

The
INTROVERT'S
GUIDE
to
AUTHENTIC
NETWORKING

by **CANDICE NINA**

ABOUT THIS ZINE

Whenever someone asks me a question about how I network, my first instinct is to blurt out:



But then when I look back to the connections I have and the networks I am part of, apparently I did it without thinking about it at all.

I never thought I did any networking, and yet: it was my network that gave me job opportunities. I am part of multiple networks that are meaningful and dear to me. I thought it's worth unpacking this more so that I have a more thorough answer than my initial "As soon as I stopped thinking about it, I started doing it." What was I thinking about instead?

If you are getting started and are feeling lost about how to go about networking, and don't like going to networking events because they feel kind of "gross" (more on the grossness on p. 4), then you might find this zine helpful.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- About this zine 02
- Table of contents 03
- What is networking, and why does it sound kind of gross? 04
- How I networked without thinking about it 05
- Your reference needs to see your work 06
- Focus on helping others 07
- Q: How do I sell myself? A: Don't 08
- Meeting new people is only part of the picture 09
- There are no shortcuts 10-11

WHAT IS NETWORKING AND WHY DOES IT SOUND KIND OF GROSS?

I looked up networking in Merriam-Webster and it says:

1. the exchange of information or services among individuals, groups, or institutions
Specifically. the cultivation of productive relationships for employment or business

The word "networking" carries a transactional nuance to me. It's an "exchange of information or services," and the purpose of cultivating productive relationships is for "employment or business." Since there's this underlying expectation to gain something immediately (or eventually), I find that the way people interact when they "network" lacks authenticity a lot of the time. They're concealing their real motive behind nice-sounding words and a smile (networking events are the worst - you'll find the SLIMIEST people there).

"How do I network authentically? How can I still be myself when networking?" I don't know if this will work for everyone but in my case, I simply changed the label from networking to something I felt more comfortable doing.

HOW I NETWORKED WITHOUT THINKING ABOUT IT

I was an introvert who didn't like "networking" (and still am).

And yet, I didn't "cold-apply" to any of the jobs that I landed.

- When I was a university student, I made sure I performed smashingly well in the courses that were meaningful to me.
- I reached out to a professor who taught my favorite course and landed an undergraduate volunteer position in a lab. After helping out in various projects, the lab promoted me to manager a year later.
- After two years of managing the lab, my research supervisor let me know about a new lab manager position opening in an analytics research/education institute. I took that position.
- I got laid off a few years later due to changes in governance, but my colleague (who already left the organization) let me know about a job opening in a non-profit that she joined. I took that position next.
- I found about my current role (running an undergraduate program) through the Chair of said Program back when the position didn't exist yet. After eyeing this role for a few years (and applying for this position twice), I landed the job.

It was the people around me who let me know about all these opportunities. How did this happen?

YOUR REFERENCE NEEDS TO SEE YOUR WORK

A common pitfall I observe often is that people assume that making a "connection" with someone (through LinkedIn, etc.) alone will allow them to get a referral or a reference later on. The connection itself is not enough.

It is bewildering when I receive reference requests from people who never worked with me before. What am I supposed to write? There's nothing I can say about how they perform at work.

What gets you a referral to a job or a glowing reference? From what I've experienced so far, it happens when your connection has confidence that you can help them (or others).

How do you do this? I think different people will have different approaches to this, but for me, I do these three things:

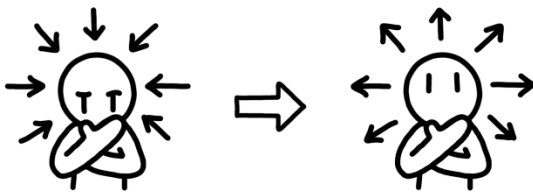
- 1) Show up. Be seen (don't be shy!). If there is an opportunity that you think you can showcase your strengths, step up. But avoid overcommitting!
- 2) Say what you will - and WILL NOT - do. It sounds basic, but it's not trivial nor easy. The best professionals I know don't do everything (that's an unrealistic expectation). Instead, they make it crystal clear what they can and (more

importantly) cannot do at the outset. Self-awareness is extraordinarily valuable in the workplace.

3) Do what you said you will do. Reliability is one of the strongest traits in a worker, and not everyone has this (I think this was the biggest surprise I had when I entered the workforce. People can be FLAKY...).

