

Smart Networking For Psychologists

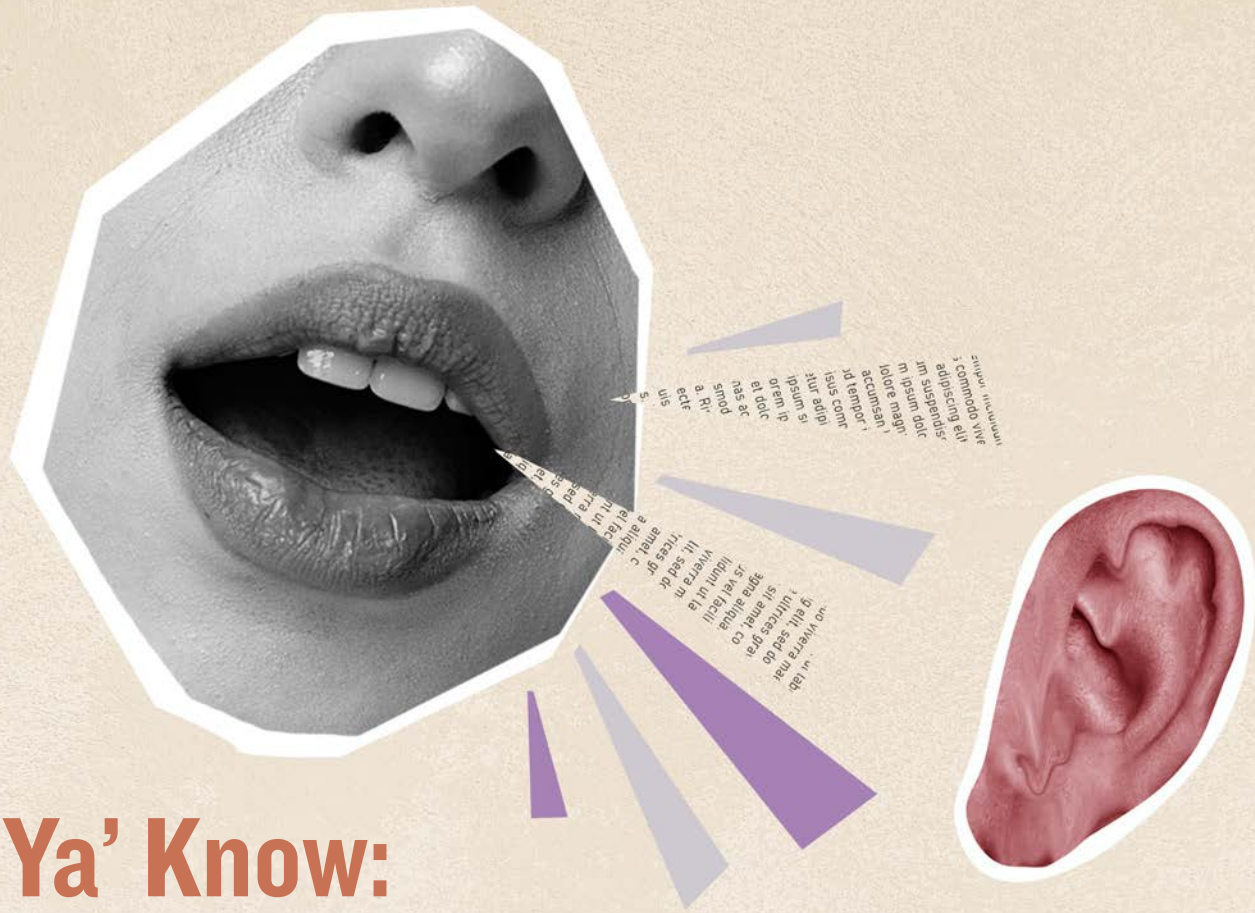


AMERICAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

Smart Networking for Psychologists

A contemporary take on networking for today’s psychologist

- Who Ya’ Know: How to Tap the Hidden Job Market 2
- SPARK! A Practical Playbook for Psychologists 5
- Networking Checklist 8
- APA’s Vast Networking Resources 9
- Network Better With an AI Partner 11
- How to Elevate Your Pitch 14
- Where Can Your Skills Network Next? 16
- Follow-Up That Works: 24/7/30 18



Who Ya' Know: How to Tap the Hidden Job Market

By Stacy Lu

In just a few short years, the job market has shifted from a pipeline to a pileup, with a crush of candidates all vying for the same roles. Job applications processed through LinkedIn [surged 45% in 2025](#), with more than 9,500 job applications posted on LinkedIn *per minute*.

Look past the bottleneck of advertised jobs, however, and a different picture emerges: a vast network of roles that are never posted at all. Instead, they are filled through internal recommendations, professional relationships, and word-of-mouth.

Welcome to the Referral Economy

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, actual hires typically far outnumber advertised openings, despite the masses of applications. In fact, about 70% of job seekers obtain work through informal channels, the Bureau says. Applicants who have an internal referral—meaning, an employee recommends them for a job at the same company—are 10 times more likely to be hired than if they go through a job board, per a report from [Career Plug](#), a hiring software company.

Finding a job purely through personal connections may seem like wishful thinking, but strategic outreach can go a long way towards making career dreams come true. Here's how to make the system work for you.

Explore Employee Referral Programs

Referral hiring may sound like it's built on handshakes over lunch, but it has become formal business practice in many companies. According to the benefits consultants WorldatWork, [77 percent of employers](#) had referral programs in place in 2024—many of which offer employees financial incentives when a referral leads to a hire. Employers lean on referrals because they lower screening costs and tend to produce stronger early job matches, according to a 2024 study in Labour Economics. Referred candidates also often perform better and stay longer.

