Best Practices for Building and Supporting Your Network in the Virtual Environment

By Corporate Strategy & Research

As our team reflected on the past nine months of a fully virtual work environment, we discussed on one area we all found particularly challenging: networking. Without everyday hallway conversations or impromptu chats in the elevator, keeping up with contacts can certainly be a struggle – especially for those of us who changed teams or worked with new colleagues. As a group, we identified 4 actions that have contributed positively to our experiences trying to support and build our networks within Liberty.

1. **Embrace the Cold Email**

   In the office, "running into" your coworkers while grabbing coffee or on your way to the printer was common. Co-location enables encounters that simply cannot be recreated in the virtual space. Enter the cold email. Proactively sending a friendly email and initiating casual networking conversations the enable new connections and conversations.

   Liberty associates tend to be extremely open to making connections and sharing knowledge but especially in this environment, you need to seek them out and take initiative.

2. **Have an Agenda**

   It can be daunting to make small talk in front of a screen in your home. To make your networking sessions feel more natural, we recommend incorporating in more structure than you might in an in-person conversation. Consider creating a list of objectives for what you'd like to learn from the conversation and questions that will allow you to explore those topics.

   Kayla Wodzicki, who recently joined a new team within GRM said that she has found success in designing conversations with peers to exchange best practices in her role.

"There is so much out of our control right now; one thing that I know I can do is seek advice from others in my position to design a path for my success".

3. **Be Flexible, but Persistent**

As we learned back in March, flexibility is key to working in the virtual environment. Things will come up and networking calls are often the first meetings on the calendar to be pushed. Be understanding when this inevitably happens (and gracious when you do it!), but make sure you follow up with a new meeting request! Ensure those meetings stay on the calendar, even if you push them back a bit.

As Monica Gabel, Managing Director in CS&R, noted, the experience we are all sharing can be humanizing. Her teams have embraced taking time out to talk about more personal issues – whether it is gloomy weather or childcare concerns. It can be nice to take some time out of the workday to connect with a colleague on a personal level.

4. **Dedicate time each week**

Virtual work creates a myriad of challenges that can, frankly, be exhausting to overcome. It is easy for your networking initiatives to fall by the wayside. Putting a recurring note on your calendar to reach out to someone for coffee can ensure the networking aspect of your career stays on track.

A strategy that works for Sarah Nardozza, a senior manager within CS&R, is to keep a log of her networking conversations and block 15 minutes each week to reach out to and/or follow up with contacts.