

ER | ELENA RAILEANU
CAREER COACHING

a guide to

NETWORKING IS NOT AN EVENT. IT'S A LIFESTYLE.

How to build relationships that lead you to your next job,
without feeling fake, awkward, or pushy.

Most job seekers treat networking like a chore: go to an event, collect business cards, send a few LinkedIn requests, and hope something happens. Then nothing does, and they decide networking "doesn't work" for them.

After 15 years in HR and recruiting, and a career before that as a journalist, I've watched how jobs actually get filled. The best roles rarely go to the person who sent the most applications. They go to the person someone already remembered, trusted, and wanted to help. This guide, adapted from a workshop I teach at Northeastern University, shows you how to become that person.

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1. What networking really is

Here's my definition: **networking is leaving a long-lasting, positive impression that leads, by an indirect path, to your goals.**

Notice the word *indirect*. The person you meet at a friend's barbecue probably can't hire you. But their sister runs the team you've been trying to get into, and six months later your name comes up. That's how it works almost every time.

Networking is not your follower count, your number of LinkedIn connections, or how many people liked your post. Those are numbers. A network is people who would actually do something for you.

> THE 3 A.M. TEST
>
> *"I'm in trouble. I can't tell you what I did. Trust me and come get me."*
>
> How many people would get out of bed for that call? That's the size of your real network. The goal isn't more contacts. It's more people who'd pick up the phone.

Successful people aren't always the smartest or the most educated. They're the people with the most genuine relationships. And every one of those relationships started with a stranger.

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2. How you want to be remembered

When I ask a room how they want people to remember them after a first conversation, the answers are always similar. We want to feel **seen**, **understood**, and **interesting**. We want to feel that **our goals matter** and **our dreams are real**.

Here's the twist: those words aren't a description of you. They're a description of how you should make *the other person* feel. People forget what you said. They remember how talking to you made them feel about themselves.

Think of a first conversation like a first date. You don't tell your whole life story. You create enough of a connection that they want a second one.

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3. The three hats: journalist, therapist, giver

Hat 1: The journalist

As a journalist, I couldn't walk away when an interview subject seemed boring. I had to dig until I found the story. Everyone has one. Your job is to find the thread and pull it.

Instead of "How are you?" or "What do you do?", try questions that invite a real answer:

- Working on anything exciting lately?
- What was the highlight of your week?
- What personal project are you working on right now?
- What's your story? How did you end up doing what you do?

Questions adapted from Vanessa Van Edwards, Science of People.

Hat 2: The therapist

Someone tells you, "I just got laid off after six years." The natural reflex is to match it: "Me too! My company just closed." Don't. Your story can wait. A therapist doesn't tell you about their bad week. This is their session.

Instead, ask: **"Do you want to talk about it?"** Then gently look for the sunshine: what they're hoping for next, what they're proud of, what they'd love to do. People who feel heard remember who listened.

Hat 3: The giver

The third hat matters most, and it gets its own section below. In short: the people who go furthest are the ones who help others get there too.

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4. Three types of job seekers

Over years of coaching, I started tracking everyone I helped reach their goals. They fell into three groups.

Secret keepers

FAST, OFTEN THE WRONG DIRECTION, RARELY LASTS

They tell no one they're looking. They send 200 applications into the void, accept the first offer, and often land in the wrong role. Nobody warned them about the manager, the culture, or the pay band.

Sharers

SLOWER, THE RIGHT DIRECTION, IT LASTS

They tell their mentor and their network what they want. They hear which companies are good, what to ask for, and who to talk to. It takes longer, but they land on solid ground.

Givers

SLOW AT FIRST, THEN THEY KEEP GROWING

They show up for other people: they pass along job postings, make introductions, and celebrate others' wins. Years later, opportunities find them through referrals they never asked for.

In year one, the secret keeper looks like the winner. By year five, the giver is so far ahead it isn't close. Networking is a long game.

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5. Why givers win, and how not to burn out

Organizational psychologist Adam Grant studied this in his book *Give and Take*. He describes three styles: **takers**, who try to get more than they give; **matchers**, who keep score and trade favor for favor; and **givers**, who help without expecting anything back.

His most surprising finding: givers show up at *both* the bottom and the top of the success ladder. Matchers and takers land in the middle. So giving alone isn't the secret. *How* you give is.

Be otherish, not selfless

The givers at the bottom are selfless. They say yes to everything until they burn out. The givers at the top are what Grant calls "otherish": they care about other people *and* their own goals.

Self-sacrificing giver	Strategic giver
Says yes to everything	**Chooses where to help**
Gives time endlessly	**Gives leverage: advice, introductions**
Helps reactively	**Helps intentionally**
Finishes others' work first	**Delivers their own results first**
Never asks for help	**Asks wisely**
Burns out	**Builds influence**

The five-minute favor

Giving doesn't have to cost you much. The best favors are small, fast, and nearly free:

- Forward a job posting to someone it fits.
- Write a short LinkedIn recommendation for a former colleague.
- Introduce two people who should know each other.
- Leave a thoughtful comment on someone's post about their new role or project.