"Most jobs are circulated around an internal network before they are posted. The idea is to create a robust network so you aren't relying on something to

be posted before you can get a chance at it,” says Yas Hardaway, executive director of career services for the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University in Malibu, California.

Tapping that system means creating your own robust network. Keep in mind that such a network comprises not just immediate contacts, but their contacts. These “weak ties” are often willing to pass names along when an opportunity comes up, and **can be even more effective** when it comes to landing a job than close contacts. Loose acquaintances are more likely to operate in different circles and have good intel about a broad range of opportunities, the authors say.

Psychologists have a good base from which to kick off outreach efforts. They can tap contacts from graduate school, training, jobs, and mentors, for starters—who may have prior experience with an organization and know someone who works there now. LinkedIn can be an exponentially helpful resource for finding out if you’re a few degrees of separation from a job or employer of interest.

“If you know 200 people, they may know 10,000,” says Matt Youngquist, a Seattle-based career coach. “Whenever you can, get the door open through that [kind of] acquaintance.”

Keep Diversity in Mind

Referral networks can be more challenging to crack for people from underrepresented groups. These psychologists may have **fewer ties to people with senior roles**

Build Connections, Boost Your Mood

The benefits of flexing your networking muscles don’t stop at your career. Per a **study** published in 2018 in *Frontiers in Psychology*, daily networking was positively associated with improved mood, which in turn boosted participants’ career optimism and satisfaction. So the actions you take to increase your referral network can also support your well-being, making it a win-win strategy for both your work and your life.

or in industries dominated by majority groups, which can limit the reach of their referral network.

“People may have imposter syndrome. These may be real concerns. There are biases,” says Heather Krasna, associate dean of career and professional development at Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health. “But you have a right to connect with others just like everyone else. Don’t make assumptions in advance. Don’t get in your own way,” she says.

It can be **empowering and helpful to join affinity groups** or identity-based networks to connect with others who have a shared background. Conferences with diversity-focused programming are also likely to have attendees who are motivated to help.

Keep equity in mind when making referrals, too. **Research shows** that people tend to socialize with others of a similar demographic, a phenomenon known as **homophily**—and to refer people similar to themselves.



Cold Outreach and Career Chats

It’s also perfectly reasonable to reach out to someone outside of your immediate or extended network to find out about their work or their employer. Informational interviews are a common and accepted practice, Hardaway says, though prefers the terms “career chat” or “career conversations” to reflect their purpose: gathering information about someone’s role or workplace, rather than pursuing a job directly.

Start by zeroing in on places or populations that genuinely interest you. For a school or organization of interest, use LinkedIn to identify employees with intriguing roles. If you’re interested in working with a specific population, like people with addiction or the LGBTQ community, search those keywords to find sources. You can use tools like Hunter to find the email template of a particular organization, such as firstname.lastname.edu, if you can’t find an email address.

Graduate students and early career psychologists may have it easier, Hardaway says, as “You can pull

the student or recent grad card. You are in a prime mentee position. People are often open to helping students or young professionals to give back to their profession,” Hardaway says.

Write an email to request a brief conversation, mentioning specifically what you would like to learn about their occupation, project, or employer. Give a bit of information about yourself and your background, and why you are interested in their work.

You might find it helpful to use AI tools like Claude or ChatGPT as you prepare—perhaps to draft an outreach note, sketch a conversation outline, or gather background on the person and their organization. Just remember to review everything for accuracy and adjust it so it reflects your own voice.

If asking a stranger for professional help feels awkward, “Think about it as a research project, where you’re simply seeking to gather information—not as sales or schmoozing,” Youngquist says. Be direct, be respectful, be appreciative. Above all, don’t underestimate people’s willingness to help. ■

Psychotherapy
NETWORKER



GO TO:
PSYCHNET.CO/APA12



Subscribe to the most
popular magazine
in psychotherapy today

Psychotherapy Networker
Digital Magazine

TODAY ONLY

\$12

PER YEAR

\$134.97 VALUE



SPARK!

A Practical Playbook for Psychologists

By Stacy Lu

If you're feeling uneasy about working the room at the next conference mixer, it may help to know that many people in the crowd feel the same way. Per a 2024 survey from The Harris Poll, 84% of job seekers in the U.S. say networking is important, but 59% don't know how to go about it.

"I have coached people on how to shake hands properly," says Heather Krasna, PhD, associate dean of career and professional development at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health and an independent career coach.

Whatever their reasons, those who cringe from networking would be wise to plunge in. Some 75 to 80% of jobs are filled through personal connections, says Yas (Djadali) Hardaway, executive director of career services for the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University in Malibu, California.

"It may seem like an old school concept with all the new [hiring] technology, but relationship building is more important than ever," she says.

Whether you're just entering the field or aiming for your next move, it's crucial to develop a personal networking playbook that can help you make every connection count. Below, career experts offer practical steps for building networking habits that can spark long-term career growth across clinical, academic, and organizational settings.

Survey Your Network



An effective networking strategy starts with an honest look at where you are now. Before adding new contacts, map your existing network to see what kinds of connections you already have—and what's missing. That snapshot helps you decide which relationships to build, and which ones are likely to matter most next.

Hardaway suggests thinking about your network in distinct categories rather than as a single list of names. "Think about different buckets of professional connections," she says. "One might be personal and community; one might be faculty mentors; one might be professional associations or organizations; another may be people from agencies or organizations that you want to work for."

Listing 15 to 20 people you know—and noting their roles, industries, and level of seniority—can quickly reveal patterns you might not otherwise see. If more than half fall into the same category or share similar backgrounds, Hardaway says, your network may be too homogenous, which can limit the range of opportunities you hear about.

"Use that information to create an action plan that's more intentional and helps you build a broader, more varied set of relationships," she says.

