Episode 23: How to Make Networking Work for You

Welcome to In the Right Direction podcast, where we believe you get to choose what's on your plate, you can manage the overwhelm, and that change is possible. I'm your host, Deb Elbaum and I'm here to share insights and strategies to increase your happiness, one baby step at a time. Let's dive in.

Hi everyone, it's Deb. Let's start with 2 questions today. First, on a scale of 1-10, how important do you think networking is? Second, on a scale of 1-10, how much do you enjoy networking?

If your second number is lower than the first number or lower than you'd like it to be, listen up because today's podcast is all about building your confidence and enthusiasm for networking. Today, we'll prepare you for networking conversations so that they are easier, more productive, and ultimately benefit you more.

I hope that we can all agree that networking is important, whether or not we enjoy it. Research has shown that in the US, most people get their jobs from someone they know. Maybe you've heard the old saying that people do business with people they know. And to a great extent, that's true.

Personally, I tell people that I have the career I have because of networking. I'll share that story toward the end of the podcast.

Networking can help us personally and professionally, and so it's important to be intentional and consistent around growing yours. And to do this, you need confidence and a clear approach.

Before we explain how to do that successfully, let's clarify what it is. Networking simply means building relationships. Networking conversations involve sharing ideas and asking questions. It's a way for people to meet and learn about you, what you're up to and what you care about, and for you to meet and learn about them. It's a way to practice your elevator pitch, expand your thinking, and find ways to potentially help someone else.

Networking is something we can and should be doing all the time, whether we're happy in our current job or not. You can and should be building your network in lots of ways – both internally at your organization as well as externally with people in your field or fields that you're interested in.

And yet, even though most people know that networking is valuable, it often causes anxiety or even dread. When I ask clients what makes them most anxious and networking avoidant, here are the top 3 reasons they share. See if you can relate. 1. If I reach out to someone, it feels like I'm bothering them. 2. I'm not clear what I'm asking for. And 3, I don't have time. Do these sound familiar?

Let's tackle each of these networking derailers so that you're confident about reaching out to someone, you're clear about what you ask, and you have a plan to make networking fit in your life.

Let's start with derailer #1: Asking for a conversation feels like I'm bothering someone, and I don't want to bother anyone. I think that the root of this derailer is a lack of confidence. Because if we're going to reach out and ask for someone's time, we have to believe that we matter and that we're worthy.

Here's what I say to my clients: We are all adults here. You get to ask, and they can say yes or no. Please don't make assumptions about what other people want or don't want. Let them answer for themselves.

Please also keep in mind that most people really do want to be helpful. It feels good to help someone else, and I believe that if someone is able to give you some of their time and brain space, they're happy to.

So please reframe this unhelpful perspective that you're a bother. Instead, remind yourself that you matter, that you get to ask, and that it might make someone's day to connect with you.

Now that you're feeling more confident about making the ask, it's time to address derailer #2: I can't ask anyone for a networking conversation because I don't know what I'm asking for.

Derailer #2, that I can't ask because I don't know what I'm asking for, is all about clarity. It's about getting clear on your goals for a conversation, what information you want to share, what questions you want to ask, and what a successful conversation would look like. I agree that other people's time is valuable, which is why getting clear on your goals for the conversation is critical. It shows that you respect someone's time and that you've done your preparation.

How do you get clarity? Easy. You take time before the conversation to ask yourself some key questions. First, think about the information you want to share. I suggest you keep this concise. If you're looking for a new job, keep the story about why you're looking short and sweet. Because we all have a tendency to talk a lot, especially about ourselves, and this is one instance in which you'll need to monitor yourself.

After you decide the main points that you want the other person to know, then take some time to think about your ask. There are so many questions you can ask. You could ask about someone's career journey; you could ask about their organization; you could ask about their network and whom they might be able to connect you with; you could ask them to listen to and make suggestions around your elevator pitch. There are many directions you can take a networking conversation, and by thinking ahead of time about your key questions, it will make it more likely that you'll actually get to them. After all, 30 minutes can go by very quickly.

This brings us to derailer #3. Time. We are so busy in our day to day lives that, especially if we're not looking for a new role, networking falls to the bottom of our to-do list.

Here's where I invite you to remember about baby steps and how small successes count.

I encourage you to set a networking goal that feels do-able for you. If you can schedule one networking a call a month, great! Even if it's once a quarter, completely fine. The important thing is to be consistent and follow through. And don't forget to network internally at your organization. If you have a chance to work with someone new in your organization, take this opportunity to have a more personal conversation, so that you feel like you've gotten to know them beyond their work role. Even better, be brave and reach out to someone at work you've not yet met and ask for a get-to-know-you conversation. Chances are they'll be glad you took the initiative.

OK, so I promised to share the networking story that helped me become who I am today. Before I became a coach, in my last career, I had a medical writing business. While this was fine, it was not fulfilling and I was ready for a more purposeful career. Now, during this time, my mother was working with someone named Josh, and Josh's wife Judy had a coaching business. My mom suggested that I have

a conversation with Judy. I emailed Judy, asking if I could have talk with her to learn about coaching, and she responded graciously and invited me over. My goal for that conversation was to learn all I could about coaching, coach training, and her business. Judy was generous with her time and thoughts, and at the end of the meeting, she suggested that I sign up for CTI – Coaches Training Institute. She said I would love it. And she was right! I credit Judy, as well as my mom, as a huge reason I'm doing what I'm doing today, and it all started from that one networking conversation.

So let's bring this to you. In the next few weeks, please make time for networking. I invite you to think of 1 or 2 people you really want to connect with, and reach out to them. Remember to stay in the mindset that you get to ask and they can say yes or no. Then, be sure to clarify your goals for the conversation, so that you discuss what's most important to you. And please be on the lookout as to how you can help them, too.

Thank you so much for listening and for being part of my community. If you found today's podcast helpful, please share it with a friend. And be sure to reach out if I can help you build your networking confidence or plan. You can find me through my website debelbaum.com or by emailing me at deb@debelbaum.com. I'm here to help you feel empowered, confident, and happier.

Until next time!