

Chapter 6:

Effective networking and increased connection in a remote and hybrid workplace

By Debbie Epstein Henry, founder, DEH Consulting, Speaking, Writing; executive consultant, Axiom

Are you feeling invisible as you try to network in a virtual environment? You're not alone. If you're networking to strengthen your alliances with colleagues, expand your client base, develop new relationships, find a new job and/or build your personal brand, you've likely realized that the skills required to network effectively in a virtual workplace are different. Networking is about investing in relationships by being helpful. In a remote workplace, the need to show your worth is that much more important but also that much harder. The mystery of virtual networking today is compounded by the uncertainty of how long virtual networking will remain the norm. Even recognizing that in-person networking will resume someday, we still have unease, not knowing what networking will look like and how it will continue to evolve.

In this chapter, we will explore how to network effectively and be visible in a remote and hybrid work world. We will address how to strengthen and develop relationships without being face-to-face. We will uncover what outreach is appropriate to pursue and what is the best approach. We will also outline thoughtful and focused communication and how to make sure we are striking the right chord. Additionally, we will share ways to use your online presence, writing, and speaking to maximize your exposure, impact, and success.

Demonstrate your value and be a resource

In a COVID-19 influenced world, many lawyers are anxious. Most are working remotely on a full-time basis for the first time. Some are facing new and different home responsibilities that they are unaccustomed to juggling – taking care of elderly or sick relatives, home-schooling children, coping with limited or non-existent childcare and other services such as house cleaning. For some, these new variables are further

complicated by concerns about job security and/or uncertainty about the continued market need for their employer's goods or services.

What may surprise some of you is that a lot of the advice provided in this chapter is about how to be a good lawyer and communicator as well as how to deliver top-notch client service. That's because so much of successful networking is about demonstrating that you are indispensable and, as a result, you're the one that colleagues and clients seek out when opportunities arise. Effective networking in a remote workplace is ultimately about demonstrating your value and being a resource now more than ever.

Understand your new virtual surroundings

Know the limitations of the medium

The challenges in communicating virtually are important to recognize. With email communications, it's harder to pick up sarcasm, humor, tone, and subtlety. Video communications are better than phone but physical cues may still be harder to detect. While video is the best substitute for in-person, it's important to recognize that it's not the same. You will need to become hyper-aware of when issues are sensitive and need to be addressed one-on-one, by video, by phone, or be delayed altogether.

Recognize that some informality has been lost

If you worked in a traditional office, you may be missing the casual banter at the coffee station or the people you commute with or the people you grab a bite to eat or drink with or the people who attend events with you. You are also not connecting with new people who you might meet at those lunches, coffees, drinks, events and conferences. Think about those opportunities lost and identify which ones could be recreated by video, phone, or email. Also, understand that those encounters are not simply filler-time. They are ways to establish trust, familiarity and comfort so that when a need arises, you're the one that colleague, client or friend calls. So, consider ways you can recoup that connection by touching base on the things you used to do or talk about or finding creative ways to connect virtually by sharing interests or hobbies online.

Heighten your communication skills

Get to know your audience¹

I have always emphasized the need to know your audience in order to be effective at networking. The more you know about someone you want to network with, the more you can help. Yet the needs and preferences

of your colleagues and clients have likely changed since the pandemic. As an effective networker, you need to reassess your contacts' needs. For example, don't presume that everyone wants to communicate by Zoom. Many people are burned out and would welcome a non-video call. Ask your colleagues and clients their new work preferences regarding frequency, mode, and time of communications. Also, when you interact by video, pay more attention to internal cues and emotions to gather any insights on the current receptivity your contacts have to you and your ideas. Now's the time to do more listening and observing and be more generous in giving others the opportunity to speak. Learn their current needs, challenges, and interests, as well as your commonalities. Once you've done this, you will be better able to tailor your communications and, in turn, garner greater receptivity.

Develop video executive presence

When you are interacting with people on video, show the best representation of yourself.² Look at the camera, even though it may feel awkward. Make deliberate contributions to the conversation with confidence. Center yourself on the screen and position yourself close to the camera. Use a professional background and dress professionally. Don't multitask during the meeting. Use the chat window to reference sources and make points of emphasis.