You can help organize yourself with a customer relationship management (CRM) app like Dex or Teal or even a simple, well-structured spreadsheet—to actively manage those relationships. These tools allow you to log not just names and titles, but also the context that makes connections meaningful: where you met, shared interests, areas of expertise, and any follow-up actions. You can set reminders to check in periodically, track when you last reached out, and note milestones like job changes, publications, or presentations—creating natural opportunities to reconnect.

Promote Your Professional Presence



Once you understand the shape of your network, the next step is making sure colleagues can easily identify your work and areas of expertise. In practical terms, that means maintaining a clear professional presence—online and in professional settings—that signals what you do and how you contribute to the field.

A strong digital presence is often the starting point. A LinkedIn profile should be roughly as detailed as a resume and include positions, training experiences, research or clinical interests, and professional activities that make your work searchable. Commenting on posts, sharing relevant articles, or posting observations from conferences and workshops can place you in ongoing professional conversations. Have a presence where other psychologists interact, too. If someone invites you to join a private Slack group, jump on in.

These kinds of cyber conversations are what Hardaway calls “micro interactions.”

“Follow thought leaders and other industry professionals on LinkedIn,” she says. Comment on, like, and reshare posts. Post thought-provoking questions. Share professional achievements, and post images and insights from professional conferences in which you participate.

“You are building a professional reputation. People are going to think, ‘She’s really engaged in her field,’” notes Hardaway.

Each branch of psychology tends to have its own front-facing channel for showing who you are: researchers are known through what they publish, clinicians through where clients can find them, and both through the professional circles where they stay active.

For psychologists in academic and research settings, visibility grows less from broad exposure than from a steady, citable record. Platforms like ResearchGate, PsyArXiv, and SSRN act as a public track record of your work. Keeping those profiles active—uploading papers, sharing data, and engaging with others’ research—signals that you’re active in your field.

Clinical, applied, and non-clinical psychologists build their profiles where clients, referral partners, or industry contacts are already looking. For those in clinical practice, this often means provider directories such as Psychology Today, Zocdoc, insurance panels, and EHR-linked listings. For psychologists working outside healthcare, it may mean engaging with networks specific to the sectors in which they hope to consult or be employed. Here, clarity matters—strong profiles are specific about niche areas, approaches, and, when appropriate, outcomes.

Whatever your field or career stage, one of the most direct ways to build traction in psychology is to join a professional association. [Regional and state associations](#) can make your reputation-building more impactful by joining the conversations that shape how psychology is practiced in your local region.

[Membership in APA](#) puts your work in front of an even broader, national audience. From CE programs and mentorship—to committee work, advocacy, and leadership roles—there are many ways to interact and get

noticed. And it is those steady, repeated interactions that can lead to collaborations, speaking invitations, and timely introductions when roles open up. Within that larger network, [APA’s 54 divisions](#) create smaller, more focused hubs where people often share news of projects, funding, and openings well before they reach wider channels.

The [APA Annual Convention](#) is also a prime place to get your face noticed. Presenting your work, helping organize symposia, or simply spending time in conversation with other psychologists can put you on the radar of people you might not otherwise meet. And the [APA Community platform](#) is an exclusive, members-only space where psychologists connect with peers across specialties and career stages. Its Membership Directory makes it easy to find people—and to stay visible in the circles where your work matters.

Approach Contacts with Purpose

Using the networking map you created earlier, begin identifying people who could help broaden your connections. The goal is to turn contacts into conversations. Reach out for informational interviews, coffee or lunch meetings, advice about career paths, or introductions to colleagues in organizations that interest you. Students can start by consulting their university’s career services office, Krasna suggests.

“They are reading the job postings that come in, and they’re going to be aware of the latest trends and credentials. They may know some of the alumni that might be in the same area in which the student is interested,” she says.

Early career psychologists can also draw on their university’s alumni networks—through alumni directories, Listservs, or professional platforms like LinkedIn, where it’s possible to identify alumni working in hospitals, clinics, research centers, or organizations related to your interests.

Staying connected with former faculty, internship supervisors, and mentors can be just as important. Many senior psychologists remain active in university

Power Up Your Local Circle

[State, Provincial, and Territorial Psychological Associations](#) (SPTAs) bring together psychologists in the same area through Listservs, newsletters, meetings, and [smaller conferences](#) focused on issues close to home. These settings are often where members exchange referrals, share consultation questions, compare professional updates, and meet colleagues they’re likely to keep running into. Regional psychological associations, with their broader mix of researchers, students, and practitioners, also offer spaces to present research, stay connected to developments in the field, and build visibility within the wider profession.

affiliated networks, where they routinely share opportunities, circulate calls for applicants, and recommend early career colleagues for roles that may not yet be publicly advertised.

When reaching out to a new contact, send a brief, thoughtful email explaining your background, your interests, and why you are contacting that person specifically. Don't let the fear of bothering someone get in the way, Krasna says.

"A lot of people have a negative impression of the concept of networking, seeing it as a phony way of ingratiating themselves. But the goal is not to do a sales pitch. You are listening to and learning from advice. You are giving the gift of [being] a good listener who respects their career and admires what they achieved," she says.

As you develop your strategy, consider your own networking style and comfort level so you can set goals that stretch you without pushing you too far outside your comfort zone, says behavioral neuroscientist turned business professional Vay Cao, PhD, founder of Free the PhD. Some people enjoy striking up conversations at receptions, while others prefer connecting through shared activities such as committee work or research collaborations.

For in-person events such as conferences, workshops, and mixers, identify two or three people you would like to meet ahead of time and prepare a short "elevator pitch."

Reach Out with Real Projects

Another way to expand your network is by contributing your expertise through shared projects—volunteering, advocacy work, pro bono activities, research collaborations, workshops, or mentorship. These aren't just CV fillers. They're the kinds of settings where people see how you think, communicate, and navigate complex tasks, which often matters more than any formal introduction.

