



Yes, COVID. And, You Still Get To/Got To Network

Anyone who hates networking might be tempted to add the lack of in-person networking opportunities to the short list of silver linings in the age of social distancing. However, we are heading into the great unknown, and it's more important than ever to cultivate a robust and versatile support system. In this episode, Gloria shares concrete tips to make meaningful connections virtually, that will be key to your success, whether you're anticipating a career change, shifting in your business, or rethinking your priorities during this pandemic.

Gloria Feldt: Like I always say, your network is your net worth. Hello and welcome to Power to You. I'm Gloria Feldt, and I'm here with secrets and tools to prepare and propel you with training and coaching to harness your incredible power to in your professional life. I have spent my career advancing women's equality from the boardroom to the bedroom. I cofounded Take the Lead because I figured out how to crack the code that has been holding women back from equal leadership and pay. My mission now is for women and men to hold equal pay, power, and leadership positions by 2025. At the end of each podcast, I'll share specific tips that will help you lead and succeed.

One thing the pandemic has done is make life easier for introverts, who break out in a cold sweat at the thought of networking in the sense that we've always thought of it, like walking into a large room full of people you don't know and trying to make connections that will be useful to you in your professional life. I'm fairly extroverted, or at least I've learned to be, but even I can find my stomach churning, especially during gala season for all my favorite organizations. A couple of years ago, I was getting ready to go to one such event and fretting about, well, almost everything. What to wear? No, I can't wear that red silk jacket that I wore the last two years again. I know everyone else will be there in amazing, sparkly evening clothes, and I don't even have those in my closet, nor do I like wearing them. Even more stomach churning. Who do I need to be prepared to meet in order to make the best of the occasion? How will I do that elegantly? Whose name should I remember, but I will be embarrassed to have forgotten? What if I end up standing alone in the back of the room?

It doesn't seem to matter that I've had the opportunity to meet people from the grassroots to the highest halls of power during my career, I never get over the

insecurity before an event, large or small. Events should be networking heaven, but they are actually personal hell. So, what to do?

Enter a pandemic. And though it brings many new worries, you might be breathing a sigh of relief that you don't need to think about networking anymore. But not so fast! It's more important than ever to maintain existing relationships and continue to build your network, especially if you've been laid off or furloughed, or you need to continue to build your professional relationships and customer base. As Dorie Clark says in an article on personal branding for introverts in the [Harvard Business Review](#), there's a difference between being an introvert and being shy. This distinction can be helpful. "Despite the common misconception that all introverts are shy and vice versa, they're two very different phenomena," she says.

So, let's start with a step back. As you know, I believe passionately that the world turns on human connections. There is huge value in being among people, especially when you're on a mission, as I am, to accelerate women to leadership parity in my lifetime. And just as in real life, it is so important to show up in this world as the authentic person you are or want to be. It's important to connect and deepen relationships with others to be able to accomplish your work and to have a fulfilling life. You simply can't accomplish that much alone and all of us get where we are with the support of others, whether we know it or not.

Proximity helps to animate mutual support based in trust, and trust is the essential heart of any positive human connection, including business relationships. I have noticed that women tend to see networking as primarily relational, whereas men tend to network more transactionally, getting right down to business. Of course, it's essential to be friendly, authentic, and generous to others. But networking must also be done with purpose and intention if it's to be effective. To network with purpose, two exchanges will usually occur: an ask and an offer. So, before I give you my tips for networking in a pandemic, and since we're still in social distancing mode, I suggest that you get into that mindset of make an offer, make an ask.

Asking for what we want by name is a practice that we women must learn, and to learn, we must practice if we're to build the lives and the careers we want. It's part of owning our power and knowing our worth. In every networking opportunity, we can identify and advance what we want from the interchange, and at least once during the conversation ask for it by name.

