

Quietly Connected

Quietly Connected

What Really Works When You
Hate Networking

Hitesh Gossain

 juggernaut

JUGGERNAUT BOOKS
C-I-128, First Floor, Sangam Vihar, Near Holi Chowk,
New Delhi 110080, India

First published by Juggernaut Books 2026

Copyright © Hitesh Gossain 2026

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN: 9789353455903
E-ISBN: 9789353456191

The views and opinions expressed in this book are the author's own. The facts contained herein were reported to be true as on the date of publication by the author to the publishers of the book, and the publishers are not in any way liable for their accuracy or veracity.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, transmitted or stored in a retrieval system in any form or by any means without the written permission of the publisher.

Typeset in Adobe Caslon Pro by R. Ajith Kumar, Noida

Printed at Thomson Press India Ltd

For Ritwik – through it all, present, believing, mine
For Teena – who faced more than her share and showed me how

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	ix
----------------	----

Section 1: The Fundamentals

1. You Already Have a Network	3
2. Why Trust Is the Key to Networking	12
3. What Should Your Networks Look Like?	26
4. Know What You Want	40
5. The Networking Flywheel: Small, Consistent Investments, Big Returns	62
6. How to Keep Your Network Alive	81
7. Why Observation Is Your Superpower	96
8. Connect the Dots	112
9. Access vs Awareness	133
10. Always Connect	154
11. Join the Journey	171

Section 2: Practical Networking

12. Digital Networking	193
13. Networking for Introverts	210
14. Stay Top-of-Mind	232
15. Work the Room	242
16. When It Goes Wrong	254
17. Be Intentional	269
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	281
<i>Appendix A: 13 Stories that Created Life-Changing Impact</i>	282
<i>Appendix B: The Research – What 316 People Told Us</i>	294
<i>Appendix C: The Assessment Bank – Your Networking Self-Audit</i>	307
<i>References</i>	332

Preface

We all know networking is important. Every year, hundreds of books are written about it. But it's a real case of there being a gap between theory and practice. The books tell you what to do. They don't show you how to actually do it. Especially when your palms are sweaty. When your mind goes blank. And you're standing in a room full of strangers.

I'm Hitesh Gossain. An alumnus of IIM Ahmedabad. I've worked in leadership positions across consulting and deep tech for over 20 years. Led the growth of international businesses. Served as a guest lecturer at business schools. And over the years, I've built one of the top recommended LinkedIn profiles in Asia. Over 140 endorsements. A following of 23,000+. This network has opened doors I couldn't have imagined.

But here's the thing. I didn't start out as a networking expert. My journey began with a simple habit. As a kid in Agra, my father worked at BSNL – India's biggest telecom company. We had a free phone. In the late 1980s and early 1990s in India, that was a big deal. So I did what any kid would do. I started calling my classmates. Checking in. Staying connected. It became a pastime. Then a habit. Eventually, people started treating me as their conduit to the world. For references. For suggestions. Doors started opening.

I always thought this was intuitive. Just asking ‘Can I help?’. Genuinely caring about others. Following up. Checking in. Small actions that compounded over time. When I needed a job, people reached out. When I was hiring, references landed in my inbox. It wasn’t luck. It was community in action.

After my eureka moment, I went looking for a book that explained all this. What did I find? Books on communication. Persuasion. ‘How to win friends’. Great stuff. But nothing about the fundamentals of making networking work as a simple, powerful principle. So I decided to write the book I wish I’d found.

I conducted extensive research with 316 senior professionals. What I found shocked me. Three major misconceptions kept coming up:

1. Networking comes easily to extroverts; introverts suffer.
2. Networking is just about participating in events.
3. Powerful people have networks. It’s just ‘available’ to a handful.

All wrong.

This book is built on three things most networking books don’t have. First, real research. Every insight comes from those 316 professionals who told me what actually works. Not theory. When you see a stat, it’s from people like you. Second, academic backing. I’ve used research from Harvard and Stanford, Mark Granovetter’s work on weak ties, Adam Grant on givers and takers, Susan Cain on introverts. These aren’t just opinions. They’re validated. Third, cultural intelligence. Most books assume everyone networks like the Western world. This book knows better. What works in New York might offend Tokyo. What’s warm in Mumbai might feel pushy in London.