At the academic level, shared interests are already part of the day-to-day rhythm, so it's no surprise that many professional relationships grow out of the work itself. Academics serve on faculty senate committees, curriculum or policy groups, or search committees for new hires—roles that put them in sustained dialogue with colleagues across divisions. Research psychologists review grant proposals, edit academic journals, and take leadership roles in professional associations that build connections with people who care about similar questions.

Working together on a project often builds trust quickly. Cao calls this "ninja networking."

"You're doing a lot of what an employee would do. You're offering your skills, your time, a unique perspec-

tive and producing output that's valuable," she says. This kind of collaboration shows both competence and collegiality—qualities that often shape who gets invited into future projects and partnerships.

A project-based approach is also helpful for people who are uncomfortable with cold outreach or who face structural barriers to meeting new colleagues. Graduate students, for example, often spend long hours in labs or clinical placements with limited opportunities to connect beyond those settings.

"Depending on their culture and gender socialization, many people are very uncomfortable about going out on behalf of the 'I,' but going out for the 'we' or 'us' promotes networking in a way that feels more genuine for themselves," Cao says. "I've done cold informational interviewing on behalf of a project I came up with, as opposed to just for my own knowledge. Reaching out to strangers on behalf of an outcome I believed in gave me courage, and that courage turned into confidence over time."

Kkeep Up the Relationships You Build

Building a network is only the first step. Maintaining those relationships requires ongoing attention, says Matt Youngquist, a Seattle-based career coach. "Networking is a mindset versus a project. It's a way of life, something to build up a reserve of favors in your bank when you need it," he explains.

Staying in touch doesn't have to wait for a clear occasion. In practice, it often looks more like brief, well-timed exchanges that connect back to shared work or interests—a paper that intersects with someone's research, a quick note after hearing them speak, a short update when a project takes a new turn.

For clinicians, that might mean a periodic check-in with referral partners that reflects how your focus is evolving; for researchers, a quiet exchange of ideas or early findings that keeps intellectual ties active; in applied settings, a short follow-up when overlapping work surfaces again.

As Youngquist notes, "Most of my networking is trying to connect people together and help others. I'm always giving back, because I want to build up a reserve of good will that I can then capitalize on for my clients."

Finally, when someone helps you, close the loop. "Say, 'I ran with your advice, and these good things happened,'" Youngquist says.

The point isn't frequency so much as relevance. When outreach is grounded in something specific and mutual, it keeps the relationship intact without turning it into an obligation—and makes it easier to return to when something more substantial arises. ■

SPARK!

An Active Checklist for Smart Networking

Survey Your Network

- ☐ List 15 to 20 contacts with their roles, settings, and seniority.
- ☐ Group connections into mentors, peers, and target organizations.
- ☐ Spot gaps or overrepresentation in your network.
- ☐ Track relationships in a spreadsheet or CRM with follow-ups.

Promote Your Professional Presence

- ☐ Keep LinkedIn or professional profiles detailed and current.
- ☐ Maintain visibility on field-specific platforms or directories.
- ☐ Join associations and engage in divisions, events, or communities.
- ☐ Comment, share insights, and post conference takeaways.

Approach Contacts with Purpose

- ☐ Identify 5 to 10 people from your network map (alumni, mentors, target organizations).
- ☐ Create an action plan to broaden and strengthen these relationships.
- ☐ Request short conversations (informational interviews, coffee chats, advice calls).
- ☐ Send brief, tailored outreach explaining why you're reaching out.
- ☐ Choose 2 to 3 people to meet before events and prepare a short introduction.

Reach Out with Real Projects

- ☐ Use project-based outreach instead of cold introductions.
- ☐ Volunteer for shared work (committees, collaborations, mentorship, advocacy).
- ☐ Offer specific skills to an existing project (data analysis, writing, organizing).
- ☐ Join roles with sustained interaction (review panels, search committees, working groups).
- ☐ Propose a small collaboration tied to a shared interest or problem.

KeeP Up the Relationships You Build

- ☐ Treat networking as “a way of life,” not a one-off project.
- ☐ Send brief check-ins tied to shared work (article, talk, project update).
- ☐ Update contacts when your focus, role, or interests shift.
- ☐ Connect people together and share opportunities.
- ☐ Close the loop with “these good things happened” when advice helps.





APA's Vast Networking Resources

Want to grow your network overnight? Start with a [membership](#) with the American Psychological Association. It's one of the best ways to relationship-build in real time. The APA offers its more than 190,000 members a robust mix of in-person and digital communication forums for connecting with peers. Our breadth of networking resources is designed to meet you where you are—and keep supporting you as your career evolves and changes.

[APA Annual Convention](#)

The largest single gathering of psychologists, the APA Annual Convention draws thousands of professionals across specialties. Presenting your work, helping to shape a symposium, or simply spending time talking with psychologists from across specialties can put you on the radar of people you might not otherwise meet. It's also one of the best places to get a sense of where the field is heading and what employers are looking for.

[APA Divisions](#)

APA's 54 Divisions place psychologists in smaller, specialty-focused hubs where students, early-career members, and senior leaders all interact in the same space. That mix makes it easier to find mentors, connect with trainees, and build peer networks that grow over time. Divisions also host talks and workshops that spark follow-up conversations, while committee and programming roles bring members into regular contact.

[APA Boards and Committees](#)

APA boards and committees bring together psychologists from across practice, research, and education to tackle real decisions—everything from [policy input to new initiatives](#). Because the work is ongoing, you're not just meeting people once—you're working through issues together and seeing how ideas take shape. It's a practical way to connect with leaders in different corners of psychology while contributing to the direction of the field.