Also, make an offer. What do you have that the other person wants or needs? If she or he doesn't tell you, ask for that information by name, too. Is it something you can offer to provide? If so, say so, and then be sure to follow through. If not, say so as well, and offer an alternative that is something you can deliver on. Once you've made an ask and an offer in a networking situation, you have then created a mutually-beneficial relationship. Relationships that are mutually beneficial are more likely to be sustained and grow over time, and also to be more egalitarian.

Now, social distancing is something we've never encountered before. For our mental health, though, it's more important than ever to connect with the people in our lives. Human connection is essential, and luckily that can be done digitally. Here's how. I will put these tips into a downloadable file for you that you can access from the show notes, so you don't have to take notes here.

1. Number one, write down your networking goals and then figure out how you can accomplish them digitally. Create a networking map, an intention that is bigger and bolder than you ever imagined.
2. Second, craft a simple but meaningful text message for the most important people on your contact list.
3. Third, take the lead. Pick a date and invite some people to a mastermind meeting, or just a regular Zoom. Your personal relationships can always help you reach some of your professional networking goals. I actually took the lead at the beginning of the pandemic, when some of my friends who live both in New York and Arizona were commiserating that we weren't able to get together with one another, and I suggested that we have a weekly Zoom. And sure enough, it's become a regular thing. We love staying in touch with each other. We talk about a lot of interesting stuff and get a lot of things done. It's been wonderful. So, just take the lead. You never know what wonderful thing will come from it.
4. Fourth, share your strengths and demonstrate your resilience in this new virtual landscape. Sometimes putting people into a mutually-beneficial room, or a screen in this case, leads to a great conversation, a healthy conversation that you might not have even imagined.
5. Fifth, identify the people that you need to contact. Find them on LinkedIn, send them a direct message on Instagram, or ask someone in your network to give you an email introduction. Be intentional about making a connection. A new connection, as it were. These relationships are key to helping you meet your goals. Remember the mantra: Make an offer, make an ask. Not everyone will respond, but those who do will be very glad you reached out to them.
6. Sixth, ask your mentees or mentors how they're doing, and if you can assist them in some way. Show your gratitude for the relationship. Genuine gratitude is quite different than random shoutouts or a like on Facebook. Send a heartfelt note via email, a text, or a greeting card.
7. And seventh, K.I.T. Keep in touch. Things will never change without action, so just pick up the phone and call someone, unscheduled and unannounced, from time to time. I've personally been making one or two calls like that every time I'm out walking, which I try to do every day to stay sane during this pandemic. I am always delighted by the reaction. It's usually a combination of surprise and delight on their end. Remember always that the world turns on human connections. You can turn a mere contact into a solid relationship. Perhaps you knew someone for years, but haven't taken the time to cultivate that relationship. You can break the ice by doing a simple check in. Send a compliment in a private message during a zoom meeting.

Now do me a favor. Choose a person with whom you'd like to network with purpose and consciously go through the process. Then let me know, how did it go? What did you learn? What would you do differently next time? What follow up do you need or want to do regarding either your offer or your ask? With any luck, our cities will have opened up, and while we might still need to social distance for a while, we will increasingly have opportunities to form those relationships in real life. But whenever and wherever we are, these tips will stand you in good stead as you build your career and lead from wherever you are.

Let me know how it goes for you by sharing with me on social media @gloriafeldt or emailing me at powertoyou@taketheleadwomen.com. Until next week, Power to You!

Power to You is produced by Lantigua Williams & Co. Cedric Wilson is our sound designer. For more about my work, please visit gloriafeldt.com, and follow me on social media @gloriafeldt. To learn about Take the Lead and our courses and coaching services, go to taketheleadwomen.com and follow Take the Lead on social media. You can also send me comments about the show and questions on leadership and power to powertoyou@taketheleadwomen.com. I might even use them on future episodes. Be sure to subscribe or follow Power to You on your favorite listening app, and you'd make me so happy if you would leave a review on Apple Podcasts, as those really help us get to know what you like about the show. Thanks.

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