

# Network With Purpose and Enjoy Better Results

By Angela Kubisky

As an A/E/C professional, being self-aware and open to professional development and personal growth reaps rewards. One of the ways I invest in my professional development is by taking the time to network and nurture relationships. I value learning from others, and especially value helping others. That said, networking is something I do very deliberately.

Networking can open doors while providing value to other people, organizations, and movements. But what if your networking efforts aren't getting results? Could it be time to rethink how you network? When you work on developing your networking skills, you can enjoy better results.

Navigation apps like Waze and Google Maps get us to our destination. Perhaps these four Rs of networking (see the sidebar for a handy acronym) can help you navigate through the networking peaks and valleys to an ideal destination of a robust network that's invested in your success.

## The Four Rs of Networking

**Rapport.** When meeting someone for the first time, we want to make a favorable impression. It's important to create a compelling and memorable introduction, delivering it with enthusiasm and confidence. I budget time before a networking opportunity to think about what I'm going to say and how I'll respond to the typical question, "What do you do?" By preparing in advance, I can offer a

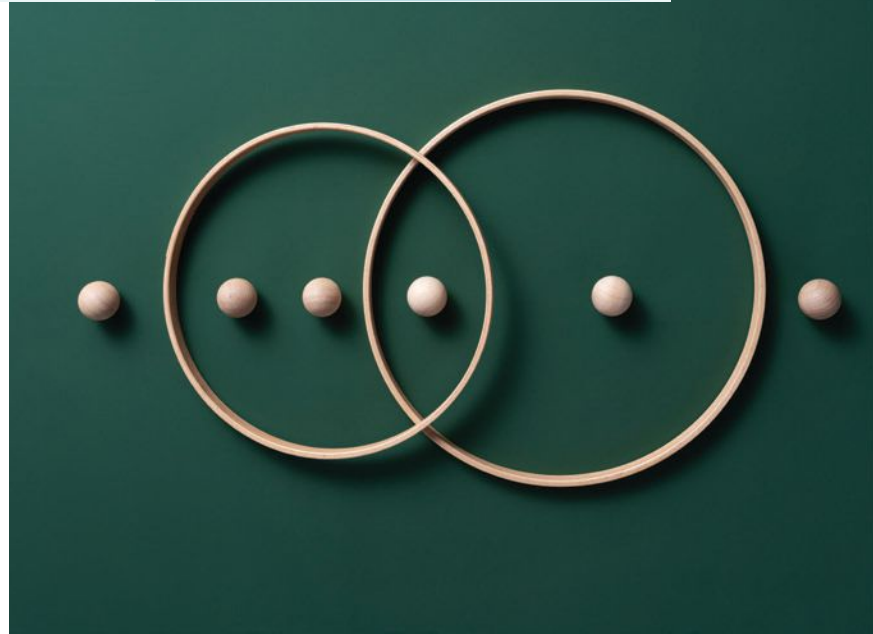
deliberate response that's interesting and engaging. Take time to think it through, practice it on a friend, and ask for feedback.

You've heard the saying "There's nothing small about small talk." This is especially true while we're working on building rapport. Your interest and genuine intent could help transition this small talk into the foundation that can help build a valuable relationship.

**Research.** I like to know what I'm walking into, so I'll also take time before a networking opportunity to do a little research on the attendees by Googling names and companies, reading relevant websites, and perusing LinkedIn profiles.

This activity can help instill confidence and limit nervousness about meeting strangers. When we prepare questions and show we're interested, the conversation flows more easily. Preparation meets opportunity and shows we take relationship-building seriously and enjoy learning about others. To be intentional about adding value, we need to invest time to figure out what's important to the people we meet.

**Relationship.** We all know that strong relationships are give and take. I've found the best strategy for building trust over time is to continuously look for ways to add value for the other person. Think of the people you know who only call when they need something. They have a way of draining our energy and sometimes our resources. Our trusted network needs to be protected. When we check in with people and focus on listening, we discover





opportunities to support them. When we support people, they remember us and, when we call them, we can typically count on their support in return. Never minimize the value of a quality relationship when we're fortunate enough to connect with someone we admire and respect.

Networking events can be information overload. Instead of relying on my memory, if a connection mentions something that's clearly important to them, I'll jot down some notes afterward. If someone shares they're going to a conference, I'll enter a reminder in my calendar to follow up to see how it went. Asking about their favorite session/speaker can often lead to deeper conversations. These types of follow-up actions do not go unnoticed. Act deliberately, get it done, and stand out to build a stronger network.

**Reward.** The reward comes when we pay attention to the other Rs. They remind us to network with purpose, which in turn builds mutually beneficial relationships. These rewarding relationships will reap benefits.

When we take time to invest in others, we're ultimately investing in ourselves, because the investment often converts into meaningful relationships. When we add value for someone, it helps build trust. The day will come when we need support. When we have a robust network to count on, that support is easier to obtain. ■

## N.E.T.W.O.R.K.I.N.G

This acronym for the word networking can help keep these points in mind as you work to build your network. Keep it close at hand to remind yourself that networking isn't about you. It's about how you can help, serve, and support the people you're meeting.

- N**ever about you
- E**veryone is important
- T**akes time
- W**ork on your introduction
- O**pportunity to pay it forward
- R**emember important points about them
- K**eep in touch
- I**mprove your listening skills
- N**avigate different forums
- G**o the extra mile



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