

Networking podcast

Hannah Peck: Hello and welcome to the seventh episode of our digging deeper podcast series. Today I have with me four guests who will be sharing with us their insights and advice about networking within the built environment. Those people are Will Kintish, international speaker and trainer on networking, Karen Rogers, the RICS Early Engagement Manager, Kelly Smith, CIOB's Tomorrow's Leader Representative and Sarah Hayford, Managing Director of the Land Collective. Welcome to all of you and thank you for joining me today.

I think everyone can agree that networking is a key skill to have as it helps to build and develop careers. It's obviously been a very strange year and the impact of that has been huge. A lot of people have had reduced social contact at work meaning they've had to re-learn how to connect and network in this new world of remote working and online tech.

My first question is for Will. Will, why do you think that networking is such an important skill for graduates? Does it actually make a difference to your career whether or not you can network?

Will: I mean, you use the word important. It's stronger than that, it's absolutely fundamental. If people think that they can achieve their career goals simply because of the certificates on the wall and the letters behind their name and their academic qualifications I think they are going to be very, very disappointed. Because at the end of the day to be successful, there are two things we all have to do, whether we're employees, whether we're bosses, whether we're self-employed, we have to be visible and we have to be proactive. And that's what networking does for us.

Everybody in the world networks from the age of two years old. Networking is just talking to people. And yet there is the connotation that it's sleazy, it's a dirty activity, it's salesy. The people who don't know how to do it, that's how they behave when they go to events and conferences but at the end of the day, networking is simply talking with a view to building relationships. And if you can't build relationships and get on with people you're going to be struggling with your career goals. Simple as that.

Hannah: Thank you. That's really helpful and makes a lot of sense. Can you give us an idea of what networking looks like today in this new world of remote working?

Will: Well, when COVID appeared, Hannah, my oxygen was cut off at the neck because for me, walking into a room, meeting people I already know, and meeting people that I didn't know - that is the best way to network. Well, of course, everything changed in March, 2020. For 20 years I've been showing people how to work a room. I'm now showing people how to work the zoom. That is the big difference. You know something? The skills and personality traits we need, whether it's room or whether it's zoom there's very little difference because at the end of the day, it's getting people to like us, it's being nice to people, it's asking good questions. If we do

spot a potential opportunity, it's knowing how to follow up and we can do all that on the zoom as we can on the room. The strongest piece of advice I've been giving since COVID appeared is it's very difficult to try and start a brand new relationship online. I believe we have to meet people. The advice I've been giving to everybody is if you're going to do your zoom networking, try and rebuild relationships with people, people you already know, or people you are introduced to. So rather than going brand new cold calling or cold relationship, get somebody to introduce you to the person you want to know, or go back through your database or your LinkedIn contacts and re-establish contact with them. So that is the big difference to me in what has happened in the last 20 months.

Hannah: Thanks Will. I think we'll be coming back to you later for some more advice and practical tips for people listening. Moving on, Sarah, you're someone that set up a career development platform within the built environment. Why do you think it's important to network within this sector?

Sarah: Well, actually I came from a different sector, so I didn't study anything built environment related, I actually studied politics and international relations. And then in my third year I decided that I wanted to break into the commercial property sector. So, for me, networking was paramount even though I hadn't graduated yet because I knew that I wanted to move into a new sector so getting to know people, jumping onto LinkedIn and seeing people that I could potentially work under or for, researching different companies is super, super important as that's another way into industry. I think that lots of people, especially students, really don't understand the power of it especially at that young age when you're trying to establish new connections. I definitely think it's something for young people to do, which is one of the reasons why I built the platform so that those interested in the built environment sector can establish those relationships really early on, in a professional manner and then can go onto their careers in that way.

Hannah: That's great. You just said you built the platform, the land collective, because you had the idea that you wanted people to be able to network within the built environment. Is that because you saw a bit of a gap within the built environment? How did it come about?

Sarah: Initially it was more of a commercial awareness platform so we actually started off as a blog. We wanted young people who were interested in this sector, or maybe hadn't heard of it, to go on the website and read about what was actually going on in the market so that if they had an interview, they could actually talk about the built environment with a lot of enthusiasm and things like. Another reason why we developed the platform is that we found it quite difficult, especially for people from non-traditional backgrounds, to break into the sector. So people who hadn't studied real estate, who didn't have a mum, a dad or uncle who was a surveyor who can kind of help them navigate their way through. We worked with a lot of employers, university, careers departments to help them not only learn about the built environment and the many career opportunities that it offers, but also how to network and how to put yourself across on CVs in front of employers and things like that. I'd say our goals are quite multi-faceted in that way.

