

# 30 Smart Career Moves You Should Make By 30

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For many people, their 20s can be a rich time for personal self-discovery — a period when you’re more willing to take risks and maybe even make mistakes along the way.

But they can also be some of the most formative years for another important facet of life: your career.

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When you graduate, you may have an idea of what you want to be when you “grow up,” but you may not have an idea of just how to get there. And while hindsight is 20/20, you don’t want to leave everything to chance — especially if it affects your future earning power.

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So we tapped a plethora of career experts and coaches to get their opinions on the top dos — and don’ts — for the younger generation of career builders. From networking to job-hunting

and then wowing your boss once you land the gig, here are 30 savvy moves you should make at each stage of your career before you hit 30.

## Top Networking Moves for 20-Somethings

**1. Attend as many events as possible.** “There’s an unstated expectation that you come to networking events to support people. As a result, there are many people who are more than willing to help perfect strangers find a job, exchange contacts or give meaningful advice,” says Michael Price, author of *What Next? The Millennial’s Guide to Surviving and Thriving in the Real World*. “But the key is to meet those people face-to-face.” In other words, get off social media and start making real, human connections because no one can tell how charming you are over email.

**2. Set networking goals.** “Before attending any event, you should have a clear purpose of why you’re going,” says Ricardo Trigueiro, director of international marketing for image and brand development firm CHUVA group. “Is it to meet as many people as possible to build your contact list? Or is it to meet a particular person?” Then make sure to accomplish your goal before the event is over.

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**3. Order business cards.** It may seem old school, but it’s still simpler to hand people a card as opposed to hovering over them as they input your info into a cell phone. Plus, you can’t hand your résumé to everyone you meet, but you can leave a card behind without seeming overbearing, adds Kathy Condon, author of [“Face-to-Face Networking: It’s All About Communication.”](#) Exchanging cards with an important contact will then allow you to follow up with a résumé later.

If you don’t have an existing business card, you can create a simple one for yourself that includes your name, address, phone number and email, along with links to any relevant business sites, [like a LinkedIn account](#) or a personal website that displays your work or portfolio. A stack of cards won’t cost much, either. Online print shops, like [Vistaprint](#) and [Moo](#), offer options in the \$10 to \$25 range.

**4. Use a contacts manager app.** The new people you meet can easily get lost amid the hundreds of contacts you log into your email address book and various social networking accounts. But using apps like [Rapportive](#) or [Connect6<sup>o</sup> PeopleDiscovery](#) can help you note identifying details — e.g., the C.E.O. that loves Coldplay — to jog your memory, and give you something to chat about the next time you meet.

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**5. Craft the perfect reply to “What do you do?”** It may sound like a no-brainer, but you want to tell someone about your job in a way that encourages conversation as opposed to shutting it down, says Trigueiro. If you’re Trigueiro, the obvious answer for what he does is: “I am an image consultant.” But he prefers something more like: “I help professionals enhance their visibility, image and performance in the workplace.” The latter is a better way to pique curiosity and open a dialogue.

**6. Follow up — and mean it.** “When you meet people, let them know how you plan to follow up, either by connecting on LinkedIn, emailing or calling about scheduling a lunch,” says Trigueiro, adding that you should then do what you promise in a timely manner. “Lack of follow-up is not good business.”

### **Top Job-Hunting Moves for 20-Somethings**

**7. Delete eyebrow-raising online pics.** Employers are likely to check out social media when researching prospective candidates, so your online presence on every account — whether that’s Twitter, Instagram or Facebook — should be professional, says Parker Geiger, C.E.O. of the CHUVA group. “That means no photos showing you drinking with friends on the beach or couple shots.”

If you can’t quite bring yourself to delete those old spring break albums, at least make sure your privacy settings are at their tightest. That said, once something is on the Internet, there are no guarantees that those “It’s all in good fun” photos won’t surface somehow.

**8. Create résumé “extensions.”** “If you want to stand out from the competition, listing your extracurricular activities on a piece of paper is no longer enough,” Geiger says. For example, adding your Habitat for Humanity volunteer work to your résumé doesn’t bring the experience to life. Instead, post pictures of yourself working on the house on LinkedIn or brief videos of you working with other volunteers on YouTube. You can also add these as links within your résumé in Word, PDF format, or on a personal career website.

