

Title: My Journey in Security: Professional Networking

As a follow-up to my article on communications, I thought I'll write on how professional networking helped me grow in my career in security.

According to Oxford Languages, the definition of networking is **the action or process of interacting with others to exchange information and develop professional or social contacts.**

Now **where do we start our professional networking?** I remember when I first started in the profession, I joined a Security Convenor meeting under The Free Industrial Zone Penang Companies Association or better known as FREPENCA.

As the 'new kid on the block', I would say that I felt overwhelmed surrounded by many very experienced security practitioners. At these meetings, we discussed mainly about security matters in the Free Industrial Zone (FIZ) in Penang and generally about the security situation in Malaysia.

More importantly, over the years I have made good friends many of whom are my seniors and mentors, and we have maintained good working relationships till today. This was my first exposure to a formal networking environment.

Over the years as I grew in my career, I joined many other security associations or organisations, namely the Penang Security Practitioners Organizations (PENSEC), Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC), Transported Asset Protection Association (TAPA), Malaysia Crime Prevention Foundation (MCPF), DRI International and ASIS International.

These esteemed associations and organisations helped me connect with many security practitioners not just in Malaysia or Asia Pacific but also globally as well.

It is through associations or organisations like these, I was also able attend conferences, seminars' webinars, meetings, and gatherings where I can **learn and gain knowledge** and at the same time meet new people and more importantly expand my network.

So, **how do we start to connect or network with new people?** The word 'intentional' comes to my mind.

For example, in a conference, we need to intentionally seek out new people whom we have never met before or wish to connect with. I understand it is always easier to mingle and speak to people we already know but we need to take every opportunity to establish new contacts.

I recall, in an OSAC Asia Pacific conference, I 'tagged team' with a friend and we intentionally broke ice to meet new people during the networking session.

Putting faces to names. During a TAPA Asia conference, I intentionally went up to a few people whom I wanted to connect with because of work and with some whom I have interacted before through emails but haven't got the chance to meet face to face.

A point to note, certain conferences provide the list of attendees and speakers. You may start looking through the lists and plan who you want to connect and network with.

In fact, in another regional conference, a CSO of my customer made contact with me when he saw my name on the list. Imagine this, he was from United States, I was from Malaysia and the conference was in Singapore. I was so thrilled to be able to meet up finally with him in person as we worked closely on several critical issues over the years.

So, you made some good contacts but how do you stay in touch?

“Staying in touch with contacts is as important as getting them in the first place”,
Harvey MacKay

In today’s world, staying in touch has never been easier with social media platforms like LinkedIn, WhatsApp, and Telegram.

I would be honest to admit that like most people, I wasn’t disciplined enough to take out all the name cards I’ve collected during my networking sessions and reconnect with them through LinkedIn. I am, however getting better at it now.

Most associations and organisations will have a WhatsApp or Telegram group which you can also be a part of. At the same time, you can ‘e-meet’ new people as they join the groups.

This is particularly important in this new normal where we are unable to really meet up physically in large settings like a conference or seminars.

Also, to share, in a recent virtual conference which I joined, there was an online networking platform which we could use to connect with the participants and the speakers. Again, keyword being, intentional.

Why do we need to network? I left this to the last because I think this is the most important aspect of professional networking. Remember: No man is an island. You may have heard of this but what does it really mean?

Recently a regional security advisor reached out to me and asked for my assistance on an initiative he was working on and within the day we managed to source a contact who was able to help him.

Also, I lost count the number of times I reached out to my network to ask about the local security situation in their country, and likewise they have called me to check on the local situation here.

At times, we also share what our organisations are doing during a crisis or post-crisis and compare notes. This type of information exchange, sharing of best practices and mutual assistance is priceless.

Not to mention that this has helped me tremendously in my job to **make good and sound decisions** and provide the right counsel to my stakeholders and business partners. Remember, for it to work, it has to be a two-way traffic.

I hope that with my sharing, you have seen how professional networking can help in one's career. I want to encourage you to start building your professional network especially if you are just starting out. Do not wait any longer as you have everything to gain and nothing to lose.

Again, the keyword here is 'intentional' which means you must make a conscious decision and effort to act on it (take action), to make professional networking a goal in your career and personal growth.

Thank you for reading. If you have any feedback, questions, or comments, please email me at limkokhooi@gmail.com.

Victor Lim Kok Hooi CPP, CBCP, CRMP

Security leader with 17 years of corporate security and physical security experience in global security risk management and is currently working in a Fortune 500 company.