Networking for Introverts

Build, Maintain, and Use Networks Without Being Creepy

Brian MacDonald
TechBash 2025
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It's been a tough couple of years

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Networks are great!

- For learning about industry trends
- For getting salary info
- For learning to solve problems
- For community
- And yes, for job hunting

The best time to start building your network is five years ago.

The second-best time is now.

Acknowledging privilege

Where we go wrong with networking

So why does it feel weird?

- Am I being deceptive?

So why does it feel weird?

- Am I being deceptive?
- Is it an even trade?

So why does it feel weird?

- Am I being deceptive?
- Is it an even trade?
- People are hard!

A network isn't a spreadsheet
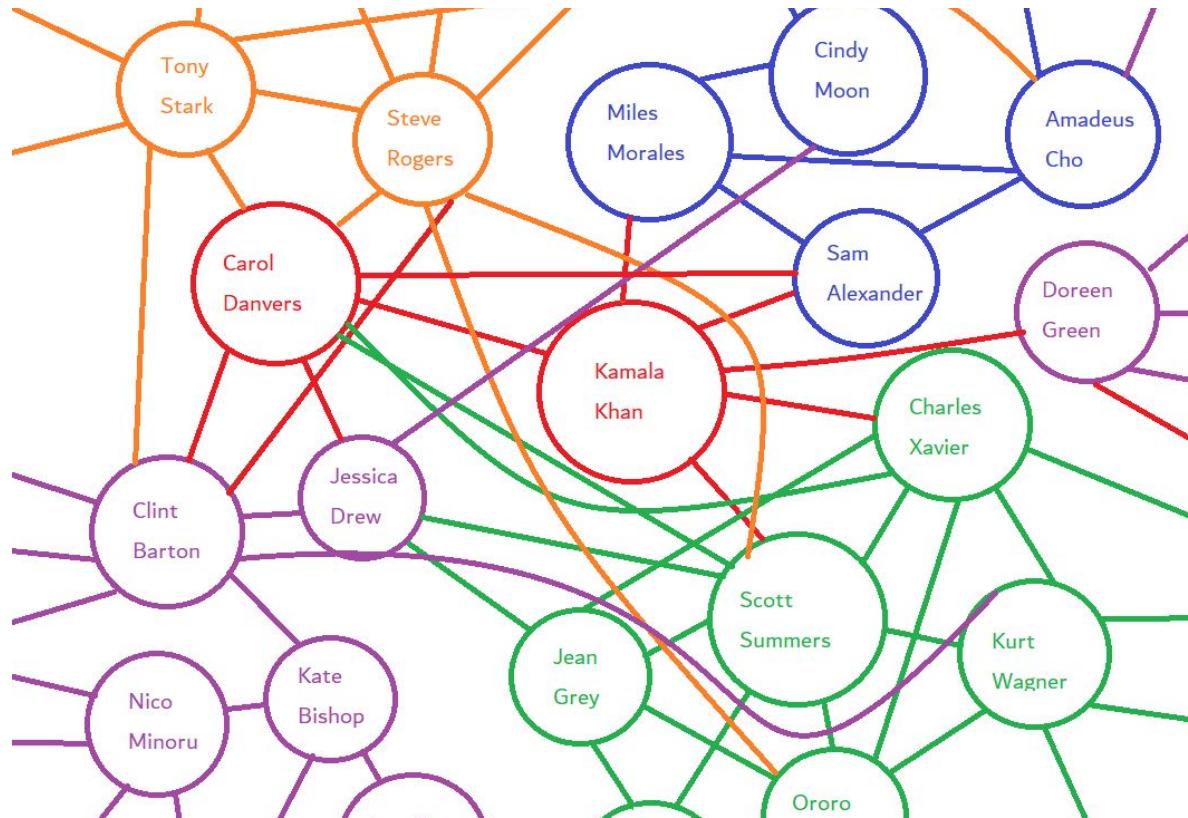
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	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	Job Factor	Name	Company	Met at	Date	Interaction	Notes
2	87	Scott Summers	RQ Optics	Local meetup	4/16/20	5/18/21 - Coffee	Intense; doesn't joke a lot
3	68	Doreen Green	Nuts.com	Chess club	7/18/23	8/22/23 - Mentoring	Fond of wildlife
4	52	Miles Morales	Oscorp	Biotech conference	2/12/21	9/27/22 - Zoom call	Has a mentor - get intro?
5	49	Monica Rambeau	Lockheed Martin	Sales call	5/14/19	3/21/23 - LinkedIn	Aerospace speciality
6	43	Rahne Sinclair	Wolfpack, Inc	Local meetup	11/9/22	1/16/23 - Meetup	Has good connections
7	37	Kamala Khan	Slothbaby.com	Local conference	6/1/23	8/5/23 - email	Early career
8	12	Cal Rankin	Xerox	LinkedIn outreach	10/20/18	no contact	Not sure if helpful

