



THE ART OF NETWORKING IN FREELANCE HAIRSTYLING

"Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion."

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

Introduction

Envision yourself in a room filled with the vibrant energy of fellow hairstylists—each one a potential ally, mentor, or collaborator. The air buzzes with possibility, alive with shared passion and innovation. Your heart races as you realize that every person before you is not just a competitor but a gateway to untold opportunities. This is the power of networking—a force so potent it can transform a casual conversation into a career-defining moment.[^1]

In an industry where creativity flows like hair dye and trends change faster than a client's mind, your network isn't just nice to have—it's essential. Networking is the art of turning a shared enthusiasm for hair into powerful professional alliances. It's about weaving a web of connections that can support you when you stumble and elevate you to new heights.

But let's be honest: for many of us, the word "networking" brings to mind awkward small talk and forced business card exchanges that leave us feeling drained. Fear not! This chapter aims to change your perception of networking, transforming it from a dreaded chore into an exciting journey of growth and opportunity.

Drawing upon wisdom from industry leaders and research in professional development, we'll explore how to harness the transformative potential of networking in the beauty industry. From building genu-

My Networking Journey: From Wallflower to Connected Professional

Charlotte Mensah's journey from her beginnings in Ghana to becoming a leading hairstylist in the UK showcases the impact of building strong professional relationships. As she shared in her 2020 book "Good Hair," Mensah credits much of her success to the mentorship and connections she developed throughout her career. Her story is particularly notable as she became the first Black woman inducted into the British Hairdressing Hall of Fame, a testament to her networking skills and professional excellence.[^3]

"I realized early on that my success would depend not just on my technical skills, but on the relationships I built within the industry," Mensah has stated in interviews. Her approach to networking focused on authentic connection and mutual support rather than transactional relationships.

Similarly, celebrity stylist Ted Gibson has spoken openly about his networking journey. In a 2018 interview with Behind the Chair, Gibson described his early career: "I was terrified of industry events at first. I would stand in the corner and pretend to be busy. But I challenged myself to make just three connections at each event. That simple goal changed everything for me."[^4]

For Gibson, the breakthrough came when he stopped focusing on impressing others and instead approached conversations with genuine curiosity. "I started asking questions about challenges other stylists were facing. Those authentic conversations led to collaborative relationships that have lasted for decades."

These real-world examples demonstrate that effective networking isn't about collecting the most business cards or having the perfect elevator pitch. It's about building genuine connections based on shared experiences and mutual support.

The key takeaway from these successful stylists is clear: approach networking with authenticity, focus on how you can contribute to others' success, and be patient as these relationships develop over time. This mindset transforms networking from an intimidating obligation into a natural extension of your professional passion.

The Value Multiplier: Leveraging Relationships for Exponential Growth

In the intricate tapestry of the beauty industry, networking is more than collecting business cards or gaining Instagram followers. It's a powerful catalyst—a value multiplier that can propel your career to heights you never imagined. When approached with authenticity and intention, networking becomes the secret ingredient that transforms good hairstylists into industry leaders.

As legendary coach Vince Lombardi famously said, "The only place where success comes before work is in the dictionary." Networking is that work—the foundation upon which success is built. It requires consistent effort, but the returns can be extraordinary.

Think of networking as planting seeds in fertile soil. Each connection has the potential to blossom into something magnificent—a collaboration that sparks a new trend, a mentorship that elevates your skills, or a client referral that changes your business trajectory. The beauty of networking lies in its exponential nature. One strong connection can lead to many more, each opening doors to new opportunities and growth.

But how exactly does networking multiply value in the hairstyling world? Let's break it down:

Knowledge Exchange

Every hairstylist you meet carries a wealth of experience. Through networking, you gain access to this collective wisdom. Imagine learning a ground-breaking coloring technique from a stylist you meet at a conference or gaining insights into running a successful freelance business from an online mentor. These shared nuggets of knowledge can accelerate your growth and keep you at the industry's cutting edge.