This book isn’t another ‘how to shake hands’ manual. It’s not a guide to collecting business cards. It breaks down the real

fundamentals through logical frameworks, relatable anecdotes and actionable strategies. I've squeezed everything I've learnt – my wins, my fails, insights from hundreds of leaders – into simple, actionable nuggets.

Do your knees wobble at the thought of initiating a conversation? They needn't anymore. This book shows you how to engage with more people. How to build deeper relationships, not just more contacts. How to turn networking from a chore into your secret superpower. One real connection at a time.

But I Can't Network – I'm Too Shy

This came up again and again in our survey. 'I'm not good at small talk.' 'I'm introverted.' 'I can't work a room.' 'I'm not charming enough.'

Here's the truth: Networking isn't about charm. It's not about being the loudest person in the room or working every table at a conference. It's not about smooth talk or magnetic personality.

Networking is about being helpful. And anyone can be helpful.

You don't need to be extroverted to forward a useful article. You don't need charisma to make a thoughtful introduction. You don't need to work a room to check in with someone genuinely.

In fact, introverts often make better networkers. Why? Because networking isn't a performance – it's about depth, not breadth. It's about listening more than talking. It's about remembering what matters to people and showing up when it counts.

The loudest person at a conference? They collect 50 business cards and forget 48 names by the next morning.

The quiet person who had three real conversations? They

remember what each person is working on. They follow up thoughtfully. They build trust.

One respondent told us: 'I used to think I couldn't network because I hate small talk. Then I realized – good networking ISN'T small talk. It's the meaningful conversations afterwards that matter. And those? Those I'm good at.'

This book isn't about becoming someone you're not. It's about learning to be systematically helpful to the people you already know. That's not about personality. That's about practice.

If you're shy, you're not at a disadvantage. You might actually be better positioned than the extroverts – you just need to know how.

My Promise to You

By the end of this book:

- You'll see your existing network differently and know how to wake up dormant connections.
- You'll have specific steps to strengthen key relationships without feeling fake.
- You'll know how to position yourself so people remember you when things come up.
- You'll feel okay reaching out after years of silence – because you'll know what to ask for.
- You'll build a network that grows in value over time.
- You'll turn connections into people who champion you when you're not there.

Most importantly, you'll never hear 'I wish you'd told me earlier' – because you'll have a network where help flows, opportunities surface naturally and everyone wins together.

And you'll understand this: Your network doesn't solve the problem; it gets you closer to the solution.

The Three Myths and Traps that Keep You Stuck

Let's kill some myths and traps to begin with. These beliefs hold people back more than lack of connections ever could. These are drawn from my observations over more than two decades in corporate careers and entrepreneurship, and names have been changed.

Myth 1: Good communicators = good networkers

Vikram was an awkward speaker. In the Monday 9 a.m. standups at their Gurugram office, he'd stumble over words, forget names and avoid eye contact. His colleague Shruti was the opposite – confident, articulate, always the centre of attention.

When a restructuring hit, guess who landed better? Vikram. He'd been quietly helpful for years – introducing people, sharing leads, remembering birthdays. When he needed help, 15 people showed up – that's when you know your network is real. Shruti had talked a great game but never actually built anything real.

Networking isn't about how you speak. It's about how you show up when it doesn't benefit you directly.

How you speak gets you a definite head start – no doubt! But it's almost never a differentiation when it comes to long-term networking and resourcefulness.

Myth 2: Elite pedigree = elite network

One of my closest childhood friends, Sanjay went to IIT. Big name, big expectations. And yes, it helped – think of

it as a joining bonus. He got access to incredibly smart batchmates from day one. That's real. That's valuable.

Another common friend, Rohan, went to a tier-two college nobody had heard of. No fancy alumni network. No brand name opening doors.