[APA Community and Membership Directory](#)

The APA Community is a private professional network that combines a searchable Member Directory, discussion groups, live feeds, resource libraries, and direct messaging. You can stay on top of specialty discussions, upcoming webinars, and post-event threads—and build visibility by contributing where colleagues are already engaged.

[American Psychological Association of Graduate Students](#)

APAGS, the American Psychological Association of Graduate Students, is the graduate-student arm of the American Psychological Association. It focuses on issues that matter during training—things like internships, career paths, and connecting with other psychology students. It also offers student-centered convention programming, grants, and leadership opportunities.

[APA Campus Ambassador Program](#)

The APA Campus Ambassador program lets students serve as a go-between for APA and their campus psychology community. Ambassadors share resources, spread the word about events, and point classmates to APA programs and opportunities. It's a chance to build leadership experience, meet people in the field, and start making professional connections early.

[APA's Social Media and Mobile Apps](#)

APA maintains a broad set of flagship social media channels—including X, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube—which function as a central feed in psychology. They're a fast way to scan new research, psychology news, policy updates, events, and member opportunities.

[The APA Committee on Early Career Psychologists](#)

CECP champions the needs and interests of psychologists in their first decade of practice, connecting them across APA divisions and governance groups. Its [Mentorship Directory](#) highlights opportunities throughout APA and State, Provincial and Territorial Psychological Associations (SPTAs), and its leadership training helps early career psychologists move into high-impact positions.

A woman with dark hair and glasses is sitting and writing on a clipboard. She is wearing a light-colored top under a dark cardigan. The background is a bright window with white curtains.

FREE WEBINARS

Long-Term Disability Insurance for Mental Health Clinicians

REGISTER

To-Do List:

- ✓ Marketing Plan
- ✓ Billing
- ✓ Taxes
- ✗ *Disability Insurance?*



Jamie Kopelman

Disability, Life, & Health Insurance Broker
jamie_kopelman@natfin.net
631-560-4701



NATIONAL
FINANCIAL
NETWORK

Network Better *With an AI Partner*

By Isobel Whitcomb

In today's job market, the question isn't whether to use AI in networking, but how to keep it in its proper place. Used well, it can extend the kind of thoughtful, pattern-seeking work psychologists already do—helping to surface hidden connections, sharpen outreach, and reduce the administrative drag that often crowds out relationship-building.

The real task is not just adopting the tools, but also using them in ways that still reflect your judgment and intent.

That distinction—between support and substitution—is subtle but consequential. AI can cover logistical chores such as managing contacts, creating outreach drafts, and dealing with automated screeners. In doing so, it frees up attention for what actually matters: the quality of the interaction itself. The result isn't more networking, exactly, but more focused effort.

AI might seem like the antithesis of relationship-building, says Madeline Mann, a job search and career coach and the author of *Reverse the Search: How to Turn Job Seeking into Job Shopping*. But it isn't there to replace genuine connection: "You want AI to be a co-pilot in networking, not your autopilot," she says.

Here's how AI can help expand your professional network while keeping connections genuine.

Use AI to Strategize

Effective networking prioritizes quality connections over quantity. That's why it helps to start with a strategy—a plan for which organizations, roles, and people are worth your attention. AI can be useful as a way to widen the aperture by identifying employers or sectors



you might not have considered. While you may already have a few in mind, “a lot of your target companies actually are places you’ve never heard of,” Mann says.

A basic chatbot is often enough for this kind of brainstorming. Start by outlining a few criteria and see what tools like ChatGPT or Claude suggest. For example:

- › Generate a list of companies to target while networking. It should be a mid-sized company in Austin, Texas with hybrid or remote work.
- › What are the top ten organizations employing psychology PhDs in Seattle?

Once you have a set of target organizations, identify people there in roles that align with your interests. While a chatbot can help generate ideas, LinkedIn is usually the more precise tool for this step, says Jeremy Schifeling, a career coach, author, and former LinkedIn education marketing leader. Search for your target employer and use the “People” tab to filter by job title, degree, or shared affiliations.

When you begin reaching out, specificity matters. Messages should feel personalized, not templated. Here, AI can help you prepare without scripting the interaction—pulling together background on someone’s work, highlighting recent articles or talks, and suggesting possible conversation starters. “The best way to forge a relationship is to have some insights on the person,” says Toni Harris Taylor, a Houston-based business coach and AI consultant.

Use AI to Maintain Connection

Reaching out is only the first step. AI can help you make contact, trade messages, maybe even set up a coffee date—but the part many people skip is the follow-up. “If you don’t follow up with them, listen—people get back to their lives,” Harris Taylor says.

Staying in touch is one of the most consequential—and most neglected—parts of networking. When you’re managing dozens of relationships, from conference acquaintances

to colleagues, it’s easy to lose track of both timing and context. Humans simply have a limited memory capacity for maintaining connections, says Caroline Dell, co-founder and CEO of Goodword, an AI-powered personal customer relationship management tool.

AI-based tools like Goodword and NetworkSpace can function as an extension of memory. After a conference, you might photograph business cards or dictate notes about the people you met; these tools can organize that information, surface it later, and prompt you to follow up—sometimes even suggesting a message to send.

One note of caution: Treat AI-generated messages as a starting point, not a final draft. Otherwise, they can come across as “spammy,” Mann says. Messages that feel conversational while remaining professional tend to generate more responses because they read as genuine.

Use AI to Shape Your Professional Narrative

At a certain point, the work shifts from identifying contacts and opportunities to articulating who you are in a way that others can recognize—and, hopefully, remember.

What are your interests and strengths? AI can be instrumental in helping to shape your professional narrative, but it is up to you to infuse your profile with a sense of your passion, personality, and goals.