Overcommunicate

Given the limitations of working remotely, become an over-communicator. Part of effective networking is showing you are good at what you do. Along these lines, good client service is not only about delivering a great work product and results but also keeping in touch and being responsive and accessible. When people work remotely, there is concern that they are not doing what they're supposed to be doing. Being responsive and accessible (if only to simply confirm receipt and indicate when a substantive response is forthcoming) is a way to keep your recipients from guessing and make a favorable impression.

Be a smart communicator

Often, people don't take the time to organize their thoughts in advance, even when they have the opportunity to do so. Prepare an outline or script or punch list of the points you want to address on a call or video or share an agenda in advance. If you have differing views on a question, answer first and then qualify to demonstrate ultimately that you are

comfortable making a recommendation and being decisive. Watch out for inflection and up-speak as it often makes the listener question your confidence. Be willing to pause rather than nervously fill any silence. Silence is another way to invite others into a conversation.

Be efficient in your communications

Many people are feeling overtaxed and overburdened. If you are thoughtful and efficient in your networking communications, you will be more likely to get a yes. For example, when you want to connect with someone on LinkedIn and schedule a catch-up call, rather than simply try to connect with the person, send a personal note to ask for that catch-up call while inviting them to connect. This reduces communication from two to one message and also creates more accountability for a response because of the personal touch. Similarly, when communicating by email, use the subject line to indicate why you are getting in touch. By scanning the subject line of an inbox, a recipient should be enticed to open your email and also know right away what it is you're seeking – once again increasing the likelihood of a response.

Demonstrate a high level of self-awareness

Be sensitive to personal lives and circumstances

Many people are struggling, suffering, angry, and sad. The global pandemic, coupled with the killing of George Floyd and its ensuing protests have heightened the focus on racial inequity in the US and our professional and personal lives are more inextricably linked than ever. This linkage requires all of us to think more critically before asking about things we may not have hesitated to inquire about previously. Proceeding with caution, empathy, and humility are important in these challenging times.

Exercise good judgment

Listen to your colleagues and clients and be sure you are current on how they want you to interact and work with them. Try to get an understanding of the status of the business so that any asks and inquiries you make are consistent with what is expected in the current climate. Identify what parts of your work are inappropriate to pursue right now and consider revisiting them at a later date. Be aware of any sensitivities and tensions or shifts in relationships that you are noticing. Typically, when you feel a tension or awkwardness, the other person does too. When you have identified something that is sensitive, try to avoid email. Video, as an in-person

substitute, is best if something sensitive must be dealt with right away. If you are upset or angry, delay responding if at all possible and, at a minimum, try to impose a 24-hour rule before responding.

Details matter

How you network and make an ask is always a challenge but when you do so in a virtual environment, the details matter even more. If it's for something important, opt for video as the best alternative to in-person. Be sure you have the right audience and take the time to tailor and personalize your message to the person and his or her organization. Practice and role play to get the framing, tone, and pacing right. Evaluate to ensure the timing is right for your ask.

Know the uniform

Part of successful networking with colleagues and clients by video is having an appropriate background and knowing the range of acceptable attire for a video meeting. Projecting a professional image while interacting by video can sometimes be even more important given that you don't have the additional context of meeting in an established venue that may lend more credibility to you and the moment. So, anticipate what your contact will be wearing and try to mirror his or her dress code. If you're not sure, err on the side of being more dressed up. You do not want your background or appearance to be a distraction so, when in doubt, you should skip what you are questioning. Pay attention to things like geography, industry, and role, as well as type of meeting, presentation or gathering as these factors are often indicators of the range of appropriateness. While it is important to know the uniform, this is not to say that you should be inauthentic or conform or stifle who you are. Instead, you should understand that you are not working in a vacuum and, whether it's fair or not, part of how we are judged is how we present ourselves. So, make the choice of how you want to represent yourself and your organization thoughtfully.

Be generous

Make your ask a give³

I've written about the importance of generosity in networking. Being kind and generous is that much important now, when people are uncertain about the future of work and how it will normalize. The concept of "Make your ask a give" is about listening and being informative and inquisitive and, in doing so, figuring out how you can provide a benefit

and be helpful. By being a resource and bringing value, you will find that opportunities will often flow back to you. This is not about seeking a *quid pro quo* but rather you will see that when you help people, frequently, a natural reciprocity ensues. While you can't create a need in someone else, if you demonstrate your value and effectively communicate with people about what you do and how you can help, those people will often call on you when a need arises.