Hannah: Great. Thank you very much. It'd be interesting to hear from both Karen and Kelly about how professional bodies are promoting networking opportunities. Karen, do you want to take this on first and then we'll pass it over to Kelly?

Karen: Yeah, sure. The RICS is quite fortunate in that it identifies networking as been essential to its members. Over 132 years ago, it created an early career network, which in today's environment is called matrix. It has over 5,000 active members across the UK and we're expanding globally. It's really important and essential that matrix has a strong proposition. This proposition is to support and develop those early in their careers and build their confidence. The priority here is building their networks and their business contacts. Therefore, a high percentage of matrix events and interactions, both virtually now and face-to-face, promote the power of network. It's a skill that's developed successfully by all our members, we'd like to think, and it really helps them throughout their whole career not just while they're early in their career, but throughout, and these skills remain with them forever and ever, and ever until they go to their grave. The RICS supports the need for networking with other surveyors as well as, other professions as well. So, the lawyers and the accountants work collaboratively because it's important, they get a good range of business contacts and they're familiar with building networks not just with those that have the surveying principles as a background. It's really important that a role of a surveyor really has these skills. I don't know any of the pathways that we have into the profession that don't depend upon being able to build relationships. There are some pathways that depend more upon that, such as the project managements but it's really important.

Previously, before lockdown all of our 32 local groups across the UK hosted networking events and I actually asked them to always host at least one annual session on how to work the room. This is now turned into how to network on zoom, which kind of it picks up on what Will was saying earlier. It's gone from work the room to work the zoom and I just really kind of reinforced that I've probably done too much work with Will as I've nabbed his ethos. It goes through me all the time when I'm working with matrix. So yeah, networking is a really important part in the RICS and it's one of its biggest priorities.

Hannah: That's brilliant. Thank you. I love this whole working the room working zoom thing. I haven't heard it before, but definitely will catch on. Kelly, how about you with the CIOB?

Kelly: For me, it's definitely been an important part of getting into the career. So CIOB we've been hot on the zoom, just like everybody else. We've been getting to grips of teaching people how to, number one, get onto Zoom and then, number two, how to really engage when you're networking on zoom, as opposed to in real life. The CIOB has put on several events throughout the pandemic to ensure. We've put on several events during the pandemic to ensure that everybody is able to network and continue to engage in the industry and really keep those bonds going. I think that the industry right now is at the point where young people are struggling to get into it and I think it is, as Sarah mentioned, the fact that young people don't see the need but it's so important. CIOB as a governing body are definitely trying to push and

promote that and put forward opportunities where people can engage. Actually we're going to host our first in-person meeting in a few weeks, which will be interesting to then go back to going in person because it's now that blended approach between virtual networking and in real life network and seeing how the two can collaborate when you've been seeing people in these little squares for 18 months, and then you go to reading them in real life. It can sometimes be an interesting dynamic.

Hannah: Thank you very much. There might be some people listening to this podcast that might not be working in the built environment and not have those ready-made networks that you can just like pick up. Are any of you able to give some practical tips to these people?

Will: I think everybody is somebody's somebody. The key to the whole of networking is always reminds me of Woody Allen's very famous quote: '80% of success is just turning up'. And people don't turn up. Something Kelly just said a few minutes ago, people are a bit hesitant now. They've been watching everybody through a little box and all of a sudden you have to go and see people in 3D. I think that if people are looking for a new job, whether it's business development or career development, it doesn't matter where they go. Sometimes I think it's better not to be too narrow in your industry. I think it was Karen that mentioned that the surveyors need to network with the accountants and the lawyers and probably the banks and just business people generally. I have this mantra, if you don't go, you'll never know. For the people who want to develop their careers in whatever way, apart from just doing the technical aspect to the job, they have to get out and meet people in all walks of life.

Kelly: I think I can say that with the CIOB. I think what's really important about us is we represent the whole construction industry and that's all trades, that's everyone involved. I think it's so important for us to have these conversations because in real life we do work together so it's good that we have a collaborative relationship in which we are used to working together and having a collaborative approach. When it's a lot more free flowing in the pub or just somewhere after work where we can relax and not have that pressure, it really allows you to make relationships. Will made that great point that networkings just a fancy word for building relationships really.

Hannah: Sarah or Karen, any top tips for networking?