Begin with your LinkedIn profile. Rather than simply listing experiences and skills, it should “tell a story about who you are and what you’re all about,” Harris Taylor says. AI can help you refine that narrative. Copy sections of your profile—your headline, about section, and career history—into a chatbot like ChatGPT or Claude, then prompt it to identify patterns in your work and draft a cohesive summary of your research or clinical focus.

For example: “Based on this information about my background, write a LinkedIn summary that highlights my research interests, areas of expertise, and the kinds of questions that drive my work.”

AI can help get you to the table. But once you’re there, it’s all about connecting as a real human, Dell says. AI can help you prepare for those moments—

suggesting thoughtful questions, ways to describe your work, and strategies for sounding both confident and approachable.

You might brainstorm conversation topics with a chatbot, then rehearse with an AI interview tool. Platforms like Udly and AMA Interview can provide feedback on mock interviews, including confidence, tone, and verbosity. “These tools give you a chance to get out of your bubble,” Schifeling says.



Use AI to Circumvent Screening

Applicant tracking systems (ATS) now shape much of the first pass in hiring—sorting candidates for relevance based on how closely a resume aligns with the language of a job posting. But these systems aren't perfect. They can get tripped up by unusual file types or different keywords from the job description. Even strong candidates can get filtered out when their experience is described in different terms or buried in formatting that the system can't easily interpret.

AI can help you adjust your application for that reality. Try prompting a chatbot to identify the top 10–15 keywords in a job posting, Schifeling says. Then upload your resume and ask which of those keywords are missing.

Just don't overdo it: Stuffing a resume with keywords can backfire and hurt readability.

There are also tools designed specifically for ATS optimization, such as Jobscan, Resume Worded, and SkillSyncer. These platforms act as a kind of translator between your resume and the screening systems employers may use—comparing your document against a specific job posting and flagging missing

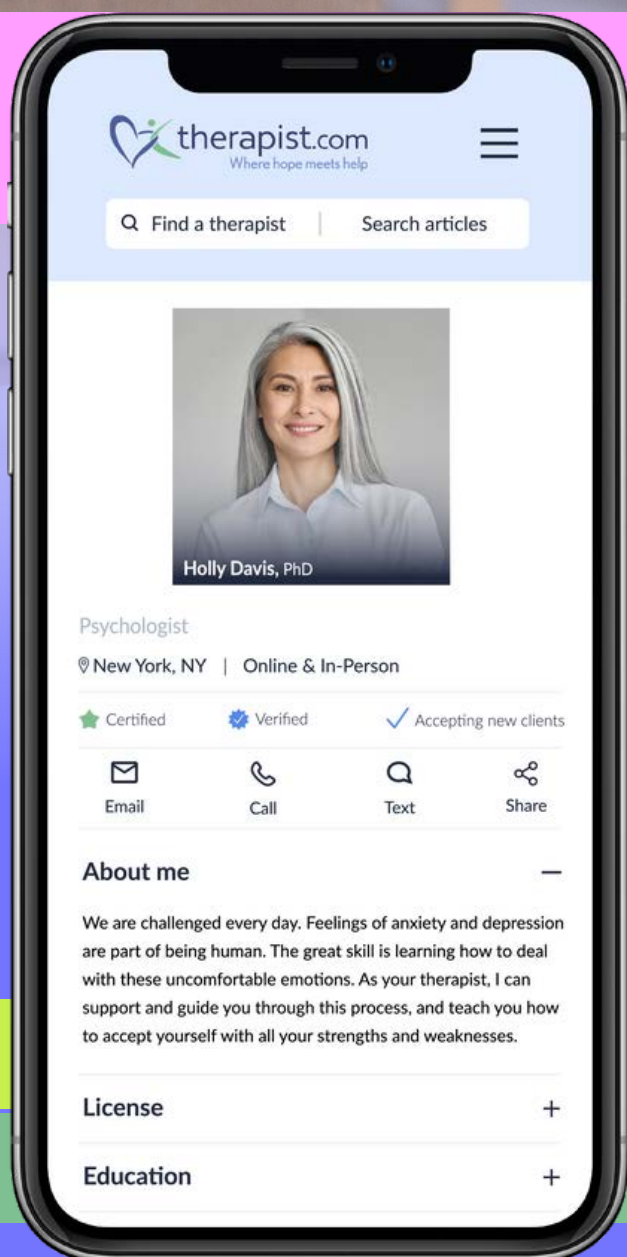
keywords or structural issues that could affect how your resume is parsed. Most generate a match score to give a rough sense of how closely your materials align, along with targeted suggestions about what to add, rephrase, or reformat.

AI Starts, You Connect

AI isn't going to replace the importance of human relationships in networking, says Harris Taylor. At its most useful, it reduces the resistance that keeps people from getting started. It can help you organize your thinking, find the right words, and take that first step.

"Networking takes courage," notes Harris Taylor. "It takes courage to say 'I'm interested.'"

Perhaps the larger discipline in working with AI is in knowing where it should stop. It can surface opportunities and sharpen your materials but it can't substitute for judgment. Used well, AI becomes less of a shortcut than a support system. It can take some of the noise out of the way so that you can focus on what actually builds a network: paying attention, following through, and engaging as your unscripted self. ■



List your practice in the
therapist directory!

FREE
30 DAY TRIAL

\$2.99 /MO
LOCK IN
FOR A YEAR AFTER YOUR FREE TRIAL

USE PROMO CODE: TCOM299

Go to: therapist.com/tc299



How to Elevate Your Pitch

By Isobel Whitcomb

The classic elevator pitch assumed a captive, in-person audience and a tidy minute. Today, you rarely get that long to explain what you do. Conversations start in chat windows, in passing between sessions, or in a few seconds after a talk—then deepen later. The modern elevator pitch is less a polished speech than a flexible way of introducing your work that can expand or contract depending on the moment. At its best, it opens a conversation rather than delivering a monologue.