Collaborative Opportunities

Innovative trends in hairstyling often emerge from collaboration. By expanding your network, you increase your chances of finding the perfect creative partner. Picture teaming up with a makeup artist for a styled photoshoot that boosts both your careers or collaborating with a product developer to create haircare products tailored to your clients' needs. These partnerships can lead to breakthrough moments.

Brand Visibility

In a crowded marketplace, visibility is key. Networking amplifies your personal brand, extending your reach beyond your immediate circle. When you engage with the hairstyling community—both online and offline—you become known not just for your skills but for your unique perspective. This increased visibility can attract clients, collaboration opportunities, and media attention.

Client Referrals

Word-of-mouth remains one of the most powerful marketing tools in the beauty industry. According to the Nielsen Global Trust in Advertising Report (2021), recommendations from friends and family remain the most trusted form of advertising worldwide, with 89% of consumers placing high trust in these personal endorsements.^[^5] A strong network becomes a web of potential client referrals. When you build genuine relationships with other professionals, they're more likely to recommend you to their clients, expanding your client base organically.

Industry Influence

As your network grows, so does your influence. You may find yourself invited to speak at industry events, contribute to publications, or shape beauty trends. This increased influence not only boosts your career but allows you to make a meaningful impact on the industry you love. Your voice becomes one that others seek out and respect.

To truly leverage the value-multiplying power of networking, consider these actionable steps:

- **Map Your Network:** Create a visual map of your current professional connections. Identify strengths and gaps. Are you well-connected with other hair-stylists but lack contacts on the business side? This exercise helps focus your networking efforts.
- **Set Networking Goals:** Establish clear, measurable goals. For example, "Connect with three new product developers this quarter" or "Secure a speaking opportunity at a regional beauty conference this year." Specific goals keep your efforts purposeful.
- **Cultivate a Giving Mindset:** Successful networkers focus on what they can offer, not just what they can gain. Before attending an event or reaching out to a mentor, consider what unique value you can bring—whether it's a new technique or an introduction to a useful contact.
- **Follow Up and Nurture:** Networking doesn't end with the initial connection. The real value comes from nurturing these relationships over time. Implement a system for following up, whether through personalized emails, social media engagement, or periodic check-ins.

- **Leverage Technology:** Use networking tools and platforms to expand your reach. LinkedIn is valuable for connecting with beauty industry professionals, while Instagram and emerging platforms (such as TikTok or Clubhouse) are perfect for showcasing your work and engaging with a broader community.

Remember, in freelance hairstyling, your network is your net worth. By approaching networking with intention, authenticity, and a spirit of mutual growth, you're not just building a list of contacts—you're cultivating a thriving ecosystem that will support and elevate your career. Embrace the power of connections and watch your value as a hairstylist multiply.

Networking Across Market Environments

Whether you practice in a bustling metropolis, a suburban community, or a rural setting, effective networking requires adapting your approach to the unique characteristics of your market. Each environment offers distinct advantages and challenges that shape how you build and maintain professional relationships.

Urban Market Strategies

In cities like New York, Los Angeles, or Chicago, the density of industry events and professionals creates abundant networking opportunities—but also intense competition. In addition to attending high-profile trade shows and product launches, urban

stylists can benefit from specialized niche groups (such as editorial or runway collectives) that offer targeted connections.

- **Industry Hubs:** Major cities host regular trade shows, product launches, and educational events. Create a calendar of must-attend gatherings and budget for participation in at least one quarterly event.
- **Specialty Niche Groups:** Seek out groups dedicated to specific techniques or cultural trends. These communities foster in-depth conversations and tailored professional advice.
- **Cross-Industry Connections:** Cities offer opportunities to connect with professionals in adjacent fields like fashion, photography, and media, opening doors to collaborative projects and broader exposure.

For example, Ursula Stephen, known for styling Rihanna and other celebrities, has spoken about how attending New York Fashion Week events early in her career helped her connect with designers and photographers who later became regular collaborators. "Being present in those spaces consistently—even when I felt out of place—eventually led to breakthrough relationships," Stephen noted in a 2019 *Essence* interview.^[6]

Suburban Market Approaches

Suburban areas offer a blend of local community building and access to nearby urban resources. Stylists in these markets can build strong local alliances while also bridging the gap to metropolitan trends.