Sarah: I think one of the things that I learned along my journey to get into this point is that I think, especially for young people, you always kind of picture networking as something that you do upwards so maybe not trying to get into the diary of a director or a senior level at that company but sometimes it's really useful just to network across as well. So people going through the same things as you or people who, for example, have just qualified. Maybe you're still studying your bachelors in real estate and you want to talk to somebody who's just qualified as a surveyor or has just started their APC. Those relationships are just as important as trying to speak to a director or a senior person in a company. I would definitely say that is my top tip. You never know when you may need that person or maybe you might go through something at work and you might think 'oh, actually there was somebody who is a

real estate lawyer that I can talk to them and what's happened'. I think networking across with people at your level is so, so important.

Sometimes young people, especially at university, have this really old-aged approach to networking and what it is, much like Will was talking about earlier. I definitely think that that is something that people at universities can adopt. Don't just think it's about networking up because sometimes that can be quite scary. Also network across and know people on your course, know what they want to go into, what they want to do. Do you want to go to the same firms? Do you want to do different things? I think all of those things are really, really important.

Hannah: That's really helpful actually. Thank you.

Will: Somebody said to me very recently "Will, bearing in mind, you're quite old and you've been working a long time, are you still relevant?" I said, "whether I'm relevant or not, I'm not sure, but I'll tell you what is more relevant than ever. And it's the topic we're talking about today." Particularly as we're being released from a COVID prison, I think it's absolutely vital that people start proactively looking for events. Kelly's raring to go in a week or so, she's going to a new event. I hope you're looking forward to it.

Hannah: Karen, did you have anything to add or should I move on?

Karen: I was just going to really support what my colleagues on this call have said in that we need to take out the scare factor from networking. It's not hard and it's something we do all of the time.

We don't have to go to an event and say that this is a networking event. Every event you go to is networking. Every part of your life is networking. The more we can realize that, even if it's just meeting up with the alumni from university or people that you've had workplace opportunities with. That is networking, It may be only a very small number of people networking. I think there's a lot of stigma around it that just needs to be broken down and say, you know, it's about building relationship. It's about having open and interesting conversations. There's not always a gain at the end of it. You don't always have to come out with a gain. It's just literally around getting to know people and in the future, your paths may cross again and there may be a gain, but there may not. It may just be somebody that helps you build your network. It may just be a very interesting conversation that expands your life experiences as well.

I think there's a big fear around networking and the tactics and the types of things it's established against. I don't think we need to worry too much.

Will: Karen, that's why I've been able to make a living for 20 years because people don't get what it is. Don't tell too many people, will you? Try and keep it a secret.

Reinforcing what Karen said, picture the scenario. You get invited to something on Christmas day, maybe family and some friends turn up and a conversation can start. And all of a sudden that person could be your new employer or your new partner in a new business. We networking every day of our lives and we've done it since we started to talk.

Hannah: That was good. I'm someone that's quite extroverted and really loves talking to people and don't find it too hard to meet new people but I've got a lot of friends that would really struggle with some of the stuff you guys are saying. It might lead onto the next question. I'm just wondering where the role of the internet is at the moment? We've talked a bit about Zoom and there's LinkedIn. Has anyone got any advice for people that actually really struggle with those sort of conversations? Because that's a lot of people they're a lot more introverted.

Will: If you're going to get invited to a live event, the strongest piece of advice I can give you is to get there early. By getting there early the host will talk to you and introduce you to a fellow guest, or another person who's there. It's as simple as this, whether you're an introvert or an extrovert, you simply do this.

You go up to them, say hello, can I introduce myself? My name is Will. And you'll say, hello, I'm Hannah. Oh, hi Hannah, nice to meet you and, even if it's a business event, never start off with what do you do. The business conversation always comes later. I might say to you, what made you come to this conference today, Hannah? Or, where have you travelled from today, or isn't this a magnificent building that we're in, have you been to it before? Always start off with some small talk because it's the small talk that glues the relationship. It's never the business talk. The business talk always comes later. That's what I say to anybody. If you're nervous, just ask the other person about themselves. Simple as that.

My life changed when I went on a Dale Carnegie course who wrote that very famous book 'How to win friends and influence people' and this is what he said: 'the most interesting people we ever meet are those who are most interested in us. When I talk to my delegates, I say to them, I want you to be perceived when you go home to be thought of as the most interesting person in the room. They might know nothing about you but they really liked you. And that's what the key to the whole thing. They really liked you because you showed interest in them as long as it's genuine interest in them.

Hannah: Great. Thank you. Does anyone else want to chip in before I move on to the last question?

