

# When You Are Not Working You Should Be Networking!

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Active networking can help one to thrive in both business and personal relationships!



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by Rahul Gupta

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Social media has taken the world by storm. As per socialmediatoday.com the average daily time spent by an individual on YouTube is 40 minutes, Facebook is 35 minutes, Snapchat is 25 minutes and Instagram is 15 minutes. They do not mention about WhatsApp where Indians typically spend a lot of time. Another interesting infographics compares the total social media time vs. other daily activities. It is important to note that total time spent on social media is 5X the total time spent on socializing.

The above stats give a totally new dimension to networking. As per Investopedia, "Networking is a process that fosters the exchange of information and ideas among individuals or groups that share a common interest. It may be for social or business purposes". While few years ago, networking used to be a totally offline activity, today the definition of networking has completely changed. It is no longer an act of meeting someone in-person or staying in touch over a phone call. Though the importance of in-person meetings cannot be ignored, today one can be connected with both personal and professional contacts through various online platforms like Facebook and LinkedIn.

It is important that one use the various modes of networking judiciously and utilize such platforms to create strong relationships.

## Active vs. Passive Networking

Not everyone is using networking opportunities creatively. A lot of people spend time on the platforms and watch updates from others. Time and again they update their status, pictures or like someone's posts. Nothing happens beyond that. I call this kind of networking as Passive Networking, where you are present yet there is no active conversation happening. While Passive Networking helps you unwind and relax it does not yield any engagement with your network. It is momentary and does not help you make a connection with your network members.

On the professional side, most corporations today understand that social media is part of an associate's life. Companies also provide corporate networking platforms with the hope that such investment will provide a platform for active conversation by associates. Active conversations on corporate platforms help companies to get vibes from all levels of the organization on what everyone is thinking about company policies, benefits offered or other relevant topics.

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There are few things one can do to improve their presence and grow their network.

**Balance Online Vs. Offline:** The stats clearly show that the time spent on Online platforms is five times more. This calls for some balancing between in-person networking vs. online networking. Based on priorities or otherwise, make a list of individuals to meet. Also, based on your comfort level, either call the person asking for an appointment to meet or send them a message expressing your interest to catch up. Given everyone value their time, it is important to highlight the reason for meeting and give some heads up on what you would like to discuss. Follow-up few times if you do not hear back. If you are trying to meet someone after a long break, it does take some time to break the ice.

**Invest in the Platform:** Often in professional networking platforms, we start becoming active when we are seeking help on getting a job, funding, partnership opportunities etc. Remember that time spent on such platform is an investment and like real financial investments, your investment of time and effort will bear fruit only over a period of time. Often approaching someone suddenly for job or other such help is not taken in a positive way. One needs to build relationship over a period of time and any help needed should be more as a natural extension of that relationship.

**Seek and Offer Mentorship:** While mostly we like to connect with people who are influential, it is equally important to build relationship with people who can be part of your team in future. Hence, one should never shy away from spending time with individuals who are seeking mentorship inputs from you. Often we ignore messages or requests from people who want to network because they require some guidance. The same can happen with you when you are the seeker. Hence, one should be mentally prepared to spend time on mentoring others.

**Have a Point of View:** Contributing to ongoing conversations often helps you get eyeballs. Hence, one should be responsible in making relevant and valid points in group discussions. It is safe to stay away from making comments which are loosely worded. If you are passionate about the topic of discussion, then you should vigorously add your point of view to make the discussion interesting and thought provoking.

**Show Empathy:** The most important factor when connecting with someone is to show empathy. Empathy helps the other person realize that you understand their view point and appreciate it. One can be very intelligent and can carry tremendous knowledge but without empathy the value of the person may be hardly anything. Hence, being sensitive is the key.

Simon Sinek, author of the bestseller "Start With Why" takes the definition of networking to the next level in his quote "The value of networking is not measured by the number of people we meet but by the number of people we introduce to others".

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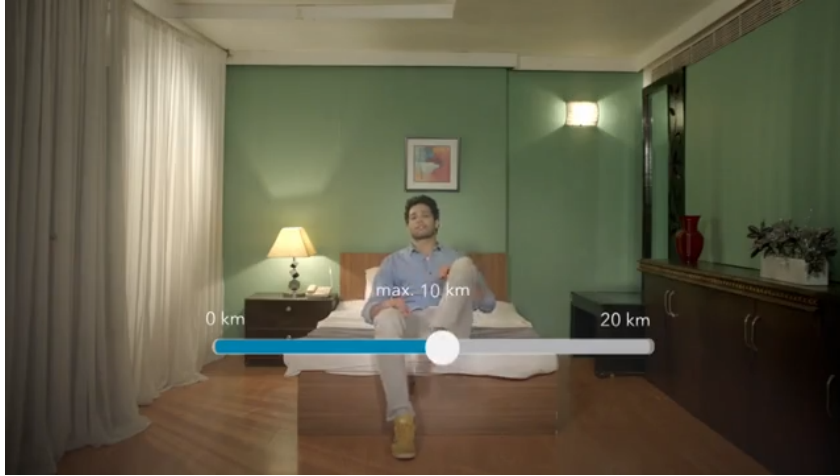
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Rahul Gupta

Rahul is passionate about Strategy and Change Management. He has around 15 years of experience in Management Consulting, Business Transformation and driving Strategy and M&A across multiple industries, business domains, technologies & geographies. Rahul holds an MBA from XLRI and is a Gold Medalist in Engineering from Jadavpur University

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