts of your life separate.

Let your friends at your local knitting group know more about what you do for a living. Tell your running club you’re open to new opportunities. Don’t push for referrals or job openings. Just share who you are and what you do.

The best networking contact is someone who’s genuinely on your side and wants you to succeed. Who better to help you than your friends?