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Invest in You Through Networking

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“The connections between and among women are the most feared, the most problematic, and the most potentially transforming force on the planet.”

-Adrienne Rich, award winning poet, 1929-2012

The differences that exist between women and men as they navigate and experience their careers are a common topic. In our [Engage Insights article series](#), we have previously discussed disparities between women and men as it pertains to mentoring, compensation and achieving C-suite status. Now, we believe it is time to talk about the networking gap. Networking is viewed as a vital element for business success; however, it can be challenging for many women. In this article, we will walk through some of the networking challenges women face, the impact of networking on career success, tips for improving networking confidence, and strengthening your network.

Women Can Face Unique Challenges When it Comes to Networking

- A 2018 study published in the journal Human Relations, discussed that self-imposed barriers can prevent women from networking as effectively as men.

Some of these barriers include hesitation and modesty. Further, the study notes that women's concerns around 'exploiting' social ties are worsened by their tendency to underestimate and play down their self-worth. These leanings run counter to the idea of networking which is synonymous with self-promotion.ⁱ However, highlighting one's skills and abilities often opens the door to new perspectives and partnerships that are mutually beneficial.

- In a 2020 Women's Leadership Summit Report, KPMG found that approximately 75% of female executives have personally experienced Imposter Syndrome at certain points in their career. Imposter syndrome is defined as a persistent inability to believe that one's success is deserved or has been legitimately achieved as a result of one's own efforts or skills. These feelings of self-doubt can be exacerbated as women climb the corporate ladder and don't know women in similar positions.ⁱⁱ The poet Robert Frost once wrote: "Being the boss anywhere is lonely. Being a female boss in a world of mostly men is especially so."
- In industries where men still hold a majority, women may feel excluded from networking opportunities such as golf or other sporting events. However, making meaningful connections is about strengthening relationships, sharing ideas, and growth- both professional and personal. That can happen in plenty of different settings! Grabbing lunch or coffee is a great way to meet during traditional business hours, but thinking outside of the corporate box provides even more opportunities. Organizing a volunteer event for a local charity, joining a local service organization, or staying in touch with your alumni association or former colleagues are just a few examples.

Three Simple Ways to Improve Your Networking Confidence

- Each of us knows at least one woman whose networking prowess we have admired. Ask her for advice!
- If networking does not come naturally, invite a friend to attend a networking event with you. Having that support will make you more likely to engage in conversations.
- Be an active listener! Practicing active listening not only shows authenticity, but it also enables you to read and anticipate situations.

Prioritize Strengthening Your Network

For avid social media users, the quantity of one’s connections seems to outrank quality. However, when it comes to networking the opposite is true. Large numbers of superficial connections may feel great, but the likelihood of developing and maintaining real relationships with each of them is low. Developing deeper relationships often means encouraging, coaching, and challenging one another, and that means connecting on multiple levels. What great news for women! Cathy Goddard of Lighthouse Visionary Strategies believes that women are “wired to connect” and often do so through family, common workplace challenges, celebrating success, and even mentoring other women. Build your network with people who will answer when you reach out to them. A strong network is best built on the depth of [meaningful](#) relationships. ⁱⁱⁱ

Networking Can Lead to Greater Success for Employees and Their Employers

Having a professional network increases the opportunities for each of us to expand our personal skill levels, boost our self-confidence, and increase our level of visibility within our organizations; all of which can lead to accelerated advancement. In addition to being beneficial to individual employees, studies have shown that when companies offer opportunities for networking within their organizations, job satisfaction and engagement levels improve. Further, the likelihood of turnover is reduced. Regardless of whether or not you find the idea of networking appealing, research has shown that it is beneficial for both personal and professional development. So, leap and the net(work) will appear!

About ENGAGE

RiverFront founded Engage in 2019 with the goal of changing and improving the experience for women in financial services. The mission of Engage is to engage women in our Industry through mentorship, education, and support.

[View our full library of Engage articles here.](#)

Sources:

ⁱ <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/11/181115104647.htm>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kathycaprino/2020/10/22/impostor-syndrome-prevalence-in-professional-women-face-and-how-to-overcome-it/?sh=2ea0069773cb>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://smallbusinessbc.ca/article/how-women-network-differently-men/>

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