It's more like a web

Your network isn't just direct connections

- People you know

Your network isn't just direct connections

- People you know
- People they know
- People they work with
- People they've just heard of

You don't know where the next opportunity is going to come from

Change your mindset

Networks aren't (just) job-hunting tools

- Your network is a collection

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- It's a collection of people

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- Joined together in one or more communities

Networks aren't (just) job-hunting tools

- Your network is a collection
- It's a collection of people
- Joined together in one or more communities
- You already have one, even if you don't know it

Networks are built on empathy

Building a network

How to people successfully

- Networking is getting to know people

How to people successfully

- Networking is getting to know people
- Specifically, knowing people *as people*

How to people successfully
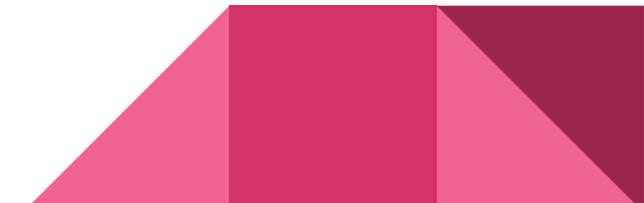
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How to people successfully
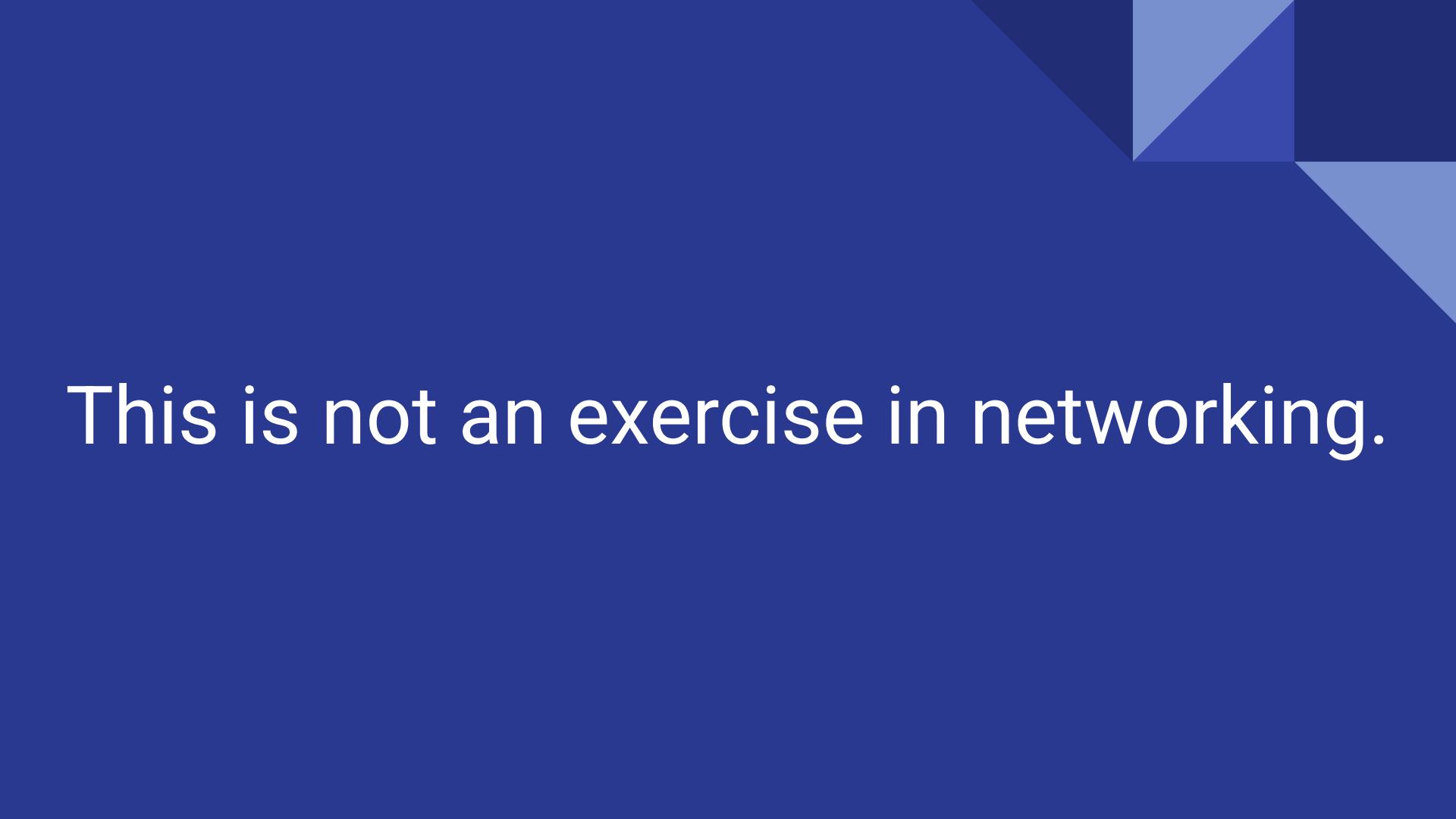
- Networking is getting to know people
- Specifically, knowing people *as people*
- Everybody's got something to connect to
- Be willing to be a bit vulnerable
- Listen actively
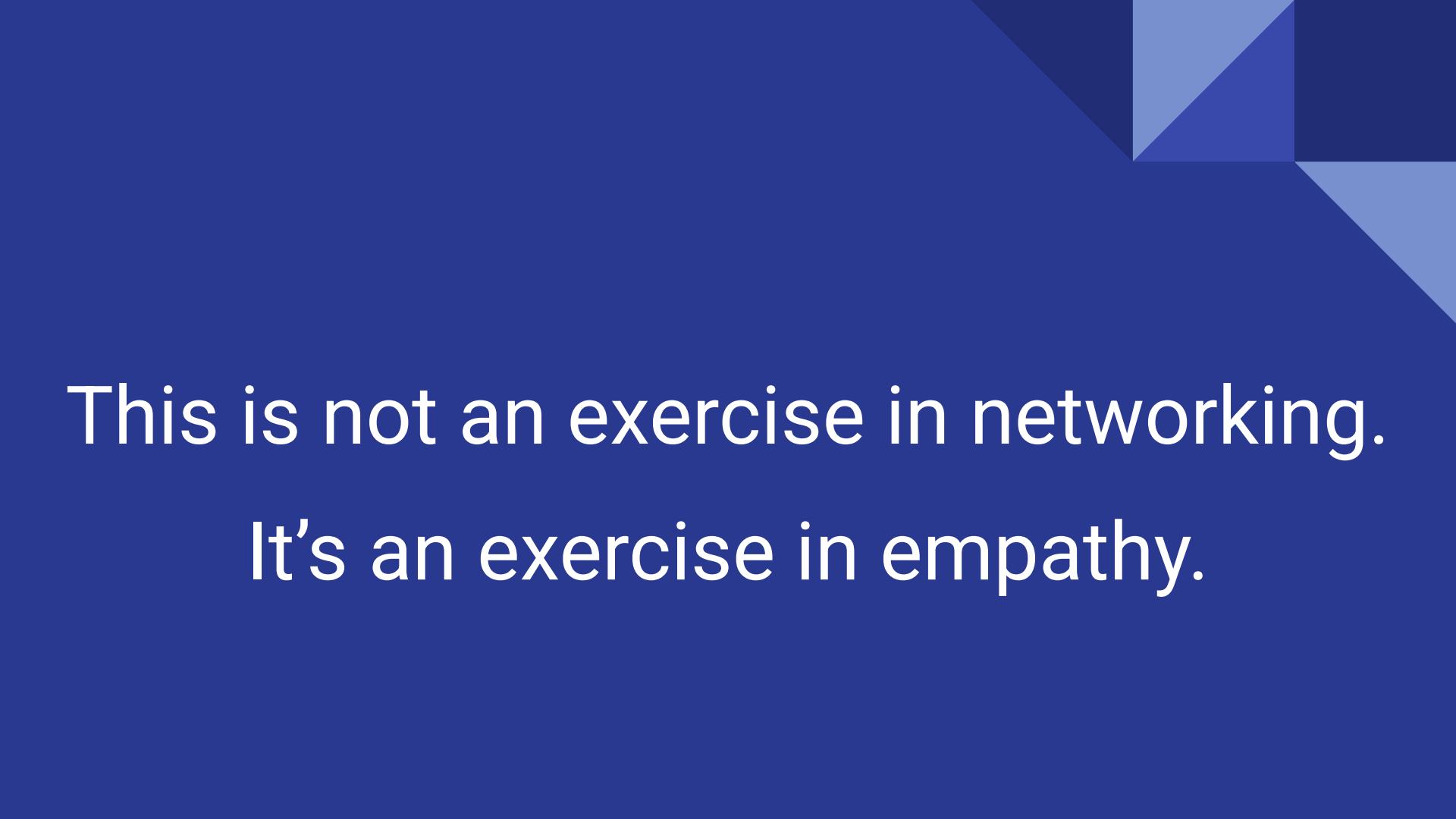
EXERCISE

