

Look up and Beyond 14" and Find a Double Minus 7

Executive summary. Networking is more than just a nice thing to do, it's a necessity to grow and heighten your own career, plus better your company. There's a million ways to do it, and you do not have to be an extrovert to do it well. But you really should make it a priority.



We're a social creature. Just like whales and dolphins, humans need social interaction. That makes up the fabric of our existence. It's how we further our lives and make it to the next day – a lot of our success is ultimately due to others' helping us.

So, if you have any interest in growing your career or building your company, go seek other people. Knowing people equates to more opportunities.

Where can I network? At a professional event, at a bar, at the barber shop, in a meeting, through a relationship your parents have, through a relationship your kids have, at the zoo, on a bus, in Row 20 of this flight I'm currently on, in a shared ride situation – this list is endless.

How do I network? It starts with looking beyond your cell phone currently being held 14" from your face. When you peel yourself away from your device, here's a good start: "Hi, I'm Scott." Here's the tricky part though, you would insert your own name where I have "Scott." Continue with what you do, maybe it's "I work for Kids Rock Construction, LLC and we build playgrounds. We specialize in the procurement of all sorts of kids play equipment like swings, slides, and jump nets. We also do special ground coverings like recycled rubber in all sorts of colors and designs. We do consultation and construction." This is good at a professional event, but if you're on the subway, bus, or in a shared ride you could try "Hi, I'm Scott, what do you do?" The goal is simply to start a conversation. And sometime in this conversation, make sure to trade contact information in whatever manner fits the situation. Again, and it's worth repeating, share contact information. Did I mention to get the other person's contact info?

It is nice to attend events in which there are similar-minded people. So, joining a professional society helps too.

When in my career should I start? I'm only 23. Today. And if you are this age, venture out and seek someone older because, ultimately, they're making the decisions. If you're in your 20s, maybe early 30s, consider double minus 7. So, if you're 28 years old, go find the 49 year old. They feel like they were your age "yesterday" and will be delighted that you said hello. They may even open a door for you (like a project to bring to your boss, or maybe even future employment!) – that's the goal.

My story. I didn't choose this topic – it was suggested to me (at a social event I was at!). Did you catch that? I was social with this person over the years (met him through an engineering society) and he invited me to his Christmas party because we developed a business relationship. This party was great (not only because it was a lot of fun), but it also allowed me to meet even more people in my industry.

Here's another anecdote. I live in Hawaii which means that there's a lot of flying between the islands for business (when I was in Austin, Texas we would fly to Houston and Dallas). You may be thinking the place with all the luggage and planes is an airport, but this is only partially true. This is actually a networking bonanza! Lots of business in Hawaii, especially construction, is done on airplanes.



I got a parking lot pavement job for a major hotel because I drummed up a conversation with the hotel's controller when I was flying to the island of Kauai.

Another one to share is my current project portfolio. My firm is a joint venture partner with a larger firm whose Chief Executive Officer I met 25 years prior at an engineering event. He and I were in our early 30s learning the business at that time. Now, we're both executives making major decisions in the engineering and construction community. The point here for the 20-somethings reading this article is that you and your current happy hour buddy, "Blackout" Barry the 24-year old, may be running the big construction and engineering companies in town in a couple decades. Get out there and make friends and meet colleagues!*

Oh, and bonus section here. The opening line to make new connections isn't "I read this article and it told me to find someone double minus 7 and you look about that old."

Work safe!