

JEN'S 10 NETWORKING

1 Myth #1: Not for introverts. It's true that it's usually easier for extroverts to strike up a conversation with a stranger or mix and mingle at events and parties, but those that prefer quieter exchanges are just as successful with this skill. Email and social media have made this process much easier for the introverted set, and besides, the most productive and meaningful networking happens during more intimate, 1:1 conversations.

2 Myth #2: Business majors and politicians only. Networking is talking to people to gain information and ideas. It is about building connections and learning from the insight and experience of others. Read those last two statements again: does this sentiment seem exclusive to a specific population or trade? Networking is a skill and a behavior that is fluid across all industries and fields, and beyond.

3 Myth #3: I have to be a Kennedy or a Vanderbilt to network successfully. Whatever. Yes, connections do provide a great foundation of folks to contact, but everyone has a set of contacts that can be tapped for this kind of inquiry (see 'low hanging fruit').

4 Myth #4: I'm just using people. The only folks who believe this are people who haven't yet flexed their networking muscles. Eventually, the relationship should be reciprocal, and the trick is to make that clear in your very first communication. No one should care more deeply about your success than you, so you have to be your own agent, albeit with a more elegant, strategic approach. If you are gracious and proactive, the relationships you build will eventually lead to great referrals and opportunities.

5 It's a process of narrowing. You'll soon notice that this is a key benefit of networking. As you move through this process – meet with a few key contacts, attend a couple of events, dive into the industry community, your focus will sharpen as you begin to get some clarity on all those possible paths that were on the table before you began to network.

6 Find your community + become a super fan. Through the process of exploring and narrowing your path, dive deeper into the communities where these fields live – on and offline. Read media, know the latest buzz and most importantly, have and share your perspective. Traditional and social media in addition to micromedia (industry blogs) can give you a lot of insight into a particular field.

Identifying these sources and becoming a regular, if not evangelical, reader accomplishes three very important objectives: **1) provides you invaluable industry information and 2) builds your industry vocabulary and 3) provides you with targeted contacts to potentially approach.** You are not only a student in the major of Communication Design, but you need to become a student of the field, as well. Adopting this habit makes you a smarter, more competitive candidate and helps to create a more focused, strategically compiled prospect list. At the end of the day, this small investment will save you loads of time. In summary – it's more often the industry 'super fan' that gets the offer.

7 Cultivate that low hanging fruit. Don't just appear when you need something – it's off-putting, not to mention a little tacky. Be sure to stay in regular touch – it's easier to ask for what you want if you know that so-and-so just returned from Thailand or had a baby or won the Turner prize. Makes sense, right? After all, you are more likely to help out someone you know, like and are 'current with' – so get and stay in touch. (Social networks are sure making this easier than it used to be.)

8 Introducing... Sketch out what we in the biz call an elevator pitch: a succinct, compelling statement about you, your unique selling proposition that frames an area of interest or other professional goal. Think about it, draft it, but be sure you don't sound like a robot when reciting it. The statement should be nimble and appropriate for any number of occasions, from introductions to 1:1 conversations. You need to answer these questions *How can I help you?* and *What are your plans?* with intention and investment.

9 LinkedIn. We'll talk more about this invaluable resource specifically in an upcoming session. At the very least, you should have a profile with a professionally appropriate photo and some top points from your resume. Do this now.

10 Info Interview like it's 1999. Hands down the most effective, efficient kind of networking, informational interviews can affirm your choices, help you avoid missteps, add to your list of contacts and spark your curiosity. See Jen's 10 on Informational Interviews for more detail.