But here's what happened next.

Ajay assumed his IIT network would carry him and he didn't make any special effort to stay connected. Rohan stayed curious, asked for introductions, followed up religiously and kept refreshing his connections.

Ten years later? Rohan's network probably dwarfed Ajay's.

Because an elite pedigree is like a joining bonus – it gives you a head start. But careers aren't 100-metre sprints. They're 30-year marathons. And in marathons, consistent investment always beats a strong start.

Ajay had the bonus. Rohan kept compounding. That's the difference.

Myth 3: Bigger networks are better

Sanjay had 3,000 LinkedIn connections from his years in Bangalore tech circles. Most he'd never spoken to. When he needed help, response rates were bad.

His colleague Anjali had 400 connections. People she'd genuinely worked with. When she needed help, 15 people jumped in immediately. Quality beats quantity. Always.

Trap 1: ‘Networking isn’t real work’ or ‘If you are good at your job, you don’t need to network’

Ravi was obsessed with his work’s delivery. He saw networking as a waste of time and believed his work spoke for itself. When a big leadership role opened, nobody spoke up for him. His colleague Mehul, with fewer wins but a stronger network, got the call.

Relationships are the invisible asset for long-term success. You don’t realize how critical they are until you need them and they’re not there.

Trap 2: ‘Networking feels like “using” people’

Ankita didn’t call her ex-manager for weeks. She thought she’d look needy. Her friend finally said: ‘Didn’t you help his niece land her internship? Haven’t you been making introductions for others constantly?’

Healthy networks work on give and take – mutual exchange over time. Asking for help when you need it isn’t using people, yaar. It’s how trust works.

Trap 3: ‘Networking is only for jobseekers or salespeople’

Ritu thought networking was for job hunters, so she focused only on her immediate team. Her peer Anushka built an informal mentor network and stayed visible on LinkedIn – not because she was job hunting, but because she was learning.

Section 1

The Fundamentals

1

You Already Have a Network

It was raining hard in Mumbai. The kind that turns the iconic Marine Drive almost into a flowing river. I was stuck in an Uber in the traffic near Bandra when my phone buzzed.

A message from a B-school classmate I hadn't spoken to in maybe two years: 'Need some help. Urgent.'

I had been stalled at one place for the last 20 minutes. I immediately called him back. 'What's going on?'

He sounded stressed. A close friend of his – let's call him Arjun – had built a fintech startup that looked promising. But now everything was stuck. Regulatory approvals weren't moving. Their tech stack needed a complete rebuild. And they were running out of money.

'He's thinking of shutting it down,' my classmate said. 'Yaar, I don't know what to do. Thought maybe you'd know someone?'

I didn't have solutions. But I had something better.

Fifteen minutes. Still stuck in traffic, rain hitting the windshield. I'd connected him to three people:

Meera, my ex-colleague who'd moved into financial compliance. She'd dealt with this exact mess before.

Vikram, a tech architect I'd met at a conference two years ago. We'd exchanged maybe ten messages since. But he knew fintech tech stacks inside out.

Priya, who ran a micro venture capital (VC) fund. We stayed in touch through Diwali wishes and the occasional LinkedIn comment. She couldn't fund directly, but she knew people who could.

By the time my Uber crawled past Mahim – about 6 km and 40 minutes in that rain – my classmate had three warm intros to pass to Arjun.

Did Arjun's startup survive? Yes. Did my three connections solve everything? No. They got him to the right conversations. What happened next was on Arjun – his pitch, his hustle, his ability to close.

That's what most people don't get about networks.

Your network doesn't solve the problem. It gets you closer to the solution.

Your Network Already Exists

Think about what just happened. Arjun needed compliance experts, tech architects and VCs. He didn't know them. But he knew my classmate. And my classmate knew me. I became the bridge to the people he actually needed.

Here's what matters. You don't need to know everyone. You need to know a bunch of someones who collectively know everyone.

My classmate didn't need to know Meera, Vikram or Priya. He just needed to know someone who did. That someone was me.

