

Skills Champions - Networking 101

The importance of networking

Networking is a powerful tool for professional and personal development, enabling you to **build** valuable **connections**, **expand your professional sphere**, and **advance** your **career**. While it can sometimes feel challenging, it's an **essential aspect of your role as a Skills Champion**. By actively engaging in networking, you can effectively share insights, deepen understanding, and **strengthen support for WorldSkills UK's work and yourself**.

Below are some useful tips to help you get networking.

Challenge your mindset and yourself

Reframe networking to be **genuine conversations with interesting people**. It can feel transactional, but if you **channel curiosity**, you'll find your conversations interesting and exciting rather than a chore. If at an event, you probably have similar interests to the other attendees, and as a Skills Champion, attendees will want to speak with you. You bring confidence, enthusiasm and commitment and everyone is on your side. This is a great starting point.

How to start conversations

This can be the hardest part. But sometimes standing on your own can be more awkward than striking up and having conversation! Here's suggestions on how to make it happen.

- Make **eye contact, smile, say hello and commit**: The other person will reciprocate and might do the hard part of initiating conversation giving you a lead in. They are probably feeling just as awkward, so will be relieved to have someone to speak to.
- Find **odd numbers**: Conversation pairs or equal number groups are hard to crack in to, as often people are engaged in one to one conversation. Find a three, or five – it's easier to speak to someone in an odd number group setting as the conversation and attention is split between more people.
- **Pair up or ask for an introduction**: If you're with another Skills Champion or WorldSkills UK staff, ask for them to make an introduction for you, or go in pairs if you're feeling unsure. Try not to travel in more than a pair, as it might appear closed off to others or intimidating; it's easier to approach an individual and connect with them, rather than a big group.

How to have an easy conversation

Once you've managed to connect with someone, next is conversation. This should be the easiest part, but it can be awkward. Here's how to make it effortless:

Ask questions! Have a **starter open question** you can ask after you've made introductions. **Open questions** (who, what when where, how, rather than 'do you') will make conversation easier:

- What's brought you here today?
- Who are you representing or which organisation are you from?
- What do you do?
- How did you find the event? Or what are you looking forward to today?
- If you're struggling with questions, comment on what you see, or think of topics like the weather, travel, or the occasion or theme for the event.

Ask the question back – like playing tennis:

- Asking 'how about you?' or 'what about you?' or 'and you?' after you've answered a question or shared something takes the pressure off you to maintain conversation and invite the other person to engage.

Keep your conversation **positive** and **professional**:

- **Ask to connect on LinkedIn or share emails** if appropriate. Easy ways to wrap up are 'nice to meet you, enjoy the rest of your day'
- **Send a follow up email or message** on LinkedIn to cement your connection or follow up on anything discussed in person
- **Avoid complaining or speaking negatively** about things; it can bring the tone down and lead to unprofessionalism
- To avoid long drawn-out conversations that can enter awkward territory, **try to end your conversations where there is good energy**, when you sense the energy has dropped, or you've run out of things to say. Thank them for speaking and move on.

Useful links:

If you're looking for more on networking and top tips, check out the links below.

- [A Beginner's Guide to Networking](#), Harvard Business Review, Rakshitha Arni Ravishankar
- [Overcome challenges and Network like a Pro](#), VeryWell Mind, LaKeisha Flemming (Useful advice for introverts, those with social anxiety or looking to challenge their networking mindset and overcome obstacles).