Invest the time

With Zoom fatigue setting in for many, there may be an inclination to shorten or limit meetings wherever possible. While that generally is a good thing, sometimes building in some extra time in meetings to connect goes a long way. For example, in a small team call, set aside 15 minutes for each team member to share a quick story of a treasure from home – a show and tell of sorts that a client suggested to me – as an icebreaker to enable team members to get to know each other better.

Be collaborative and considerate

Be respectful of boundaries

Many who work virtually have greater difficulty delineating lines between work and home. For that reason, be more thoughtful about avoiding weekend communications if a matter is not time sensitive. Also, with more people behind their desks and not traveling, there is a tendency to send more emails. Now's the time to be more considerate and not send excess emails and be careful to avoid unnecessarily copying people on email chains.

Volunteer and ask

Everyone's job descriptions have changed since the pandemic so be inquisitive and ask what are the new challenges that your colleagues and clients are faced with and volunteer to help. However, don't just put the onus on them. Come up with strategies of how you can fill gaps after observing where your skill sets align with their areas of need.

Offer new ideas

There is a whole new landscape to work so this is a time where there may be more receptivity to new ideas. Be the one to offer them and be able to articulate why they're worth a try. Suggest calling it a pilot so it is recognized as a test and less subject to being perceived as a failure if it's not worth pursuing long term.

Check-in and offer to help

This is a modified ask. Remind someone that you're there and how you can help. Share any information, resources, articles, and webinars that may be of interest. Be informative of what you are doing for others and what others' needs are and how your contacts' needs may be analogous. Be mindful if an ask is appropriate or if it should be postponed.

Suggest a collaboration

Offering to take the lead on a co-authored article or presentation is a great way to engage with someone and give the person you want to connect with some visibility while you take on most of the work. Before proposing the collaboration, develop a well thought out plan that you can present about the topic, audience, approach, timetable, impact, reach and benefits.

Get organized

Replace the missing transitions in your day

If you find yourself with extra time on your hands, be thoughtful about reallocating the time before it slips away. If you establish daily rituals and routines, it will help you. It is harder for many to work remotely because it requires imposing a structure that was previously imposed upon you. By creating parameters around your work day – start and stop times, break and meal times, and exercise and fun times – it will naturally bring back those transitions you've been missing. If you schedule your work around your natural rhythms when you are most productive, it will help you stay focused and better able to manage and anticipate distractions.

Repurpose your time

If you have extra time because you're no longer commuting or you've recouped time because you're no longer chatting with colleagues at the office, use that time, at least in part, to network more and/or increase your impact. Write that article you've been wanting to write, prepare that Continuing Legal Education talk you've been wanting to give, develop that webinar you've been wanting to create, get involved in non-profit work, or pick up that pro bono project that will enable you to help a cause you care about and hone a new skill. Articles, presentations and increased engagement in non-profit work are ways to help others while maximizing your exposure and developing or growing an area of expertise.

Be respectful and take charge

Your organizational skills should not only help you apply internal discipline, they should also help you in your interactions with others. When you secure a networking meeting or call, be respectful of your colleagues' and clients' time. Plan, in advance, an agenda of items to cover while being respectful and ready to defer to your audience's preferences. Also, pay close attention to time. Pace the meeting so the most critical topics are prioritized early and the time allocated for each topic appropriately reflects the relative importance of the topic. Try to end the meeting in advance of the time allotted.

Invest in yourself

Develop or reinvigorate your online presence

One of the key advantages of an online presence is your potential reach and impact. Given the lack of in-person interaction, an online presence is more important than ever. So, now's the time to be sure your bio on your employer's website is current and the social media platform bios where you engage are current too. As a minimum, you should have a LinkedIn profile that is current and consider ways you can contribute to the online dialogue and conversation. If this is new to you, observe others' conduct online and adapt the parts you like to your style. You can start small by liking and commenting on others' posts and then share articles, sources, updates, recognitions, or events that you find helpful.

Up your game

Another way to be an effective networker is to always be bettering yourself. Particularly when times are uncertain, it is good to identify gaps in your expertise or skills and develop them. Focus on how you can increase your job security and bring more value to colleagues and clients. Be indispensable, volunteer, and be prepared. Contribute to the conversation. If obtaining new training or certifications or substantive knowledge will improve the contributions you can make, seek out new learnings and enroll. In addition to substantive training, you may want to pursue training on management and leadership skills as well as other areas of personal development.