For many psychologists—whether in research or clinical settings—the idea of “pitching” themselves can feel uncomfortable, says Amber Khan, PhD, a licensed clinical mental health counselor who specializes in career counseling. But a good elevator pitch isn’t really a sale—it’s a tool for building relationships. Here’s how.

The Nuts and Bolts of the Elevator Pitch

Business communication experts often stress opening with a strong “hook”—a surprising statistic or bold statement—to grab attention. But for psychologists, a softer entry point is often more effective, says Khan. “Be warm. Be your authentic, genuine self,” Khan says. This isn’t a speech, after all—it’s a way to start a dialogue.

After greeting a new professional connection, share your name, your organization, and what you do. Focus on a few elements that can travel well across a vari-

ety of settings. You may want to include special skills or credentials that distinguish your work: Perhaps you’re bilingual, have extensive experience with a specific vulnerable population, or are skilled at research design.

Then comes the most important element: why the work matters. This might be a fact, a statistic, or a brief story. For example: *Right now, we’re working to meet the local mental health crisis by providing services to 4,000 children and adolescents in our community.* “It’s helpful to have some stats in your pocket to throw out,” Khan says.

Traditionally, the elevator pitch runs about a minute. But many networking moments don’t allow that much time. At conferences, in group Zoom calls, or in casual professional settings, a shorter “lightning” pitch may be more appropriate. This 15-second version condenses the who, where, what, and why into a few sentences. The aim isn’t to pack in detail; it’s to leave room for listeners to ask questions or share about themselves.

At other times—job interviews or one-on-one networking meetings, for example—it may be appropriate to go beyond the minute-long version, Khan says. A longer pitch allows room to describe a research question, share an illustrative story, or explain a question that your work attempts to answer.

Regardless of length, the pitch should end with a bid for connection. “Invite them in somehow,” Khan says. Ask your listener a question about themselves that



relates to a detail you shared, or even for advice. Then suggest a way to continue the conversation. For example: “I’d love to hear more about what you think, but I’m sure you have limited time here. Can we arrange to chat later?”

Developing Your Pitch

An elevator pitch isn’t a compressed résumé. It should be tailored to a specific goal—whether that’s securing funding for a study or finding collaborators, says Leslie Caromile, PhD, a professor and research scientist at the University of Connecticut who coaches students and early-career scientists in career development. That means taking time to self-reflect. Ask yourself:

- › What is the purpose of the pitch?
- › What are your unique skills and strengths?
- › What is the broader impact of your work?
- › What questions does it answer, and what problems does it solve?
- › What are related issues you’re hoping to get input on?

Then practice making it sound like you never practiced. A strong elevator pitch should come off as conversational, not memorized, Caromile says. She advises mentees to build in natural pauses so listeners can react or ask questions.

Finally, read the room, Caromile says. Before launching into a pitch, she suggests asking questions about the other person and their work. Then tailor your description to their interests and goals. After all, Caromile says, “it’s about engaging your audience—and building connection.”

Developing a clear, concise way to describe your work doesn’t just help in brief introductions: It will be pivotal across your career—whether you’re introducing yourself at conferences or meeting new collaborators. Done thoughtfully, it can also be a confidence builder, by giving you a much fuller appreciation of what you bring to the table. ■

FREE

Exclusive live event May 28, 2026



Featuring
David Nowell, PhD

Changing the ADHD Brain

Moving Beyond Medication

Register for FREE at: pesi.com/freeapa



PESI
A Non-Profit Organization

Where Can Your Skills Network Next?

By Charlotte Huff

Last year, Kristie Wood, PhD, was partway through her second year of NIH-funded postdoctoral research in aging and palliative care at the University of Colorado Anschutz, when federal research funds began to dry up—along with the prospect of a third year of support. Faced with an abrupt career pivot, Wood realized she needed to move into private practice to earn a living.

She had zero clients, no business infrastructure, and, by her own account, little confidence in her networking abilities. “As an ex-researcher who is now starting a business, it’s such a different skill set,” she said.

In short order, Wood went into hyperdrive to cultivate relationships and raise her local profile, using networking strategies that extended far beyond collecting business cards at conferences. She offered to blog for a national publication and scheduled talks to promote her expertise—any moves that she thought might reach future clients. “I [thought] of networking more as translating my work into places where it hasn’t lived yet,” she said, “where there could be people who would really benefit from hearing about it.”

Wood’s experience underscores a broader shift in how psychologists need to build sustainable careers in what has been described as a [low-hire economy](#)—even in relatively resilient sectors like healthcare. This shift, popularly referred to as ‘[networth](#)’ or relationship marketing, encourages people to understand their value in broader terms—seeking out new contacts and new applications for their skills so they can cultivate long-term, mutually beneficial relationships.

Psychologists are well situated to hone these skills, as they’ve been trained to build trust and read people. Instead of treating networking like self-promotion, psychologists can approach it as they do their own work—by paying attention, asking good questions, and building relationships that last, say experts.

“Nobody refers someone that they don’t know and

trust,” says Ivan Misner, PhD, founder of BNI, the business and professional networking organization, and author of more than 30 books, including most recently [Networking is a Marathon Not a Sprint](#). That referral bar, Misner says, is likely set even higher when recommending a psychologist versus a florist or a real estate agent: “If I’m referring you as a therapist, I have to have trust that you’re going to do a good job for them.”

Breaking Beyond Your Bubble

Building that relationship network starts with doing “everything we can to get out of our hermetically sealed bubble,” says Susan McPherson, author of [The Lost Art of Connecting](#). Psychologists, she notes, aren’t going to find future clients by limiting themselves to chatting with colleagues at psychology-focused conferences and events.

