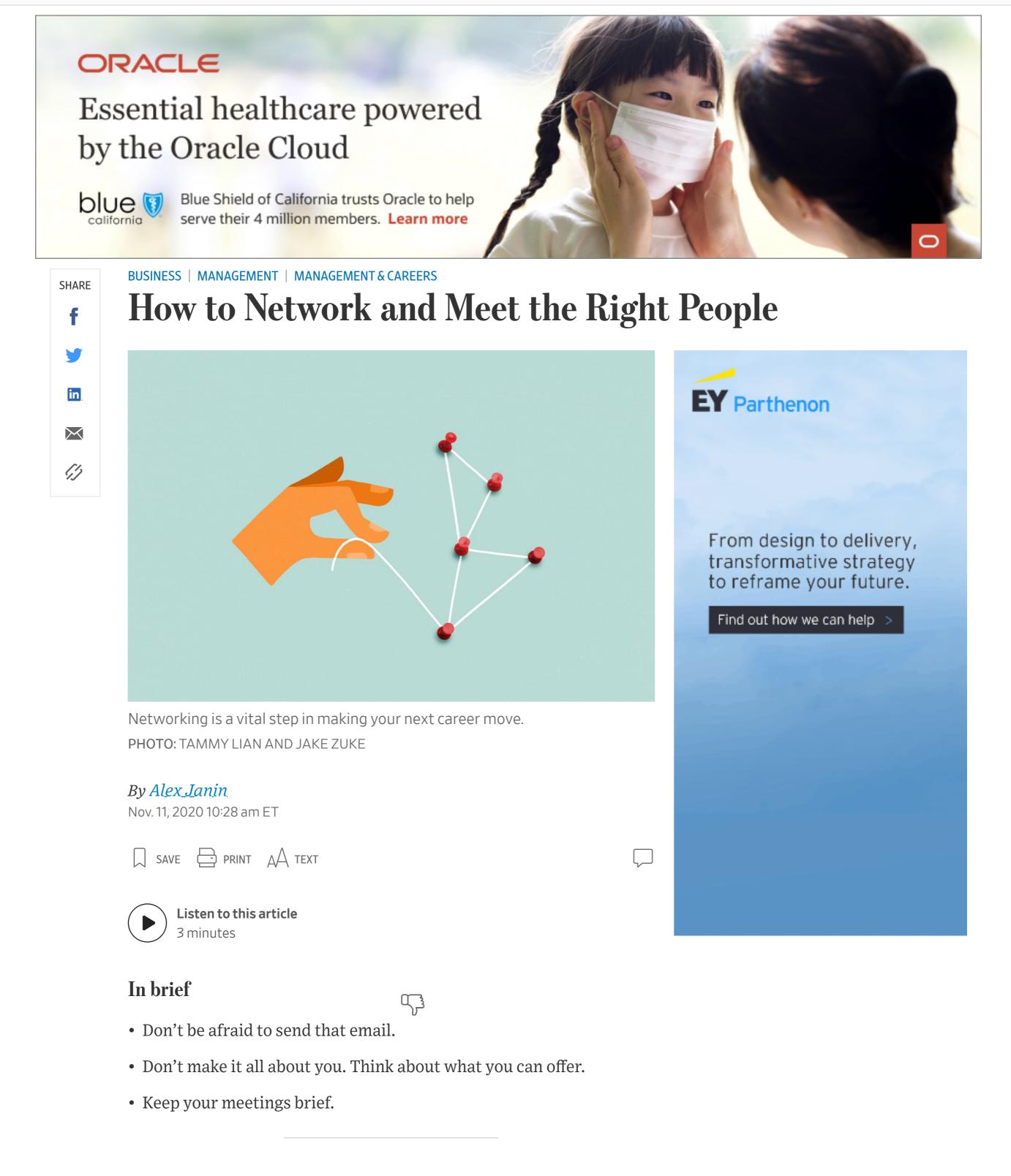
MANAGEMENT



B uilding a network is vital for your career, whether you are looking to take the next step, change industries or build your personal brand. Networking can feel intimidating at any age or stage of life, but overcoming jitters can lead to productive and lasting professional relationships.

1. Take a leap of faith and reach out when it is uncomfortable.

If you have had your eye on an industry leader's LinkedIn page, now is the time to hit the "Message" button. It can feel daunting to ask for a meeting with somebody you have never met, but overcoming the fear of rejection can lead to a meaningful connection. "A cup of coffee with the right person can change your entire trajectory," says Sarah Benken, founder and chief executive of networking group The KNOW Women. "What's the worst they can say? 'No?'"