1. Your Name
2. Where you're from
3. One weird interest
4. Respond

This is not an exercise in networking.

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It's an exercise in empathy.

Giving Back to Your Network

Listen first

- Don't just jump in with a suggestion

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- Understand the needs you're addressing

Listen first

- Don't just jump in with a suggestion
- Understand the needs you're addressing
- Somebody else might be more appropriate

Share what you know

- When you reply, do so with empathy and intent

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- Focus the reply on the person you're helping

Share what you know

- When you reply, do so with empathy and intent
- Focus the reply on the person you're helping
- Ask "Does this add to the discussion?"

Using your network

Be a participant

- Give others an opportunity to help

Be a participant

- Give others an opportunity to help
- Be willing to build community with empathy

Be a participant

- Give others an opportunity to help
- Be willing to build community with empathy
- Not every conversation has a purpose

When it's an emergency

- Be factual about what happened

When it's an emergency

- Be factual about what happened
- Be clear about what you need

When it's an emergency

- Be factual about what happened
- Be clear about what you need
- Be grateful for help, even if it's not helpful

Beyond the fire alarm

- Let people know how you're doing

Beyond the fire alarm

- Let people know how you're doing
- Express gratitude for the help again

Beyond the fire alarm

- Let people know how you're doing
- Express gratitude for the help again
- Pass along resources

Maintaining your network

Networks need maintenance

Don't wait for an emergency

- If your network has a persistent communication channel, participate

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- If your network has a persistent communication channel, participate
- Check in on people to keep things fresh

Don't wait for an emergency

- If your network has a persistent communication channel, participate
- Check in on people to keep things fresh
- Doesn't need a specific purpose