A smart strategy is to volunteer for a cause that you’re passionate about, where you’ll meet like-minded people from a cross section of backgrounds, McPherson says. Another is to reach out to community groups, such as the Rotary Club, and offer to speak about a subject that highlights your expertise, says Misner, [who has written about this approach](#).

Keep the talk narrow and rooted in commonly shared challenges, such as how to better navigate the emotions of divorce, or the challenges of raising a teenager. Industrial/organizational psychologists may pursue a different path, by speaking to business-focused groups about how assessment tools can provide insights

into their employees, Misner says. Then demonstrate your value, he adds, by volunteering to analyze the test results of a problematic employee gratis—which may land a new client.

Wood instinctively adopted a similar relationship-building approach, starting with leaders at assisted living and memory care centers in the greater Denver



area, who she had gotten to know when conducting her research. Would they be interested, she asked, in her speaking about dementia and related caregiving challenges? For instance, one of her early talks was titled: “When Love Isn’t Recognized: Understanding the Emotional Impact of Dementia.”

“That was a really great way of not only sharing my research, but then also translating the research into something that could be clinically applicable,” Wood says. “And then allowing me to be in front of caregivers who might benefit from psychotherapy.”

Wood also reached out to *Psychology Today* to see if she could blog about [relationships, aging and dementia](#). Those blog postings, along with caregiving talks and other steps, began to attract clients.

A Lifelong Journey

By mid-career, psychologists ideally have built a broad network and can become more selective. But you also must guard against allowing those relationships to go dormant amidst the swirl of life and career—which could become problematic if a layoff or other circumstance forces an abrupt shift in career focus, McPherson notes.

When reaching out to a lapsed contact, instead of admitting “I dropped the ball,” McPherson suggests sharing an article, podcast, or something else that made you think of them. These days, when she is out walking and someone pops to mind, she immediately calls or texts: “I have developed a really good muscle habit of just doing it then—I don’t put it off.”

While psychologists earlier in their careers seek out mentors, by mid-career and later they can give back by becoming a mentor themselves, says Laura Kuizin, PhD, who wrote about building genuine relationships [as the hidden career superpower](#) for *Inside Higher Ed*. Offer to buy coffee for a younger colleague recently out of school and see how the relationship develops, she says. “They’ve been exposed to new ideas, new technologies, new advances within the field. It’s a mutual relationship just in terms of what both parties get out of it.”

Above all, when forging a new connection, be sure to demonstrate your interest in the person in front of you, rather than focusing on what you’ll say next to burnish your own image, emphasize Kuizin and others.

Psychologists are wired to practice this vital networking skill, Misner says. “A [psychologist] is good at asking questions. If you’re interested, then you’re able

to make a connection. If you can make a connection, make a follow-up connection.”

Promoting Expertise

By putting herself and her expertise out there again and again, Wood found herself in the right place at a propitious time. Last year, at the [APA Annual Convention](#) in Denver, she approached an exhibit for New Harbinger Publications and mentioned to the man behind the table that she was working on a book proposal.

After chatting for a half hour or so about her research and the book’s focus, he passed along his business card, saying, “Send it directly to me.” Only later did Wood realize that she had met the publisher’s co-founder.

By March, she had signed a book contract. The book’s working title: *The Familiar Stranger: A Survival Guide for Dementia Caregivers When Recognition Fades and Love, Hurt, and Duty Collide*.

Wood, who still hopes to one day find another funded research position, acknowledges that there’s been “some dark nights of the soul” during her forced career pivot. But over time, she learned to reframe her thinking: What could she do in her new work life, she asked herself, that she didn’t have the time and opportunity to attempt as a researcher?

The answer, as it turned out, was rooted in recognizing the value of her own expertise and where it could travel beyond academia. It connected back to her original goal of bringing research insights to caregivers on the front lines—only now, she was doing so in new spaces and with new audiences. To that end, she achieved another long-held dream: to write a book. ■



Follow-Up That Works: 24/7/30

Let's say you meet someone genuinely interesting at a conference, at a CE workshop, or even in line for coffee. You trade cards or scan badges...and then life happens. A week later, the spark of that connection already is fading.

Networking expert Ivan Misner, PhD, author and founder of Business Network International, suggests that psychologists don't need a complicated system to keep those relationships alive. What they need is consistency. His 24/7/30 method offers a simple, memorable structure for nurturing early-stage professional ties before they disappear into the ether.

Within 24 hours

Send a brief, personal follow-up while the conversation is still fresh. Reference something specific you discussed—an assessment tool you both like, a tricky supervision dilemma, a shared interest in workplace wellbeing. Misner suggests language as simple as: "I really enjoyed our conversation about X, and I hope our paths cross again." The goal isn't to impress; it's to signal that you were genuinely paying attention.

Within 7 days

When first meeting someone, try to learn their preferred social media platform—LinkedIn, ResearchGate, a professional Listserv. Follow them there and interact lightly: a quick comment on a post, a "congrats" on a publication. These are what Misner calls "light touch points" that signal that you're part of the same professional orbit. "Don't private message them and ask them for business or ask them for anything," he says.

Within 30 days

If your new contact is local, suggest coffee or, alternatively, a phone or video chat. Keep it conversational: Ask about their clinical interests, research passions, organizational projects, or the hobby that lights them up outside of work. "The reason that works is that when you find overlapping areas of interest, all of a sudden, you have a connection," he says.

The bottom line: For the first month, don't pitch, don't ask for referrals, and don't angle for opportunities. Instead, keep building those touch points. If your new contact hosts a webinar, attends a division meeting, or presents at a conference, show up. Engage. Be visible in a way that feels authentic to you. Over time, these small, steady gestures can accumulate into something powerful: a professional relationship that feels mutual, warm, and real. ■



VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

BRING YOUR PASSION TO VA

Multiple psychologist openings



Apply now