Your industry is smaller than you think

Most people are matchers, and matchers punish takers by telling others. Take credit for someone's work, burn a bridge on the way out, or trash a former employer, and word travels, often straight to the hiring manager doing an informal reference check. Give freely, but it's fine to stop giving to people who only take.

> If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.

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6. Stop judging people in five seconds

Why don't we wear these hats more often? Partly because we're trained for instant gratification. A ride arrives in minutes, an AI answers in seconds, a package shows up in two days. So when a new person doesn't entertain us right away, we decide they're boring and move on.

Malcolm Gladwell calls our habit of drawing big conclusions from a tiny slice of information "thin-slicing." Within seconds of meeting someone, we've guessed their job, their strengths, their family, their politics, and whether we'll like them. We're wrong more often than we think. People also present themselves selectively, especially when they're trying to impress, so first impressions are doubly unreliable.

Don't believe everything you think. Quiet the judgment and let people tell their story their own way.

> A STORY I TELL IN EVERY WORKSHOP
>
> You meet someone who is your total opposite. She's loud, you're quiet. She brags, you're humble. You decide there's nothing to talk about and drift away.
>
> What you don't know: she's close friends with the hiring manager at the company you've been trying to get into for a year. She liked you, and she was about to offer an introduction.

7. Where to network, and what to remember

Say yes

Say yes to invitations more often than no, unless they're truly unreasonable. If the event turns out half-empty and it's pouring rain, make the best of it: talk to everyone who did show up, take a good photo, and tag the organizers. They'll remember you.

Anywhere there are people

The best place to network isn't a networking event. It's the coffee line, the gym, your kid's soccer game, a wedding, a book club, the airport gate, a neighbor's barbecue, a dance class. Even a date is a networking event: maybe not a love match, but they might know your next manager. Every one of these is a chance to put on the journalist hat.

Host your own gathering

You don't need to be the expert to bring people together. Invite a few people to a breakfast or a casual evening: friends, former colleagues, someone you met once at an event. Give each person 15 minutes to talk about anything they love, from travel to investing to their dog. You just host, introduce, and follow up. Everyone remembers who brought them together, and your network grows every time.

Five things to remember about them

1. Their correct name
2. How to connect with them online
3. Where you met
4. Something important to them
5. Anything you agreed on ("Let's grab coffee next month")

Five things they should remember about you

1. Your correct name and spelling
2. What you do, or the role you're looking for
3. That you're nice to talk to
4. That you're nice to talk to
5. That you're nice to talk to

Yes, three of the five are the same. That's the point.

8. The follow-up that gets answered

The follow-up is where most networking dies. Compare these two messages:

THE TAKER

"Hey, remember me? Can you refer me for the open role at your company?"

THE GIVER

"Hi! We met at Dana's birthday. You mentioned your team is growing. My former colleague is a great project manager and is open to new roles. I'd love to connect you two if it's helpful."

The second message asks for nothing, offers something useful, and proves you listened. That's already the behavior of a giver, and it's exactly the kind of person people want to help when you *do* ask.

9. Your public human

Before a recruiter ever meets you, they've likely met the version of you that lives online. What you post, what you comment on, and what you're tagged in add up to your public human. Ask yourself: would you hire that person?

One well-known example: a student announced her new NASA internship on social media, then swore at a stranger who commented on her language. The stranger replied that he sat on the National Space Council, which oversees NASA. You never know who's reading.

The billboard test

Before you post, text, or comment, picture it on a billboard in Times Square with your name on it. A "quick, harmless" text venting about your boss or a difficult client can be screenshotted and shared in seconds. If you wouldn't want it on a billboard, don't send it.

Who gets your frustrations?

Only three people need to hear your biggest frustrations about work: your therapist, your therapist, and your therapist. Publicly complaining about a former employer tells every future employer what you'll say about them.

10. Your one-week action plan

1. **Run the 3 a.m. test.** Write down the people who'd actually show up for you. Reach out to two of them this week, just to reconnect.
2. **Tell three people what you're looking for.** Be specific about the role and the kind of company. Become a sharer, not a secret keeper.
3. **Do two five-minute favors.** Forward a posting, make an introduction, or write a recommendation.
4. **Say yes to one invitation** you'd normally skip, and wear the journalist hat there.
5. **Send one giver-style follow-up** to someone you met recently.
6. **Clean up your public human.** Read your last month of posts and comments as if you were the hiring manager.

ready for your next step?

LET'S WORK TOGETHER

Book a strategy call with Elena

One-on-one help with your interviews, resume, salary negotiation, or next career move.

Book your strategy call

Sign up for the next networking session

Two hours, live, with a small group. Practice real conversations and leave with scripts you can use the next day.

Save your seat

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