- **Build Local Business Alliances:** Partner with boutiques, spas, or wedding venues to create referral networks and host collaborative events.
- **Bridge Multiple Communities:** Position yourself as a connector who brings urban trends into suburban markets, creating a unique selling proposition.
- **Host Educational Events:** Organize workshops and "trend update" sessions that attract both local talent and experts from nearby cities.

Nick Stenson, Artistic Director for Matrix, has shared how he initially built his network in suburban Chicago before expanding to national prominence. "I created quarterly trend events that brought city-based educators to our suburban salon. This positioned us as the local connection to broader industry movements and created valuable relationships with national educators," Stenson explained in a Modern Salon feature (2020).

Rural Market Innovation

Rural stylists face geographic challenges, but their unique market position can become a strength. Emphasize digital-first strategies and targeted trips to urban hubs to overcome isolation.

- **Digital-First Networking:** Invest in building an online community via Instagram, Facebook groups, and virtual events. Digital platforms can neutralize distance, allowing you to connect globally.
- **Regional Hub Expeditions:** Schedule quarterly trips to the nearest metropolitan area for intensive networking and education. Plan multiple meetings to maximize each trip.
- **Exclusive Market Position:** Highlight your role as one of the few stylists in your area offering modern techniques. This can attract brands and educators seeking fresh perspectives in untapped markets.

Heather Chapman, known for her bridal hair expertise, built a global following while based in a small town in Utah. In interviews, she's discussed how strategic travel to key education events, combined with consistent online content creation, allowed her to develop industry relationships despite geographic isolation. Her approach proves that location doesn't have to limit networking potential.

Regardless of your location, the foundation of successful networking remains consistent: authentic relationship building, consistent value exchange, and strategic connection maintenance. Adapt these principles to your market environment to build a powerful network that transcends geography.

As poet Maya Angelou eloquently stated, "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." This wisdom perfectly captures the essence of networking etiquette. In the fast-paced, image-driven world of hairstyling, how you conduct yourself is as important as your technical skills. Mastering networking etiquette is like perfecting a signature hairstyle—it requires attention to detail, practice, and understanding your audience.

Approaching Respected Figures with Reverence

When connecting with industry leaders or respected figures, approach with both confidence and humility. Recognize their years of experience and let your genuine curiosity lead the conversation.

Actionable Tips:

- **Do Your Research:** Learn about their background and recent work to engage in informed, relevant conversation.
- **Prepare a Concise Introduction:** Clearly highlight your passion and unique perspective in a brief introduction.
- **Ask Thoughtful Questions:** For example, "Your recent collection inspired me. What was your creative process behind it?"
- **Be Respectful of Their Time:** When requesting advice or mentorship, politely ask if they're open to a brief follow-up conversation.

Listening Attentively and Discovering Mutual Interests

Skilled networkers know that active listening is often more important than speaking. By truly listening, you can identify mutual interests and lay the groundwork for meaningful, long-lasting connections.

Actionable Tips:

- **Practice the 80/20 Rule:** Listen 80% of the time and speak 20% to show genuine engagement.
- **Use Open-Ended Questions:** Encourage deeper dialogue with questions such as, "What excites you most about the current sustainable haircare trends?"
- **Take Mental Notes:** Remember key conversation points to support thoughtful follow-ups.
- **Find Common Ground:** Explore shared interests beyond hairstyling, like art, travel, or personal growth.

Networking Strategies for Introverted Stylists

If large gatherings drain your energy or you prefer one-on-one interactions, take heart—some of the most successful networkers in the beauty industry are introverts. They excel by prioritizing depth over breadth and leveraging environments that suit their natural strengths.

Energy Management for Networking Events

For introverts, strategic energy management is key. Instead of trying to match the stamina of extroverted peers, plan your day with built-in breaks to recharge.