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**9. Play the job field.** While it’s tempting to focus on one cool company you’re dying to get into, “be strategic and interview with numerous companies at the same time,” says Matt Mickiewicz, C.E.O. and co-founder of job-placement start-up Hired.

This also means not accepting the first offer that comes along. In fact, juggling numerous opportunities is the best way to make yourself more appealing to hiring managers. “Then you can be upfront about the fact that you have choices,” Mickiewicz says, “because once a company has made you an offer, the last thing it wants is to see you walk out the door.”

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## Top Interviewing Moves for 20-Somethings

**10. Kill the receptionist with kindness.** “That person probably has more pull in the office than you think,” says Rosalinda Randall, author of *Don't Burp in the Boardroom: Your Guide to Handling Uncommonly Common Workplace Dilemmas*. Being rude to your future bosses' gatekeepers might burn bridges — and your chances at getting the gig.

**11. Come armed with questions.** “The key to interviewing and landing a job is to interview the interviewer,” says Price. After all, you're on as much of a fact-finding mission as they are, so gather as many clues about the company's culture and job expectations as possible. “Strong questions also let the interviewer know how you think and how intellectual you are,” Price says. “Think of it as a game of mental chess. They may not admit it, but they secretly want you to stump them.”

**12. Master the handshake.** Here's a hint: It shouldn't be weak and clammy. “Do not underestimate the importance of a firm, dry, eyeball-to-eyeball handshake,” says Karen Elizaga, an executive coach and author of *Find Your Sweet Spot: A Guide to Personal and Professional Excellence*. “I hear from so many top executives that a less-than-stellar handshake makes them nuts.”

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## Top Skill-Building Moves for 20-Somethings

**13. Sell something.** Even if you never go into selling full-time, holding a sales position at some point in your career can teach you valuable life lessons. Kate McKeon, C.E.O. of Prepwise, a test-prep and career-coaching firm, even suggests trying out a commission-only job to get the full experience. “It's brutal to get rejected over and over, but you'll learn to persevere — and you'll figure out how to be successful,” McKeon says.

Besides, whether or not you realize it, you're actually selling all the time. “You have to sell yourself to companies to get jobs — and peers and bosses to earn their respect and promotions,” she says. “Selling is all around us.”

**14. Take an improv class.** “It can develop your ability to listen more carefully, build on the ideas of others, solve problems creatively and get comfortable with risk — and even failure,” says Milo Shapiro, author of *Public Speaking: Get A's, Not Zzzzzz's!* “My improv years did as much to help me with my corporate job as my college training,” Shapiro says.

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**15. Mind your (table) manners.** “Many meetings take place over fine lunches and dinners, so it’s important to know the basics,” Elizaga says. Learn how to order graciously, which fork and knife to use, and bread plate etiquette. “Your comfort with the basics will ease nerves, as well as make you look polished,” she says. “If you don’t have these skills, it will stick out — and possibly be a negative in terms of interfacing with clients or employers.”

**16. Learn basic HTML.** Millennials get a lot of credit for being “digital natives,” but knowing merely how to browse the web, send email, use Twitter and upload videos doesn’t really mean much these days, says Aaron Black, assistant professor of management and business administration at Missouri Baptist University. “You don’t have to know how to write software or create a website from HTML, but you need to know enough to understand how programming works so you’re ahead of the curve.”

**17. Get out of the country.** Spending time abroad — even if it’s just personal travels — is good experience to have in an increasingly global economy. “When I speak to my 30-something friends, nearly all of them say they wish they had traveled before launching their professional careers,” says Chaz Pitts-Kyser, author of *Careeranista: The Woman’s Guide to Success After College*. “Through travel, you can gain an amazingly broad view of the world — and maybe even find new career opportunities.”

**18. Adopt a cause you believe in.** “[Volunteering] can help show trust and value to potential employers,” says Geiger, adding that it illustrates you care about something deeper than the daily grind. But don’t just team up with a nonprofit to meet people or because it looks good on your résumé. “Join one to help others first,” he says, “and make connections second.”

**19. Be willing to invest in yourself.** Your career is your biggest asset, so it will require some financial investment, says Eddy Ricci Jr., author of *The Growth Game: A Millennial’s Guide to Professional Development*. “Don’t be afraid to invest in a library of self-help career books, lunches and dinners with influential people, and ongoing courses to build a career bedrock.”

