Seven Techniques to Hold Yourself Accountable to Network

Even if you've set goals, it's not unusual to push aside activities you don't enjoy, find uncomfortable or don't view as immediately beneficial. So it's no wonder that networking falls to the bottom of your to-do list or off your list all together.

Your life as a b-school student is busy with classes, homework and extra-curricular activities. These things often take priority over your job search and specifically networking. You'll need to find a way to hold yourself accountable.

Following through on your goal to network provides a sense of pride and a feeling of empowerment. You'll begin to feel better about yourself and more confident too. Not only will learning how to hold yourself accountable to network help you manage your career, these strategies will work to help you follow through on many other life goals too!

Try some or all of these tips to hold yourself accountable.

1. Schedule Time Every Week

Allocate time every week to work on networking related activities. This means blocking off time on your calendar each week to send messages, follow-up and schedule meetings or phone calls. Treat this time as you would a class or any other mandatory event.

Before you schedule this time block, consider what time of day you have the most mental energy. You will need that mental energy to craft messages or make phone calls and you want to be at your personal best. You will find that scheduling calls or meeting people in person will require you to flex your schedule and be available when the person you want to network with has time.

Setting aside time each week to network will help you take the small but incremental steps to build relationships, and like anything else, the more you do it, the better you will get and the easier it will become.

2. Reframe Your Goal

What is your goal for networking? If you don't see the value in networking, then you're less likely to work at it. To hold yourself accountable, you'll have to find a way to motivate yourself to want to network. In the short term, you are networking to do career research and build relationships. Longer term, you are networking to land a job.

Try reframing your networking goals for the short- and long-term. Look for something that will entice you to want to learn or build relationships. Short-term, you may find it fun to find things in common with people you meet or discover new places to visit or new occupations. Try to set goals that align with your strengths or things you enjoy doing. If your long-term goal is to land a job with your dream company, envision yourself working for that company and how rewarding that will feel. You want that job so badly that nothing will stand in your way. Your goal to network with people who work inside that company becomes much more fulfilling when you see the end result. ▶

3. Learn Everything You Can

If you knew that every CEO attributed networking to their career success, would you be motivated to learn how they did it? One way to overcome procrastination is to become more knowledgeable about the subject - networking. Study the great networkers. Read articles about successful leaders. Not only will you learn some new tricks, you may also learn to appreciate the art and science of networking and how it has helped successful people reach their goals.

Learning will remove some of your anxiety of the unknowns of networking. It will give you the confidence to try new approaches. By becoming an expert student of networking, you'll learn best practices that will improve your networking outcomes, making you more likely to continue to do it.

4. Reward Yourself

Dangle a carrot to motivate yourself to fulfill your networking goals. Sometimes the long term reward of securing a job just isn't enough to keep you motivated. Create a reward system to help you meet your micro-goals or smaller networking action items. For example, if you meet your goal of sending five emails requesting a meeting one week, reward yourself. This will also force you to use measurable goals rather than non-quantifiable ones.

You may want to try an app that will gamify your networking to-do list.

Another option is to penalize yourself for not achieving your goals if you think that would be a stronger deterrent and help keep you on track.

5. Publicize Your Goals

A time-tested trick people use to hold themselves accountable is to share their goals publically. You may choose to tell your classmates, post it on social media or share your intended goals with a job search group.

By announcing your goals, you are letting other people know your intentions. This sets an expectation and some will want to see you carry it through. They may ask about your progress or even ask how they can help.

6. Remove Obstacles

One of the primary reasons people procrastinate or don't follow through on their promise to network is due to obstacles they encounter. What is keeping you from networking? The first step is to recognize the obstacles you face. Dig deep if necessary to uncover the root cause. If you say networking makes you feel uncomfortable, ask yourself why. Once you've identified the obstacle, you can address it and remove it so you can achieve your networking goals.

7. Get a Partner

Identify someone you trust to hold you accountable. This person is someone who will be empathetic yet tough. They will help you troubleshoot situations, celebrate in your successes, and give you a kick in the pants when you need it.

Set up a time to regularly check in with your accountability partner. During your check in, share your successes, your challenges and share what you want to accomplish before the next check in. Your accountability partner should challenge and support you.