Karen: I think there's opportunities before you go networking to think about 'if I was a brand, what brand would that be and how would I sell myself?'. That's the only piece of preparation I would say before going to a network event I would do. Don't worry about, should I ask this question or go too much into that because the conversation will flow. But if you go in thinking, this is me, this is my personal brand, this is what I stand for it really helps your networking. Sometimes it's helpful to remove yourself from the person you are and make it look like a brand takes away that nervousness. It's kind of like networking and trying to sell a product, but actually you're selling yourself and it's not about me, me, me, it's about this is what I stand for, these are my values. It's quite fun to do that as well. Before you go to a networking event. So in terms of brand would I be Coca Cola or would I be Nike or would I be Adidas? And what does that mean? And it's really interesting. And that's a really good thing to ask somebody when you're networking is 'if you're a personal brand, let's just have a

chat about what would you be. What do you like in a brand?' and it gets the conversation going away from business.

Will: I love that one Karen. Can I add to that? I say to people, particularly younger professionals and that's who we're focused on today, it is unnerving walking into a room of more experienced people, but please give yourself an upbeat talking to to say, okay, I haven't got as much knowledge, I haven't got as much experience, I haven't got as much expertise as half the people in this room, but so what? As long as I'm courteous and polite and nice, I have as much right to be in this room as everybody else.

And the older person like me will take you seriously when you ask me insightful and intelligent questions. That is the key to the whole thing, asking the other person good questions.

Kelly: I think that's such an important point that young people do have a place in the room. And we are the innovators, we've got something to add and something to bring.

There are lots of companies now that are offering reverse mentoring because the industry recognises that there are skills that we find easy that the generations before us think are completely alien to them. I think there's something to be said about the skills that we can bring into the room and bring into the industry. On the second point also, I like to tell other young people at CIOB, just think of it as a brand new, freshers week. When you're going into university, you've got that whole week where you've come from different parts of the country, different parts of the world and you make new friends. This is where people find their husband or wife for life or their best friends, the godparents to their children. These are where you're making your lifelong friends and freshers isn't intimidating so network in the same way. There are so many interesting and wonderful people out there and when you find that genuine interest and when you enjoy, or at least appreciate, wanting to meet new people it takes the fear and pressure element out of it. Don't be intimidated by the directors in the room. They're just a person just like you. He's most likely got a wife getting on his nerves, just like you have. So just take the human element and really think of them as people and they can appreciate that as well.

Will: The irony about this introvert/extrovert thing everybody is that, at the end of the day, the introvert can often be a better networker than the extrovert because the extrovert will go home and be asked by their other half, so what did you learn tonight? The extrovert learns nothing because the extrovert has been talking about themselves the whole time. Whereas the introvert, if they ask good questions and they're very good listeners, they will learn so much more and so much after the event than the extrovert, but you have to tell the introvert first, otherwise they won't believe it. You have to encourage them that it is about the other person.

The extrovert talks and then thinks, the introvert thinks and then talks.

Hannah: So true. I'm nodding along as an extrovert. I definitely talk before I think. We've got time for one more question. It would be good to discuss the role of the internet in job hunting. There's been a huge rise in people using online tools such as

LinkedIn and social media for career purposes. Is this the way forward for finding new jobs and developing careers? Kelly is very excited to answer this question. Go, Kelly.

Kelly: The internet is a wonderful place, an absolutely marvelous invention. However, we have to acknowledge the sector that we're going into. We really have to look and read the room. All of my jobs that I've received, every single one has been an in-person job. Not one of them have I received because of an online application.

People now are so grateful that you make that person-to-person connection. They're so grateful that you walk onto site and want to introduce yourself to the site manager. Do you know that on every single site, outside the site, is the site manager's name and number and often email. Pop them email. They are crying out for us to come in and join the industry. They really want us there. If that's not you, if you're not a grafter, if you're not into walking the streets and finding every site then the LinkedIn's, the websites of the day, the indeed's, then they're great. They're absolutely fantastic. But go to your university or find a mentor that can support you with a strong CV and a strong cover letter. You need something that makes you stand out. What have you done? Did you do Duke of Edinburgh, have you travelled to a really interesting place, did you do a gap year, did you do a family holiday where you went skiing? What makes you a personable person? I think people try and keep it so academic and so focused that they forget that, in the industry, we want whole-rounded people. We need all of you, not just your surveying qualifications. We want the whole of you and everything that you can bring. As a young person, I have to admit that I'm not the best when it comes to technology and the construction industry, unfortunately, often isn't the best when it comes to upgrading the technology and getting into the tech world. But there is a place for it and it's definitely out there. So yeah, I would emphasize a hundred percent stick on that cover letter, get a strong CV and get one of your mates to look over it. At every single university you've got a careers service and most lecturers do consultations. I'm sure they'd be happy to see you. Ask them, would you hire me with a CV and cover letter like this? Does it work? Does it reflect the job role that I'm going for? If it does, great. If it doesn't, then what can we do to improve on it? Talk about the modules that you found interesting. Talk about what you really learnt? What did you take away? What were your favourite modules? That would be my advice.