Wow, this is a lot of work
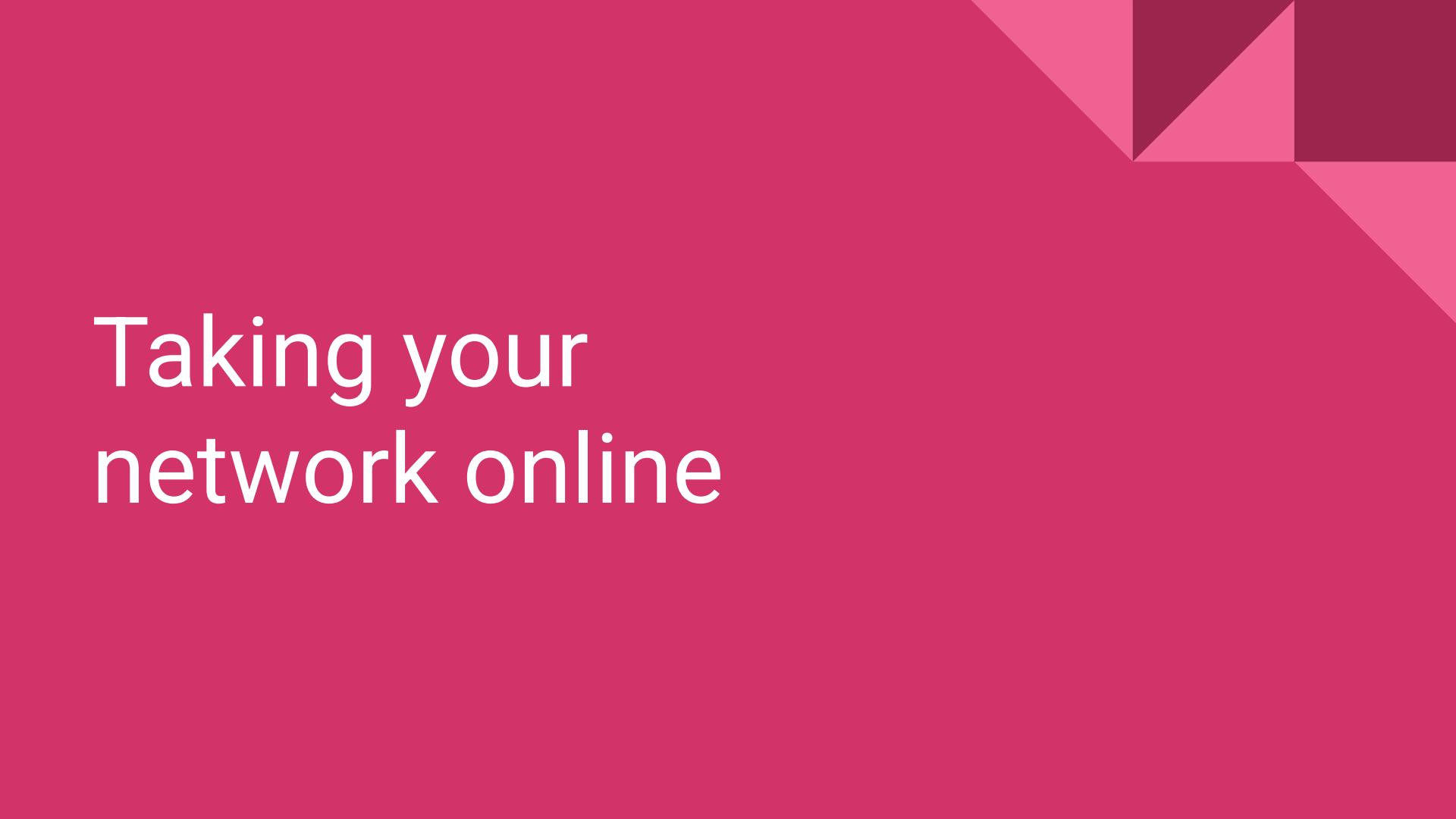
- People take effort

Wow, this is a lot of work

- People take effort
- Be mindful of your own resources

Wow, this is a lot of work

- People take effort
- Be mindful of your own resources
- You don't have to do everything

Taking your network online

Beyond face-to-face

- Online communities are bigger than ever
  - Socials: Mastodon, BlueSky, Threads, even LinkedIn
  - Real-time convos: Discord, Slack, IRC
  - Asynchronous: Yes, forums still exist
- Beware parasocial relationships

Anonymity requires care

- Easy to lose nuance online
- Exercise empathy

Maintenance online

- Online communities multiply rapidly
- Don't feel obligated to keep all of them
- Checking in is easier, but so is ghosting

Final Thoughts

- Networks are built on empathy
- You already have the start of a network
- Opportunities come from unexpected places

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