- **Schedule Recovery Time:** Reserve quiet moments before and after events. For major conferences, consider booking a private space to retreat and recharge.
- **Set Realistic Connection Goals:** Aim for two or three meaningful conversations rather than trying to work the entire room.
- **Use the "Bookend" Technique:** Arrive early when the atmosphere is calmer, allowing natural connections to form.
- **Create Purposeful Breaks:** Step outside for fresh air or find a quiet corner periodically to prevent energy depletion.

Celebrity stylist Mark Townsend, who has worked with clients like Dakota Johnson and Elizabeth Olsen, has described himself as an introvert who had to develop specific strategies for industry events. "I volunteer at hair shows whenever possible," Townsend shared in a Professional Beauty Association interview. "Having a specific role gives me purpose and natural conversation starters, making networking feel more authentic and less overwhelming."[^7]

Leveraging Strengths in One-to-One Settings

Many introverted stylists excel in personalized, individual settings where they can truly listen and engage. Focus on smaller gatherings or coffee meetings to form deep, lasting connections.

- **Schedule Individual Coffee Meetings:** Invite potential mentors or collaborators for focused conversations in quieter settings.
- **Develop Thoughtful Follow-Up Habits:** Send personalized messages referencing specific conversation points to show genuine interest.
- **Create Value Through Curation:** Share carefully selected resources or opportunities that align with your contact's interests.

Hairstylist and educator Jayne Matthews, co-owner of Edo Salon in San Francisco, has built her reputation through deep expertise in dry cutting and precision bob techniques. While not naturally comfortable in large social settings, Matthews has described how focused education sessions allowed her to connect meaningfully with both students and industry leaders. "I found my network grew organically through teaching small groups," Matthews noted in an interview with American Salon. "Those intimate settings allowed for real connection and collaboration."

Digital Networking for Introverts

Online platforms offer a comfortable space for introverts to network without the draining energy of large in-person events. Virtual events, webinars, and social media groups create structured opportunities for deep connection.

- **Curate a Specialized Content Strategy:** Share thoughtful content that positions you as a go-to expert in your niche.
- **Engage in Industry Conversations:** Participate in online forums and discussions where you can contribute valuable insights.
- **Attend Virtual Education Events:** Small online workshops and masterclasses provide a focused environment for connection.

Remember, introversion is not a barrier but a different approach to networking—one that values quality over quantity.

The Cultivation Rhythm: Nurturing Long-Term Relationships

Building a network is just the beginning—the real art lies in nurturing these connections into lasting, mutually beneficial relationships. Think of your network as a garden: initial connections are seeds, and with regular care, they blossom into a thriving ecosystem.

Adopting a Service-Based Mindset

Shifting your focus from "What can I get?" to "How can I serve?" is crucial. This mindset builds trust and positions you as a valuable resource in your network.

Actionable Strategies:

- **Regular Check-Ins:** Reach out with genuine inquiries like "How's your week going?" to keep relationships active.
- **Offer Expertise Freely:** Share your insights and solutions without expecting anything in return.
- **Be a Connector:** Introduce people in your network who might benefit from knowing each other.

Identifying Opportunities for Mutual Elevation

Strong relationships thrive on mutual benefit. Look for opportunities where both you and your contacts can grow together.

Actionable Strategies:

- **Stay Informed:** Keep track of your contacts' goals and challenges to spot collaborative opportunities.
- **Propose Collaborative Projects:** Suggest joint initiatives like styled photoshoots or co-authored blog series.
- **Share Opportunities:** Pass along referrals or job leads that suit your contacts even if they're not a match for you.

Collaborating on Audacious Projects

Working together on bold projects solidifies relationships. Collaborations not only enhance your professional profile but also push you to innovate.

Actionable Strategies:

- **Initiate Industry Challenges:** Organize community events or sustainability-focused hair shows to bring peers together.
- **Cross-Disciplinary Projects:** Blend hairstyling with fields such as fashion design or visual arts to create unique offerings.
- **Co-Create Educational Content:** Develop online courses or workshops that highlight the strengths of all involved parties.