Your network already exists. Scattered across old jobs, B-school, conferences, training programmes, that startup you worked at five years ago. Most people think they need to build a network from scratch. Wrong. You've been building it your whole career. You just forgot where you put the pieces.

Think of it like Lego. You don't need every piece in the box. You just need the right pieces to snap together. And most of the time, you already have them. You've just forgotten where you put them.

That college friend you haven't spoken to in ten years? She's now a VP at the exact company you want to join.

That guy who sat next to you in training? He's now married to someone who runs the fund you're trying to pitch.

Your network isn't small. You've just forgotten who your people have become and who they know. Like that box of Lego pieces gathering dust. The pieces are still valuable. You've just stopped building with them.

The Two Questions that Unlock Everything

When you need something, ask yourself two questions:

Question 1: Who is the Person I Actually Need to Reach?

The hiring manager. The investor. The client. The expert who's solved this exact problem before. Be specific.

Question 2: Whom Do I Already Know Who Might Know Them?

This is your bridge. And here's the thing – you probably already know this person. You just haven't asked yet.

Arjun needed three types of people. He didn't know any of them. But his friend knew me. And I knew all three. One bridge unlocked three doors.

You don't need to know everyone. You need someone who knows the person you need.

Your Network Opens Doors. You Walk Through Them

Here's something critical. Let me tell you about Riya.

Riya was the connector in her circle. She remembered birthdays. Sent job leads. Made thoughtful introductions. When she left her job to start her own design studio, her network showed up.

Within a week, her WhatsApp was buzzing. 'You have to meet my boss.' 'Let me set up coffee with my cousin who runs marketing at a retail chain.'

Her first meeting was at a Mumbai cafe. The client walked in and said, 'If Ankit sent you, you must be good.' Riya smiled. This was it.

But when the conversation shifted to business, things changed. The client wanted specifics. 'How would you handle a rebrand? What's your process? Show me a campaign you're proud of.'

Riya's answers were honest. But her portfolio was thin. She'd spent time building relationships – she hadn't built enough case studies. She could feel it slipping.

The meeting ended with, 'We'll get back to you.'

That evening, Ankit called. 'They liked you. But they said you're not ready for this scale yet. Don't worry – you'll get there. See, yaar, I can get you the meeting. Only you can close the deal.'

It hurt. But it was true. Riya thought every intro would end with a win. That's not how it works.

Here's what Riya learnt, and what you need to understand. Your network opens doors. What happens once you're inside? That's on you.

The door opens. You're in the room. You have their attention. That's what your network can do. The actual outcome – the job,

the investment, the contract, the sale – that’s on your prep, your skills, your fit, your timing.

Oprah Winfrey was talented but unknown. A news anchor nobody had heard of. Her lawyer and friend Jeff Jacobs saw something others didn’t.

When WLS-TV Chicago needed a morning show host, Jeff didn’t pitch Oprah as a superstar. He just worked the phones – gently, persistently – until Dennis Swanson, the station manager, agreed to meet her.

Nobody knew what would happen. Oprah wasn’t famous, but Jeff got her into the room. Once she was there, she killed it.

That meeting didn’t guarantee a show, but it gave her the shot. The door opened. What happened inside was all Oprah.

Warm introductions open doors. Your preparation determines what happens once you’re inside.

Ask for Doors, Not Outcomes

When people refer you, they’re risking their reputation. People are comfortable vouching for you as a person. They’re not comfortable vouching for you as ‘the right fit’ for a specific role.

Think about it. If you ask for a job, you’re asking them to guarantee your skills, your performance, your future. That’s pressure. They worry: ‘What if this person doesn’t work out? What if my relationship with this company gets damaged? What if I look like I have bad judgement?’

But if you ask for an introduction – just a conversation – they relax. They’re not recommending you for a job. They’re just connecting two people. They don’t carry the weight of the outcome.

Our survey found 49 per cent of respondents value ‘getting introductions when needed’ as a top networking benefit.

Introductions are currency in professional networks. The risk isn't rejection. It's wasting that currency. Someone introduces you and you don't deliver? Nobody will spend their introduction capital on you again.