FOCUS ON HELPING OTHERS

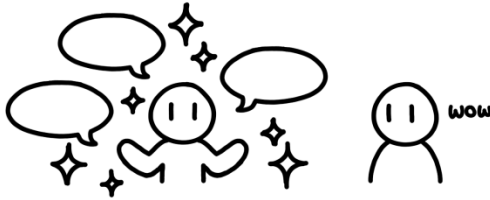
One of the things I struggled with in resume writing was the "accomplishments" section under each of your jobs, where you're supposed to write down what you accomplished above and beyond your responsibilities. It became much easier to write things down once I shifted focus from myself ("what did I accomplish?") to others ("WHO did I help and HOW?").



Remember who you helped already. If you can't think of anyone you've helped, it's never too late to start. You may have connected the dots already: Is there any way that you can help your reference? Then you'll have something to write in your resume AND your reference will get to know you better.

Q: HOW DO I SELL MYSELF? A: DON'T

Sometimes, you will run into an opportunity to "put yourself out there" and meet new people. One of the reasons why I abhor networking events is the anxiety around "how do I sell myself?" But not too long ago, I realized that a much more effective approach existed. Don't focus on selling yourself; instead, focus on the things you love talking about. The rest will follow.



People are generally pretty good at telling whether someone is being authentic or not. So when you talk about something you genuinely love or care about, it is likely that your excitement and enthusiasm will show through (emotions are contagious!).

I had a bad self-image growing up (I still suffer from it from time to time), so "selling myself" didn't work at all for me. I frankly couldn't find anything good to sell about myself. It was only when I started shifting my focus away from myself and towards the things I adored when I discovered that I had no problem putting myself out there.

MEETING NEW PEOPLE IS ONLY PART OF THE PICTURE

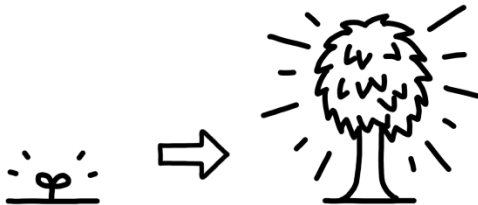
- 1) When you move from one role to the next, think about who you might want to stay in touch with. Were there any colleagues (think beyond your department) who helped you out or any colleagues who you helped out? Or is your colleague moving from one role to the next? If you think they're great at what they do, it is worth sending them a message before they leave.
- 2) Message your ex-colleague every once in a while to see how they're doing. When they reach a milestone (work anniversary or starting a new role), that is a good occasion to say hello. If they are looking for work and if you know of an opportunity that might be suitable for them, let them know about it!
- 3) Make sure to stay in touch with the people who GET you. Sometimes you will work with people who DON'T understand you. If you ask them for a referral or a reference, they might recommend jobs that are irrelevant for you. Or they might highlight the wrong attributes as your strengths!

THERE ARE NO SHORTCUTS

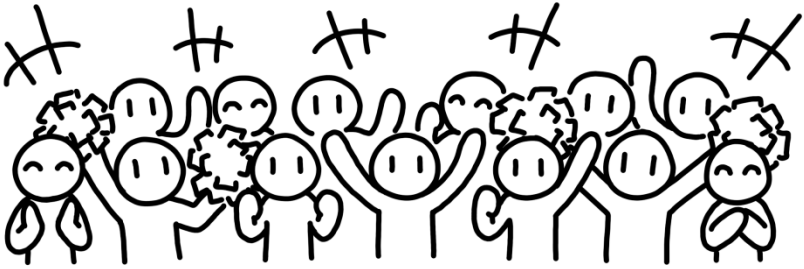
In a nutshell, I just changed the name from "networking" to something else I felt more comfortable with (like "building a relationship") and did the following:

- Showed up
- Said I would do things
- Did what I said I would do
- Made a mental note of who I want to keep in touch with when they leave or I leave the organization
- Pinged ex-colleagues every once in a while to see how they were doing

You might think, "This is time-consuming and effortful, it will take such a long time before I have a network I can tap into," and to that, I respond: YES, EXACTLY! It's like growing a plant from seed. There are no shortcuts. Have patience, and you will start seeing results in a few months or years.



Eventually, your reputation will start to snowball. As you do more great work and help more people, more people will spread the word about your accomplishments. Your network will start to grow on its own. And before you know it, more people than you had ever imagined will cheer you on.



Now, go and do your thing!

Thanks to Kimberly Geswein for the "Gloria Hallelujah" typeface!

candicenina.com

buymeacoffee.com/candicenina

@candiceninasays