

Networking

Level of difficulty: ●●○

Before you read

Why do people 'network'? Do you think networking is useful? Why (not)?

Reading

Read this article from the *Financial Times* and answer the questions.

I refuse to hobnob for advantage

by Lucy Kellaway

- 1 At some point on Tuesday, 1,000 of the world's leading businessmen will get on aircraft and hurtle across the sky to Davos to attend the World Economic Forum. In their briefcases they will have a fat stack of business cards and a collection of glossy invitations. Every hour of the day for five days there will be a different social engagement to key into their personal digital assistants.
- 2 On Tuesday, I will be on the 8.38 a.m. to Moorgate Station as usual. I am not going to Davos this year. I did not go last year, either. In fact, I have never been. 'Never been to Davos?' people say, eyes wide with amazement. 'You must go. You'd love it. You'd get to meet so many people.' I always nod, but actually the prospect of the biggest networkathon in the world appeals to me even less than the prospect of going skiing – which appeals not at all. Having to make conversation with strangers while squinting at their name tags and trying to work out if you should have heard of them is a wretched way to spend an evening; doing it for days on end must be pure torture.
- 3 The whole networking process defeats me, in particular the business cards. I keep my own at the bottom of my handbag, and they are usually a bit grubby on the rare occasions I am required to produce one. Other people's cards go back into my bag, and get fished out whenever I spring clean it. They then sit on my desk for a while before eventually going into the bin.
- 4 Networking may not be all it is cracked up to be. Last week, I had lunch with a man who was a famous UK entrepreneur in the 1980s and now has many fingers in many pies. The previous night he had been invited to a drinks party in a grand London hotel. The great and the good of British industry were there, along with all the biggest brokers, lawyers and accountants touting for business and laughing just a touch too loudly.
- 5 He checked in his briefcase and went into the heaving ballroom, smiling and catching the eyes of the people he knew. Suddenly he felt tired by the whole thing. He did not see the point of being there. So he collected his briefcase, regretting the £2 he had paid to the cloakroom attendant for five minutes' custody, and went home to watch the cricket on television.
- 6 It had taken him 60-plus years to realise that networking was a waste of time. He could not remember one business deal or one person he had ever hired on the strength of a meeting at this sort of occasion. So why did he go on turning up? As a younger man, he had simply liked seeing and being seen. It had tickled his vanity, but that day he discovered that his ageing vanity was no longer in need of tickling, or at least not in this way.
- 7 The more I think about it, the odder I find the whole networking process. The very word is off-putting: it sounds so pushy and calculating. The point of networking is to meet someone more important than you are. But if everyone goes to a party determined to network, the whole exercise becomes self-defeating. It also offends against the idea that we work in a meritocracy, where talent will out, eventually. In true life, of course, talent does not always out. The smarriest have an annoying way of getting to the top. But it does not follow that the collecting of business cards at drinks parties is a good use of time. Ah yes, networkers say. There is an art, and you have to learn to do it well. Hence the success of volumes called *Non-Stop Networking*, *Networking Magic* or *The Networking Survival Guide*.

FINANCIAL TIMES

- 1 Read the whole article and match these headings to the paragraphs they relate to.
- A recent networking event in London
 - One entrepreneur's reaction to the London event
 - The entrepreneur's new-found feelings about networking
 - A description of an international networking event
 - Why Lucy Kellaway criticises the networking process
 - The reasons why Lucy Kellaway isn't going to Davos
 - Lucy Kellaway's policy towards business cards
- 2 Match these adjectives from paragraph 1 (1-5) with the noun they describe (a-e).
- | | |
|------------|-----------------------|
| 1 leading | a) digital assistants |
| 2 business | b) cards |
| 3 glossy | c) businessmen |
| 4 social | d) engagement |
| 5 personal | e) invitations |
- 3 Match each of these nouns with the adjective from Exercise 2 it commonly goes with. More than one combination may be possible.
- a) brochure b) lunch c) brand d) computer e) occasion
- 4 Read paragraphs 2 and 3 and say whether these statements are true or false.
- Lucy Kellaway ...
- goes to work by train.
 - has always been interested in attending the World Economic Forum.
 - doesn't like talking to strangers at networking events.
 - can neither understand nor deal with networking.
 - finds her business cards don't stay very clean in her handbag.
 - often has to give people her business card.
 - regularly searches through her handbag to find cards.
 - keeps all the business cards she receives from contacts.
- 5 Read paragraphs 4 and 5. Choose the correct alternative to explain the words and expressions in *italics*.
- 'Networking may *not be all it is cracked up to be*.' This means it isn't as ...
 - difficult as it seems at first.
 - crazy as it looks.
 - good as people say it is.
 - ... *has many fingers in many pies* means that someone ...
 - suffers from an eating disorder.
 - is influential and involved in many activities.
 - is the owner of a famous chain of restaurants.
 - The great and the good* means people who are ...
 - respected for their charitable works.
 - considered important.
 - members of a secret organisation.
 - Touting for business* means they were ...
 - trying to persuade people to buy what they were offering.
 - praising something to convince others that it's important.
 - trying to buy and sell tickets for sports event or concert.
- 'He *checked in* his briefcase' here means he ...
 - looked inside it.
 - left it at the airport check-in desk.
 - left it in the hotel cloakroom.
 - '... and went into the heaving ballroom, smiling and *catching the eyes of the people he knew*.' This means he was ...
 - trying to get the attention of influential people.
 - looking at acquaintances as they looked at him.
 - wanted to avoid eye contact with people he knew.
 - 'He *did not see the point of being there*' means that he ...
 - felt there was no good reason to be there.
 - felt lost because he didn't know anybody.
 - didn't understand why the event had been organised.
- 6 Read paragraph 6 and correct these sentences where necessary.
- The entrepreneur ...
- had only recently come to think that networking was not a good way to spend his time.
 - thought he had made a lot of useful business deals while networking.
 - had employed only one person he had met while networking.
 - found he enjoyed networking more as he got older.
 - had networked to help him feel good about himself when he was younger.
- 7 Find adjectives in paragraph 7 to match these definitions.
- appearing unattractive or causing dislike
 - doing everything you can to get what you want from other people
 - thinking carefully about how to get exactly what you want, without caring about anyone else
 - causing problems that you are trying to prevent
 - making you feel slightly angry

Over to you 1

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of networking, according to the article? Do you agree with some or any of the points made?
- Can you add any more examples of advantages and disadvantages?
- What is the best way to go about networking in your profession or company? What organisations are useful to join? What events are worth attending?

Over to you 2

Do you think you live in a meritocracy where the highest social positions are occupied by people with the most ability? Why (not)?