So ask for access, not outcomes.

Don't say: 'Can you get me a job at your company?'

Say: 'Can you introduce me to someone on your team so I can learn more and see if there's a fit?'

Don't say: 'Can you convince this investor to fund me?'

Say: 'Can you make an intro so I can share what we're building and get feedback?'

Don't say: 'Can you get me this client?'

Say: 'Can you help me get a meeting so I understand their needs?'

See the difference? You're asking for the door to open. Not a guarantee of what's inside. And when you get that meeting – what happens next is on you.

Riya learnt this the hard way. After that failed meeting, she went back. Took smaller projects. Built a strong portfolio. Asked for feedback. Six months later, another friend made an intro. This time, Riya was ready. She got the meeting. And the contract. And a testimonial that opened more doors.

She built it one piece at a time. That's how you build anything that lasts.

What the Data Shows

Between January and August 2025, my team and I surveyed 316 professionals across India, the Middle East and the US. From startups to corporates. Tech leaders to business leaders. Executives to independent contractors. Newbies with five years' experience to veterans who've been CXOs for 20 years. (The details of the research are in Appendix B). The results? Shocking.

- A whopping 72 per cent admitted they struggle to ask for help – even when they know the right person.
- As many as 60 per cent felt awkward reaching out to old contacts – even if they'd had a great relationship.
- Most only network when they need something, and then feel guilty about it.
- Many believed networking was just for extroverts or 'born connectors'.
- Almost nobody had ever been taught how to actually nurture relationships.

As one exec put it: 'I always thought networking was about schmoozing. But the people I trust most are the ones who check in when they don't need anything.'

That's when it hit me. This isn't about being smooth or outgoing. It's about being human. And building a tribe that helps you unlock life's complexities.

We asked: Who do you know? Who helped you get where you are? What actually works?

A remarkably high proportion – 73 per cent – said their most significant career break came through someone they already knew. Not a cold email. Not a LinkedIn message. A former colleague, a college friend or a friend-of-a-friend.

We asked: 'From people who studied with you, how many are you still in touch with?'

Nearly half – 46 per cent – said 'very few', 41 per cent said only close friends. These weren't casual acquaintances. These were people you spent years with during the formative stages of your life. If those connections decay, imagine what happens to weaker professional ties.

Not because of any conflict. Simply because life got busy and they didn't think to reach out.

Interestingly, large LinkedIn numbers don't necessarily equal real relationships. Among our respondents with 5,000+ connections, only 45 per cent enjoy networking – whereas among regular connectors with fewer connections, 55 per cent enjoy it. Collection doesn't create connection.

People weren't struggling because they lacked connections. They were struggling because they didn't know who their existing connections had become or whom they knew.

You had the building blocks. You just weren't building.

Networking Is Marketing, Not Sales

Here's the shift that changes everything. Stop treating networking like sales. Start treating it like marketing.

Sales is transactional. You walk in expecting to close. You pitch. You push. You measure by immediate results.

Marketing is different. You build awareness. You create trust. You stay top-of-your-mind. Not every interaction leads to results right away. But every interaction moves things forward.

Networking works like marketing. Creating awareness so people know who you are and what you do. Building trust by giving people reasons to believe in you over time. Opening doors to get you into the right meetings and rooms. Playing the long game because today's coffee might lead to next year's big break.

There is a saying in Hindi which I love: *'Jungle mein mor naacha, kisne dekha?'*

The peacock danced beautifully in the forest. But no one saw it. You're that peacock. You have the skills. The product is ready. But if you're dancing in the wrong jungle? No one sees you. That's bad marketing.

Networking isn't sales – convincing people you're good. It's marketing – being visible to the right people. The decision-makers. The opportunity-givers. Consistently.

Same dance. The right jungle. Consistently. Sales is the pitch. Marketing is being seen before you even open your mouth. That's what networking gets you!

The research backs this. Studies show people help those they trust and feel connected to. Not because they were sold to, but because they were engaged with, consistently, over time.