Hannah: Thank you, Kelly. Loving the passion.

Karen: Can I just jump in there and support everything that Kelly says? An initiative that we've been doing with some of our school students is helping write CVs, but also doing very short one-to-two-minute videos and at the bottom of their CVs we recommend that they put in a link that says, this is me and link to that video that brings out their personality. It's not really anything to do with their CV, unless that student wants it to, but it's about them saying this is me. I love walking my dogs. This is my school. This where I like walking and smelling this smell, smells very important. This was one student and I was like, wow, she's really in touch with her senses. And her whole video was nothing to do with how well she'd done in her grades because she said, that's in my CV, but I want you to get my personality. And that's what we've

been encouraging our students to do within six-form, to get onto their apprenticeships, because at the end of the day the employers like 'oh, here's another CV'. It's really refreshing for them to click on that link and get this little video of somebody talking to them.

Will: I think that's a wonderful idea. We all know that we make immediate impressions when we interview people, as we walk them down the corridor into the office, we've often decided whether they'll fit or not before we know anything. We've already seen the CV, we've done all that.

Hannah, you asked the question about IT and job-seeking. LinkedIn started out as a job site and for me, the best way to use LinkedIn is if you've got quite a few contacts who you know like you and trust you, my advice would be to go through their contacts and see who they know, rather than going in cold. I never do any cold calling or anything. I always try and find people, who know me like me and trust me, to introduce me to their contact.

Hannah: Thank you. Sarah, I wonder if you've got any input on this, seeing as you've got the Land Collective, which is obviously a website and it's online. What is your view?

Sarah: I'm a big social media advocate. I've been doing social media for quite some time. It's actually how we got the Land Collective so widely shared as well. I completely agree with what everyone has said, especially what Kelly has mentioned about social media and online having many, many benefits and being able to connect with people so quickly but being in the room with people is a lot more important, especially in this industry as it is so people focus. I know that a lot of our audience are young people who wonder if it's all about making a good LinkedIn profile and connecting with lots and lots of people on mass, but it's not really about that really, because you do want to meet people to make meaningful connections. We always encourage things like being vocal and using these actual social media tools to your advantage, and then eventually pushing on the relationship from that. For example, when I was first getting started in the industry, one of the first applications I came across was through Twitter just because I was talking a lot on Twitter. I was very vocal about the issue that I cared about in the built environment and eventually I was approached by recruits who said we have this role going, do you want to have a chat with me about it? And that was my first role and I got it through Twitter and it was amazing. I would always say to young people, if meeting people initially freaks you out then build up your brand, your personal brand online first. Hopefully, the people will come from there. You still have to be active and you still have to get out there, make connections with people, ask them for coffees, do all of that stuff but if you do want to build a reputation online for something that you want to be known for. If you want to get into a certain part of the industry, whether it's ESG, risk or prop tech. Start getting vocal about that first. Start blogging about it. Start writing, start tweeting about it and see who gets eyes on you. That's actually how I made a lot of my contacts in the industry when I first got started. And it was brilliant to see that people were following my things to hear what I had to say. And

then from that I got meetings and phone calls with them. And now we're working together on the Land Collective which is amazing.

Hannah: Thank you. It's really helpful to hear the personal stories. Kelly?

Kelly: Yeah, if I could add, it's actually really interesting because I follow the Land Collective on Instagram.

Just to add onto the whole internet thing, it's not just the LinkedIn's, the Instagrams, the Twitter's, most larger organizations I know have a handle on every single platform. Really branch out and, in the same way, be responsible with the type of content that you're posting. Because as much as you can look for a job, recruiters sometimes look to see what kind of person you are through your social media is also so being mindful of that.

That's all we've got time for today. Thank you all so much for your contributions. It's been really interesting and helpful to hear your advice and experience of networking.

If you want to know more about careers in the built environment then you can visit our webpage www.ucem.ac.uk/careers

Thanks for listening!