

Networking

What is networking, and why should I do it?

Networking is about keeping in touch. We all do this to a certain degree, but networking has, as the name implies, to be worked at in order to be effective. We all know a 'friend of a friend' who can do something for us on the cheap, for example. It need not be just for your own benefit, but about helping others as well – such favours tend to be returned sooner or later so are a worthwhile investment.

Your own network

We all have our own networks, be they social, work, or outside this.

- **Social** - we may think of them as just family, or 'a bunch of mates I see in the pub' but they represent the informal side of your network.
- **Work** - on the formal side are all the contacts you make at work; in other departments, other locations, customers, plus their equivalents from previous employment.
- **Others** – these might include your doctor or dentist, staff in your local shops or leisure businesses, the mechanic who fixes your car, your children's teachers or club leaders, and so on.

The important point is that these people are only the first link in the chain. It is not just about who you know, but who they know and can put you in touch with.

How big is your network?

- ❖ We all know a minimum of a hundred people well enough to call them and ask for advice on a particular topic. If you think this figure is too high, go through the lists above and add them up. If anything, it's too low a figure.
- ❖ Each of those people could be assumed to know at least another hundred people in addition to the few you both know.
- ❖ This means that with one phone call you could have an introduction to one of a hundred times a hundred, or ten thousand people.
- ❖ Take this a stage further, that each of those people knows a hundred people, and with two phone calls you could have an introduction to one of a million people!

How can I use this?

If you are lucky or far-sighted, you will have a mentor who you keep in touch with and can help, or who can suggest someone who can help, for example:

- You may from time to time be in need of advice at work on how to handle a particular situation, or how to tackle a thorny problem.
- You may need information and be unsure who to ask – this is particularly likely if you are new into a role.
- You may need a chat with someone who's faced the same problem that you are now, as a friendly ear or a sounding board.
- You will often find that the most knowledgeable person on a particular topic is not the current job holder, particularly if they are new to the role, but the person who held the job before them.
- You may find you are unable to get time in someone's diary, but you know someone who can.

- You might have a brilliant idea that will help the organisation, and want to know who's best placed to put it into action.
- You may wish to further your career within Konica Minolts and want to know who to speak to about a certain role, or a vacancy that has arisen.
- You may want to use network contacts to market yourself in an area of the organisation you don't know – your network can help you get a 'foot in the door'.

However, networking needn't just be for yourself:

- You might receive some mail or an invitation from a supplier that you can't use but someone you know can
- You hear that someone you know slightly has had a promotion or other significant event and call to congratulate them
- You could email someone a brief note of thanks for something they or their team have done
- You might meet someone who would be a useful contact for someone else you know

Networking hints and tips

- ✓ Draw out your network on paper including people's jobs or departments – seeing it visually may reveal gaps you weren't aware of
- ✓ Be prepared to give more than you get – it will help you grow your network quickly
- ✓ Keep in touch with people regularly, not just when you want something
- ✓ Seek to help others before asking them to help you
- ✓ Remember names and faces – if you don't find this easy, jot them down immediately after meeting or speaking to someone
- ✓ Show genuine interest in others
- ✓ Volunteer for projects and activities that bring you to the notice of those you wish to get to know
- ✓ Introduce yourself to people at social events, but recognise that this is not always the time and place to talk business – follow up later with a phone call for this
- ✓ Join a trade or professional organisation appropriate to your role to meet peers in other companies – you will then receive their newsletter or magazine which opens further opportunities

Points to avoid

Assuming you are observing normal courtesy when networking, there are still a few things to avoid:

- Constantly pushing your case
- Insincerity and false interest
- Talking too much – listening will help you more!
- Pushing the new relationship too far too soon
- Taking co-operation for granted

Self-marketing and making an impression



A word of warning. If you do decide to further your career by marketing yourself through your network contacts in the manner described above, remember that the impression you make will rebound on the person who made the introduction. It is essential therefore to make a good impression. Do this as you would if you were going for an interview for promotion, bearing in mind that if you make a poor impression it will rebound not only on you, but you risk losing the goodwill of your network contact, and possibly the contact before that!

Networking courtesy

When making a phone call or writing an email to a person recommended to you by a contact, it is a good idea to introduce yourself by mentioning your mutual acquaintance. Say or write for example 'John Williams suggested I give you a call about a project I'm working on' as this immediately enables them to place you in a context, and increases the chances of them being more helpful to you.

Finally, if you get somewhere due to an introduction made for you by a network contact, it is courteous to thank them and let them know their efforts have been useful. Even if you draw a blank or reach a dead end, it is still a good idea to do so, as you may want to use them again one day.

For related topics see Top Tips:

- **Mentoring**
- **Influencing**