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## **Top On-the-Job Moves for 20-Somethings**

**20. Steer clear of office gossip.** This is especially sage advice during the first six months at a new job, says Louise Jackson, a career coach in Ann Arbor, Mich. “Be quick to work hard, but slow to form alliances with co-workers,” she says. “Watch and listen for how stakes fall politically — the last thing you need is to be aligned with someone who is on their way out.”

**21. Laugh at the boss's jokes.** Along those same political lines, you're not going to love everyone you work with — and you'll just have to deal. Of course, you don't want to be the office kiss-up, "but bosses like to have their egos stroked," says Dr. Lorenzo G. Flores, author of "[Executive Career Advancement: How to Understand the Politics of Promotion](#)." "Plus, laughing at jokes is great for bonding and relationship-building."

**22. Make friends in high places.** Sure, senior executives can seem intimidating if you're just starting out, but they're the ones you can learn the most from, says Fred Cook, author of "[Improvise: Unconventional Career Advice from an Unlikely CEO](#)." "Stalk them in the hallways — without being creepy — seek them out at events, ask them smart questions, and never be afraid to ask for their help." You never know when that high-powered exec might be willing to act as a mentor or [sponsor](#).

**23. Know when to keep quiet.** We hate to break it to you, but you don't know everything — and you shouldn't be quick to yammer away at the wrong time. If you're in a meeting, take notes for questions you can raise later. If you're in a conversation, listen for the meaning between the words, and don't be too quick to interrupt.

"There are times to assert your opinions, and times when it's better to shut up," Cook says. "People who are just starting their careers need to learn everything they can about their business, their clients and their co-workers. And when you're talking, you don't learn anything."

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**24. Test your comfort zone.** "Volunteer for the project that you don't think you can do," Pierce says. "With your back against the wall, you'll discover creative ways of accomplishing your goals and force yourself to learn a lot with limited time." Plus, succeeding against the odds will make others take note of your tenacity, ingenuity and drive — and that may earn you a much-deserved promotion.

**25. Go ahead — break bad news to your boss.** It may be tempting to hide in your cubicle to avoid the aftermath of a mistake in the workplace, but it rarely works out in your favor. Proactiveness and communication are key for career success, says Elene Cafasso, executive coach for Enerpace, Inc. Bottom line: Knowing how to deal with the good and the bad is a sign of maturity.

**26. Keep an outside-work-hours side job.** Not everyone can land their dream position at 22, so it's great to [keep your passions alive through side gigs](#) — whether they're hobbies that could eventually make money or income-generating businesses right off the bat. "Considering young professionals can likely count on having periods of unemployment throughout their

careers, having a part-time gig to fall back on is crucial,” says Pitts-Kyser. Bonus: You might even learn a skill or two that you can translate into your 9-to-5 job.

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## Top Salary-Boosting Moves for 20-Somethings

**27. Research your income bracket.** “Before you ever provide your salary expectations or accept a job offer, do your homework to make sure you’re not asking for too much or too little,” Price says, adding that you can do this by checking out sites like [Salary.com](#) or [Payscale.com](#). “These are the same services that employers use to determine your salary.”

**28. Speak up.** The most important thing you can do as you’re climbing the career ladder is to learn how to advocate for yourself, says Elizaga, whether you want to ask for a raise or a promotion, or join a team on an important project. “The more you practice or actually do these asks early on, the more comfortable you’ll get — and the more you’ll be able to earn for yourself over time,” she says. “You’ll [advocate for yourself] numerous times in your career, so it’s best to get accustomed to it now.”

**29. Tout your accomplishments.** “If you want a raise or promotion, you need to show your boss why you deserve it,” says Barry Maher, author of “[Filling the Glass: The Skeptic’s Guide to Positive Thinking in Business](#).” “If you can assign a dollar value for how much the accomplishments on that list have earned or saved the company — even better.” Numbers don’t lie.

**30. Write yourself a “future” acceptance letter and salary offer.** “Focusing on [that dream offer] daily will help you attract what you want,” says Stacia Pierce, a life coach and the C.E.O. of Ultimate Lifestyle Enterprises. Hey, if visualizing your goals worked for Hollywood funny man [Jim Carrey](#), why can’t it work for you?