

Developing your network

Talking to people about what they do will give you fresh insights, connect you with a wider network, and spark your curiosity about work / careers that you may not have known about or considered before.

When considering your potential career moves you will have many questions, such as:

- Will I have to retrain?
- Will I find it fulfilling?
- What's the pay like?
- Is it possible for me to move into the field with no experience?
- How long will it take me to move up the career ladder in this industry?
- Will it play to my strengths?

One of the ways to seek answers to these questions is through connecting with people in the areas of work you're interested in. Reaching out and asking for help can accelerate your progress, giving you the expertise to help you answer the questions you have tried to figure out alone.

Networking can feel daunting or make you feel embarrassed, particularly if you don't yet know what you want to do. Reaching out to people can feel like a lot of effort or make you fear that you appear lost. But if you think about networking as making connections and meeting interesting people it removes that uncomfortable feeling. Making connections with people doesn't require you to get out there and impress them.

If you're feeling confused or trapped in your career change, meeting with others and having conversations can help you get unstuck. Here's some suggestions to get you started:

1. Become more visible

Look for ways to make connections by going to events, volunteering, or joining professional associations. Networking doesn't have to be at networking events! Being open to connecting with people in a variety of places – wherever there are people! – will open up fresh perspectives, opportunities, and possibilities. Expressing enthusiasm and interest in others will make people want to interact with you and build a genuine connection.

2. Ask people to introduce you

Think of people in your existing connections who may be able to introduce you to people it would benefit you to meet. Explain why you're exploring a new path – you never know who might have a connection within the organisations or industries you're considering. Explain what your goals are and what's motivating you to make a change. Be curious and ask questions.

3. Be clear about what you're asking for

When approaching people for a conversation be specific about what you're asking for. For example, ask to meet for a 30 minute chat about their field of expertise over a coffee, or ask them to share some resources that would be useful for you. Do some research beforehand so that you're asking the most pertinent questions and to demonstrate your genuine interest in the person's career / field.

4. Follow up

If you've asked someone for their time, be sure to follow up with a thank you and let them know the most valuable information you learned from the conversation. Follow up again and give them an update on how things are going or continue to build the relationship by congratulating them on any achievements, expressing interest in their research or commenting on their posts.

5. Reciprocate

Think about what you have that you can offer in return for others' help. Be alert to ways to build goodwill and share an interesting article you've found or an idea for a project or make an introduction.