Case Study: The Power of Long-Term Relationship Cultivation

Micaela Erlanger, known primarily as a celebrity stylist, has built a reputation for her mentorship initiatives through programs like TJ Maxx's Styled by Runway incubator. As documented in her 2022 book and multiple industry interviews, Erlanger's approach to networking emphasizes mutual growth and long-term relationship cultivation.

Erlanger identifies three core principles in her networking approach:

1. **Consistent Value Exchange:** Regularly sharing insights and opportunities with her network, creating a reciprocal relationship ecosystem.

2. **Strategic Introductions:** Connecting professionals within her network based on complementary skills and goals.
3. **Collaborative Innovation:** Partnering on projects that showcase the strengths of multiple professionals, elevating everyone involved.

This approach has not only expanded her professional opportunities but has created a supportive community that continues to evolve. As Erlanger noted in a 2021 interview with Women's Wear Daily, "The stylists I mentored five years ago are now my peers and collaborators. That evolution is possible because we built relationships based on genuine support rather than transactional exchanges."

Consistency is key—set up a system to remain engaged:

- **Use Tools to Track Interactions:** Employ a CRM tool or even a simple spreadsheet to record key details.
- **Schedule Regular Networking Sessions:** Dedicate monthly time to follow up, share content, or explore new collaborations.
- **Celebrate Successes:** Acknowledge and congratulate your contacts' achievements to reinforce positive relationships.

By approaching your relationships with intentionality, generosity, and a spirit of collaboration, you're not just building a network—you're cultivating a community that supports and elevates your career.

Activating Virtual Networking Vectors

In today's digital age, networking extends well beyond in-person events. The virtual realm offers expansive opportunities for freelance hairstylists to connect, collaborate, and grow their professional network on a global scale.

Establishing a Strong Online Presence

Your digital footprint is often the first impression you make. A polished online presence can attract opportunities and establish you as a credible professional.

Actionable Strategies:

1. Optimize Social Media Profiles:

- **Choose the Right Platforms:** Use Instagram for visual storytelling, LinkedIn for professional connections, and consider emerging platforms like TikTok for creative expression.
- **Complete Your Profiles:** Ensure every profile is professional, up-to-date, and reflects your unique brand.
- **Use High-Quality Images:** Showcase your best work along with a professional headshot.

2. Create Valuable Content:

- **Maintain Regular Posting:** Develop and stick to a content calendar to keep your audience engaged.
- **Share a Mix of Content:** Post your portfolio, behind-the-scenes glimpses, and educational insights.
- **Use Relevant Hashtags:** Increase your content's visibility within your niche.

3. Engage Authentically:

- **Respond Promptly:** Engage with comments, messages, and mentions.
- **Participate in Conversations:** Join live chats and discussion groups in your industry.
- **Support Others:** Share and comment on peers' content in a genuine manner.

4. Develop a Professional Website:

- **Showcase Your Best Work:** Include a portfolio, list of services, and testimonials.
- **Add a Blog:** Share your expertise and boost search engine visibility with regular posts.
- **Ensure Mobile-Friendliness:** Guarantee that your site is easy to navigate on any device.

Engaging in Niche Communities and Forums

Online communities offer forums for in-depth discussions, knowledge sharing, and relationship building with like-minded professionals.

Actionable Strategies:

1. Identify Relevant Communities:

- **Research Forums and Groups:** Seek out hairstyling-specific platforms that match your interests.

2. Contribute Meaningfully:

- **Introduce Yourself:** Share your expertise when joining new communities.
- **Offer Advice:** Answer questions and provide insights based on your experience.
- **Share Resources:** Provide valuable tools and tips that help others succeed.

3. Initiate Discussions:

- **Start Threads:** Share topics you're passionate about and invite discussion.
- **Ask Questions:** Encourage others to share their expertise.

4. Organize Virtual Meet-ups:

- **Host Sessions:** Propose virtual coffee chats or skill-sharing events using video conferencing tools.
- **Use Video Platforms:** Facilitate face-to-face interactions online to build rapport.