Relish the clarity of learning what and who is important

For some, working remotely has cut out a lot of the excess in their life and streamlined what and who is important. This can be a helpful refresher and a way to refocus your networking efforts and energy to the people

and things that matter most. Use the moment of clarity to re-evaluate and refresh your approach.

Be deliberate

Self-advocate⁴

To be an effective networker, you need to inspire confidence and be great at what you do. Part of networking entails getting others to vouch for you. Your contacts who are recipients of your asks need to be confident that you will deliver and you are worthy of their backing. This involves effective self-advocacy that may come in different forms. It may involve taking credit where credit is due. One way is to be factual and informative to show how your knowledge, contribution, and experience may benefit a colleague or client. It may also involve aligning your self-promotion with that of your organization or a compelling cause. Once again, you want to be able to demonstrate how you can bring a benefit not only to yourself but also to your organization and causes bigger than yourself.

Be strategic in your networking

Many make the mistake of being unfocused in their networking efforts. Networking requires a systematic approach, just like anything else that is important. In the Strategic Networking chapter I wrote for ARK in 2018,⁵ I talked about the need to make your LinkedIn profile current, organize your contacts, make deliberate, personal, and tailored outreach and set targeted goals for the times and types of outreach. This type of strategic approach is even more important in a virtual environment where your networking efforts will not be reinforced by in-person touch points.

Develop and invest in sponsorship relationships

Sponsors are power brokers who use their influence to back high potential proteges to advance their careers.⁶ At a time where in-person contact is limited, it's essential to have people of influence keeping you top of mind and advocating for you. To shore up these strategic alliances, keep in touch with your sponsors and deliver value to them based on their current needs. Also, be courageous in seeking feedback from your sponsors, asking how you can be more effective in supporting them and your organization. If you don't have a sponsor, identify potential sponsors and see how you can deliver value to them that is unique and indispensable.

Be creative

Do something that is not a compromised version of what you used to do

A lot of people feel frustrated that their work in the pandemic is merely a diminished version of what they would have done pre-pandemic. For example, an in-person presentation in a resort with lots of in-person networking is reduced to a Zoom webinar. Instead, think of work and circumstances that are not compromised by remote work. For example, if you decided to launch a podcast, the medium is audio so hosting a podcast would essentially be the same, regardless of whether you work in a virtual environment. The other frequent complaint I'm hearing from employees is boredom from the monotony of our work communications. Think of ways that you can bolster your work contributions that do not feel constrained or limited by the current circumstances and bring more variety to your interactions.

Use being at home as a way to build trust

Many focus on the negative influence on colleague and client relationships due to remote work because of the lack of ability to connect in-person. But, what about focusing on the benefits of being inside colleagues' and clients' homes to provide more insights into who they are as a way to build trust? Some fun networking activities that people have shared with me that they are doing with colleagues and clients that they would have been less inclined to consider or had less time for when they worked in a traditional office include:

- Virtual walk and talks;
- Cooking and recipe swaps;
- Wine clubs;
- Book clubs;
- Collective exercise, yoga and meditation;
- Movie and TV series clubs;
- Foreign language pen pals and conversational partners;
- Games, contests, challenges and karaoke nights;
- Bridge, Mahjong, Canasta; poker and other card clubs;
- Needlepoint, knitting, crochet, cross stitch and patchwork groups;
- Jamming, bands, orchestras, choral and instrumental groups;
- Community organizing and volunteering groups;

- Gardening and flower arranging clubs;
- Painting and crafts collaborations;
- Pets and animal care groups;
- Literary and journaling clubs; and
- Self-care groups – facials, massages, pedicures, manicures.

Establish new rituals

Some report feeling even more connected as a result of working remotely because they are making greater efforts to be in touch and they have established new rituals to reinforce their efforts. For far-flung relationships, improved technology has brought some people closer because it's often just as easy to reach someone across the world (other than juggling time zones) as it is to connect with someone in the same city. For some, changed work circumstances have been an invitation to try out new routines and pursue new interests and hobbies as well as pilot new ways of work. Embrace the rituals that have created more meaning for you and engagement with others and commit to keeping up those new routines.

Reinvent and reengage

The recommendations shared in this chapter are meant to inspire you to rethink how you are networking and engaging with your colleagues and clients. Now, more than ever, networking is essential to strengthen your alliances with colleagues, grow your client base, develop new relationships, find a new job, and/or build your personal brand. If you welcome the changes that surround us and embrace the new networking opportunities that present, you will be able to bring great value to others as well as yourself.

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