Top networkers focus on staying visible and valuable. When we asked: 'When you think of any highly networked person, which attributes come to mind?' 72 per cent said they 'dedicate time for networking/are always available for coffee'. It's about ongoing presence, not closing every conversation transactionally.

One person said: 'I just want people to remember me as helpful. The opportunities always come later, from places I never expect.'

This takes the pressure off.

You don't have to close every conversation. You don't have to turn every coffee into a transaction. Just show up. Be real. Add value when you can. Let it develop.

This creates a healthier way to network. One based on trust, not transactions. One that doesn't make you feel gross or tired. One that actually works.

When we asked 316 professionals, 'Do you enjoy networking?' only 36 per cent said yes. But when we asked, 'Do you believe networking is necessary to succeed professionally?' 80 per cent said yes. The gap between knowing and enjoying? That's where transactional approaches fail. Create ongoing value instead.

Remember Riya? She learnt to split the two. Her network did the marketing – got her noticed, got her into rooms. But she did the sales – showed up prepared, delivered value, proved her skills.

That combination works.

2

Why Trust Is the Key to Networking

Quick Recap from Chapter 1

Your network already exists – scattered across old jobs, B-school, conferences. Arjun’s fintech was dying. Three intros in 15 minutes got him to the right rooms. The person you actually need? That’s your target. The person who knows them? That’s your bridge. Your network opens doors – what happens after you’re in is on you. Now let’s talk about what makes those doors open.

Starting Notes

Before we talk about how to network, we need to understand what makes networks actually work. Not the surface stuff – business cards and LinkedIn ads – but what really matters.

Trust

Trust turns a contact into a connection. Trust makes someone pick up when you call. Trust opens doors.

But here’s what most people miss – trust operates by rules

that are rarely discussed, poorly understood and almost never taught.

This chapter shows you those rules.

What Builds Trust in Professional Networks

Trust takes time but can be accelerated through specific actions.

Consistency matters most. Show up even when there's nothing in it for you. The person who reaches out with a helpful article, makes an introduction, or just checks in without an agenda – that's whom people remember.

Let me show you what this looks like.

Amit and Pradeep both met Kavita at a conference in 2019. Both exchanged business cards. Both said, 'Let's stay in touch.'

Amit sent a LinkedIn request. That was it.

Pradeep? Different story. Two weeks after the conference, he sent an article about a challenge Kavita had mentioned. Three months later, he made an intro between her and someone in her industry – no ask, just thought they should know each other. When Kavita posted about a work milestone on LinkedIn, Pradeep commented genuinely. Not under every post. Just the ones that mattered.

Fast forward to 2023. Kavita's company is hiring for a senior role. Who does she think of?

Not Amit – she barely remembers him. Pradeep. Because he showed up consistently, without an agenda, for four years. He built trust through small actions that compounded.

That's the difference between a contact and a connection.

Following through is non-negotiable. One broken promise erases ten kept ones.

You say you'll make an intro? Make it within 48 hours. You

promise to send that article? Send it today, not ‘when you get around to it’. You commit to a coffee meeting? Show up on time, be prepared, present.

People notice when you follow through. They notice even more when you don’t.

Vulnerability builds connection. Share something real, not just your highlight reel. Admitting ‘I’m struggling with this’ or ‘I made this mistake’ makes you trustworthy because you’re human.

The armour we wear – the ‘I’ve got it all figured out’ persona – it keeps people at a distance. Drop the armour. Share the struggle. That’s where real connection happens.

Trust is fragile. Years to build, moments to break. Research shows repairing broken trust in professional relationships is rare. Protect what you’ve built.

The Trust Equation

Based on decades of academic work – particularly from David Maister and Charles Green’s *The Trusted Advisor* – here’s how trust actually builds in professional relationships (Maister, Green and Galford, 2020):

$$\text{Trust} = \frac{(\text{Credibility} + \text{Reliability} + \text{Intimacy})}{\text{Self-Orientation}}$$

Let’s break this down with real examples.