Leveraging Social Media to Build and Maintain Relationships

Social media is invaluable for building and maintaining professional relationships. Platforms like Instagram, LinkedIn, and even TikTok allow you to showcase your work, engage with your audience, and foster a supportive community.

Practical Ways to Use Social Media:

- **Add Value with Your Content:** Post tutorials, hair care tips, and behind-the-scenes glimpses of your creative process.
- **Engage Authentically:** Interact by liking, commenting, and sharing posts in a genuine manner.
- **Utilize Live Features:** Use live streaming (via Instagram Lives or similar) to connect with your audience in real time.
- **Be Consistent:** Stick to a regular posting schedule to build and maintain trust.
- **Build a Community:** Encourage dialogue and make your followers feel part of your journey.

Success Story: Rural Stylist Building a Global Network

Kristin Ess, who built her haircare brand from a relatively remote location before becoming a major industry name, has shared how digital platforms transformed her networking capabilities. In interviews with beauty publications, Ess has described how consistent content creation and virtual relationship building allowed her to connect with industry professionals across the globe.^[8]

"When I started, I wasn't in a major beauty hub," Ess explained in a 2019 Beauty Independent interview. "Social media completely democratized access. I could share my work, connect with brands, and build relationships with other stylists regardless of location."

Ess's approach focused on creating highly valuable educational content that served her audience while showcasing her expertise. This strategy attracted not just followers but industry partners who recognized her unique perspective and technical skill.

"I realized that geographic barriers were dissolving," Ess noted. "By focusing on consistent, high-quality content and genuine engagement with my online community, I built relationships that eventually led to product development opportunities and global recognition."

Key Takeaways

- **Virtual Networking is Powerful:** It enables you to connect with a global audience and collaborate on projects regardless of location.
- **Craft an Authentic Online Persona:** Use social media to build trust and a strong personal brand.
- **Participate in Virtual Events and Communities:** Engage in online forums, webinars, and groups to expand your professional reach.
- **Consistency and Authenticity Matter:** They are the cornerstones of successful virtual networking.

- **Focus on Building Genuine Relationships:** Networking is about providing value and creating lasting connections.
- **Adapt Strategies to Your Market:** Tailor your networking approach to urban, suburban, or rural environments.
- **Honor Your Temperament:** Whether you are introverted or extroverted, leverage your natural strengths to connect effectively.

Endnotes

1. Mark Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties," *American Journal of Sociology* (1973), accessed March 8, 2025, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2776392>.
2. Charlotte Mensah, *Good Hair*, 2020, <https://www.goodhair-book.com>.
3. Ted Gibson, "Behind the Chair Interview: Ted Gibson on Networking," 2018, <https://behindthechair.com/interview/ted-gibson>.
4. Nielsen, "Global Trust in Advertising Report," 2021, accessed March 8, 2025, <https://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/report/2021/global-trust-in-advertising/>.
5. Essence, "Ursula Stephen on Networking at New York Fashion Week," 2019, <https://www.essence.com/style/ursula-stephen>; Modern Salon, "Nick Stenson's Suburban Networking Strategies," 2020, <https://www.modernsalon.com/article/2020/06/nick-stenson>.
6. Professional Beauty Association, "Interview with Mark Townsend on Introvert Networking," n.d., <https://www.probeauty.org>; American Salon, "Jayne Matthews on Small-Group Networking," n.d., <https://www.americansalon.com>.
7. Kristin Ess, "Beauty Independent Interview: Kristin Ess on Digital Networking," 2019, <https://www.beautyindependent.com/kristin-ess-interview>.

Chapter Quiz

1. The chapter distinguishes between transactional and authentic networking. What defines authentic professional networking?