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The strategy helped Ms. Benken establish a relationship with a successful woman she admired who was speaking at a business lunch. "I walked right up to her and I said, 'Hey, I would love to have coffee with you. You're a phenomenal woman. I want to get to know you."" It worked, and the woman eventually became Ms. Benken's mentor.

Before you send that message:

- Identify your goal. Are you looking for a new job? Hoping to meet someone at a particular company? Looking to learn more about a certain industry? Know what you want to get out of a networking meeting before asking for one.
- Select the right people to approach. Ask friends, colleagues or mentors if they can help recommend or connect you with somebody. If you already have someone in mind, research their experience to make sure it aligns with your goal for the meeting.
- Choose your platform. Beyond traditional methods of contacting people, such as email, phone calls or professional networking websites like LinkedIn, there are other ways to reach out. You can also make networking requests on social media sites including Facebook and Instagram, particularly if the person you want to contact uses these platforms in a professional capacity. Choose an appropriate platform where the person you are reaching out to is most active. If in doubt, email or LinkedIn messaging are generally safe and professional options.
- Plan what you want to say. "Sometimes being bold gets you in the door," says Ms. Benken. Don't be afraid to pay a compliment if you admire the person you are reaching out to, but keep the inquiry specific and to the point. Be clear about why and when you would like to meet and what you would like to discuss.

2. Be prepared to give more than you take.

Once you have landed the meeting, whether it is in person or over a video call, think about how it will be structured. Do your research and prepare two or three specific questions. Networking meetings should be as much about learning from the other person as they are about pitching yourself. Try asking the person you are meeting how you can help them.

The do's and don'ts of networking:



- **Don't** simply hand your business card—physically or virtually—to somebody. Explain specifically why you want to connect with them.
- Don't start by asking what the other person can do for you.
- Don't directly ask for a job.
- Do ask the person you are meeting how you can help them. "You will remain in that person's mind as somebody they want to help and somebody they want to connect to other people," says Anne Sample,

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Carol Schuler
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chief executive of Navigate Forward, which helps employees figure out how to make transitions in their careers.

A networking meeting should be reciprocal. Think about and communicate what you can offer. If you are less experienced than the person you are meeting, you might be able to share a fresh perspective they otherwise wouldn't hear.

Ms. Benken, who is 38 years old, has a 75-year-old mentor. "She has been there, done everything and that's why I was attracted, right? I thought, wow, there's a lot I can learn," says Ms. Benken of her mentor. "But going back the other way," Ms. Benken says her mentor thought: "Wow, I really love the energy of this woman and she can teach me new hacks and new tricks and new technology'."

"A cup of coffee with the right person can change your entire trajectory."

3. Keep your meetings short and sweet.

- Sarah Benken, The KNOW Women

Bear in mind that a lot of people are <u>suffering from</u> Zoom fatigue. Do the work of proposing a specific

time and sending a calendar invite and keep the meeting to no more than 30 minutes.

Prepare a concise and focused personal narrative to kick off the conversation.

Don't worry about covering everything in the first meeting. If it goes well, you could have a longstanding relationship and there will be future opportunities to cover more ground. "The best networking meeting leaves people wanting more of you rather than feeling like you have to exhaust the situation," says Ms. Sample of Navigate Forward.

4. Finish strong.

When you feel like you are getting to the end of the meeting, feel free to ask the other person to introduce you to one or two of their contacts who might have some useful insights.

Don't forget to send a follow-up email, text or direct message thanking them for their time.

Bonus tips

- Get comfortable with your technology. If you are using Zoom, Skype, Google Hangouts or some other meeting technology, test it out a few times first. Whether you are meeting in person or online, arrive early.
- Be friendly and be yourself. A smile and wave on a Zoom meeting can replace the traditional in-person handshake. Demonstrate that you are listening by giving clear verbal cues.

Resources

- LinkedIn. A tried and true professional network that helps you connect with people.
- Zoom extension. Add this plug-in to your internet browser so you can schedule meetings with one click.
- Speedtest. Use this to see how fast your internet connection is before you jump on a video call. You should have an upload speed of at least 1.5 Mbps for a video call.

What to read next

- How to Network When You Can't Meet Up With People
- The New Rules for Networking in the Pandemic

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