- A) Collecting as many business cards as possible
- B) Only connecting with people who can immediately benefit your career
- C) Building genuine relationships based on mutual support, shared values, and long-term reciprocity
- D) Attending every industry event regardless of relevance

2. In the "Wedding That Changed Everything" anecdote, what networking principle led to long-term success?

- A) Undercutting competitors' prices
- B) Providing exceptional service and building authentic relationships that led to organic referrals
- C) Aggressive self-promotion
- D) Working for free to gain exposure

3. According to Lisa's Collaborative Success case study, what was the key benefit of strategic collaboration?

- A) Eliminating competition
- B) Creating win-win partnerships that expanded reach and enhanced credibility for all involved
- C) Keeping all knowledge proprietary
- D) Avoiding other hairstylists

4. When leveraging digital networking, the chapter recommends:

- A)** Posting constantly without engaging with others' content
- B)** Buying followers to appear more successful
- C)** Authentically engaging, providing value, and building meaningful online relationships
- D)** Only networking in person, never online

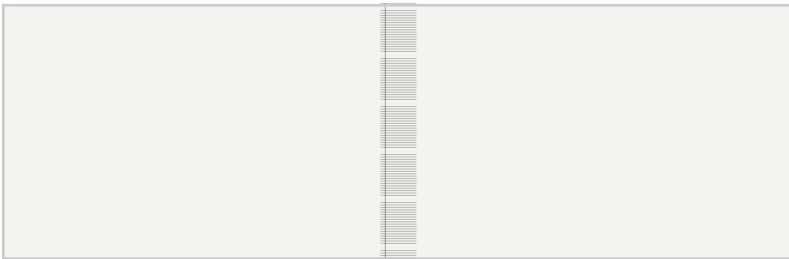
For answers, see the Quiz Key in the backmatter.

Chapter Worksheet

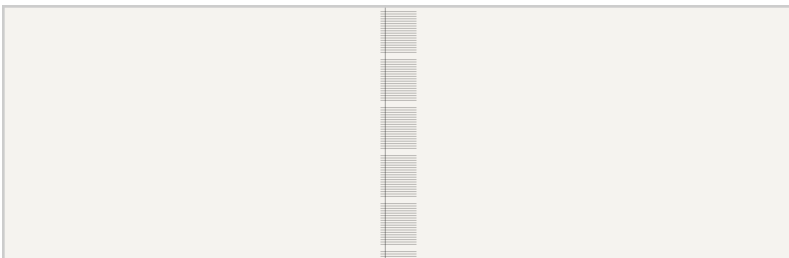
Reflection Questions:

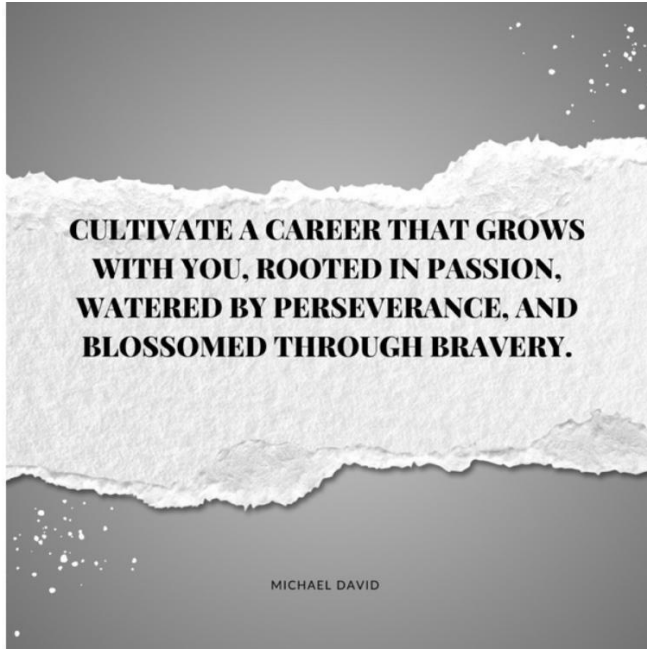
Take time to consider how this chapter's concepts apply to your own experience and practice.

1. **Map your current professional network: List mentors, peers, industry contacts, and collaborators. Identify gaps where strategic connections could support your goals.**



2. **Define your networking goals for the next 6 months. What types of relationships would most support your current career stage (e.g., mentorship, peer support, client referral partners)?**





Optional caption for the closing image