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INSIGHT

Building Your Network in FM



Introduction

Facilities management is a smaller world than it looks. The same names turn up across client sites, supplier meetings, committees and job moves. A reputation for being reliable, straight and helpful travels faster than any CV, and it travels whether you are managing it or not.

Yet many capable FM professionals treat networking as something to do only when redundancy looms or a contract ends. They then discover that the people they would like to call have not heard from them in three years, and that an awkward request for help lands badly. That is the wrong way round. A network is built in the quiet years so that it works in the loud ones.

It is also easy to dismiss networking as something for extroverts with business cards. It is not. The most effective networkers in this sector are often the ones who simply answer questions well, introduce people who should know each other, and follow up. Those habits can be learned by anyone, including a technical manager who would rather be on a plant room walk than at a drinks reception.

This guide is written for FM and estates professionals at every level. It shows you how to map the network you already have, where to find more of the right people, how to approach them, how to give value first, and how to keep it all alive without it becoming a second job. It ends with a checklist you can start on this week.

Why your network matters more in FM than most sectors

FM is a people-and-trust business. Clients judge an FM leader by how problems are handled, and the evidence for that is mostly held in other people's heads: the contractor who saw you stay calm during a failure, the facilities director who watched you rebuild a service, the colleague who covered for you and remembers how you responded.

That is why roles move by reputation so often. A hiring manager with a gap will ask someone they trust who they would recommend. The answer they receive is the shortcut that no advert can match. If your name comes up unprompted, you have an advantage that cannot be bought.

- It widens what you hear: openings, restructures and new contracts often circulate informally before they are advertised.
- It speeds up problem solving: a call to someone who has faced the same compliance or contractor issue saves weeks.
- It protects you: when a role ends, a warm network turns a crisis into a conversation.
- It raises your standing: being known for good judgement is part of how you get asked into bigger rooms.

The test of a good network is simple. If you lost your job on Monday, how many people would you be comfortable ringing on Tuesday, and how many of them would pick up? If the answer is fewer than five, you have work to do, and this guide is for you.

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Candour saves everyone time



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Map the network you already have

Most people underestimate what they hold. Before you go looking for new contacts, write down everyone you could reasonably contact today. Use your phone, your email and LinkedIn as prompts, and be generous: former colleagues, contractors, consultants, clients, tenants, landlords, trainers, auditors and people you met on a course.

Then sort them into four circles. This turns a vague list into a plan.

- Peers: people at your level in other organisations, who share problems and honest opinions.
- Seniors: directors and heads of function who could advise, sponsor or hire you.
- Supply chain: contractors, consultants and suppliers, who see many sites and hear a great deal.
- Outside: people from other sectors, property, finance, HR and construction, who widen your view of how others see FM.

Look at where the gaps are. A common pattern is a thick circle of peers inside one employer and almost nothing in the other three. That is a network that disappears with your job. Another common pattern is plenty of supply chain contacts and few seniors, which limits the advice you get about stepping up.

Pick one circle to strengthen first. Do not try to fix all four at once. Setting a target of two meaningful conversations a month in the thinnest circle is enough to change the picture within a year.

Where FM people actually meet

You do not need to be everywhere. You need to be somewhere, regularly. A person seen four times at the same small event becomes a familiar face. A person who attends one huge exhibition and never returns becomes a blur.

Choose two or three places from the list below and commit to them for a year.

- Professional body activity: the Institute of Workplace and Facilities Management runs regional and special interest groups, and these suit people who prefer smaller rooms.
- Supplier and client events: site tours, product briefings and breakfast sessions are often free and attract the people who actually run buildings.
- Your own building: tenant forums, landlord meetings and other occupiers on a shared estate are a source of peers you walk past every week.
- Courses and qualifications: classmates on safety, energy or management programmes tend to stay in touch for years.
- Online communities: sector groups and discussion threads are useful if you contribute rather than lurk.

A decision test: after any event, ask yourself whether you would recognise three people there by sight next time. If not, you were a visitor, not a member. Go back, or choose a different room.

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It starts with a good first call



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Make LinkedIn work without living on it

For most FM professionals, LinkedIn is the one platform that matters. Treat it as a professional noticeboard, not a diary. Three small habits do most of the work.

First, a clear profile. Your headline should say what you do and the kind of buildings or services you handle, not just a job title. Your summary should explain scope in plain terms: sites, services, team size, contractors managed, and the outcomes you are proud of. Avoid vague claims about passion and leadership.

- Comment well on other people's posts: a thoughtful two-line reply to a facilities director's post is seen by their whole network.
- Share something you learned: a lesson from a failed audit, a handover that went well, a tip on contractor management. Specifics beat slogans.
- Congratulate and recognise: new roles, certifications and anniversaries are easy, warm reasons to be in touch.
- Keep client confidentiality: never post anything that identifies a site, tenant or incident without permission.

Posting is optional. Commenting is not, if you want to be seen. Fifteen minutes, three times a week, is plenty. Also set your profile so recruiters and employers can reach you, and check what a stranger would see before they contact you.

When you are asked to speak, even for ten minutes at a small group, say yes if you can. Sharing a real example of a project you ran, with what went wrong as well as what went right, gets you remembered far more reliably than a polite introduction ever will.

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Starting conversations without it feeling forced

The hardest part of networking is the first message. It gets easier when you stop trying to impress and start trying to be specific. People respond to a clear reason for contact and a small, easy request.

Here are three scripts that work. Adapt the wording so it sounds like you.

- After meeting someone: Good to meet you at the tenant forum on Thursday. Your point about planned maintenance backlogs stayed with me. If you are open to it, I would value ten minutes on how you structured yours.
- Reconnecting with an old contact: It has been a while. I saw you have moved to a new estate, congratulations. I am interested in how the multi-site model is working for you, if you ever have a coffee free.
- Approaching someone more senior: I have followed your posts on compliance governance. I am working towards a head of function role and would value one piece of advice on what you wish you had known at my stage.

Notice what is missing: no request for a job, no long life story, no attachment. Ask for advice, not favours. Advice is flattering to give and cheap to offer, and it opens the relationship. If the person offers more, accept gracefully. If they do not reply, leave it a few weeks, follow up once, and move on without resentment.

Give first, and be specific about it

Networks reward generosity, but generosity has to be concrete. Saying you are always happy to help changes nothing. Doing one useful thing for someone does.

FM professionals have plenty to give that they do not realise is valuable.

- Introductions: connecting two people who should know each other costs you a two-line email and builds goodwill with both.
- Knowledge: a template, a checklist, a handover format or a lessons-learned note that saved you time will save someone else time.
- Insight: telling a peer which contractor performed well, or which software was a mistake, is worth more than any sales brochure.
- Time: offering to sit on a panel, mentor a junior, or take a site visit for a newcomer builds a name quickly.
- Referrals: if you hear of a role that suits someone you know, tell them, even if you are not involved in the hiring.

Keep it honest. Do not pass on a name you would not stand behind, and do not share anything confidential to look helpful. Your credibility is the asset, and one careless recommendation can spend years of it.

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Say what you can deliver, then deliver it



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Find mentors and sponsors, and know the difference

A mentor gives advice. A sponsor uses their standing to put your name forward. You need both, and they are rarely the same person.

Mentors are easier to find. Look for someone two or three steps ahead in a role you want, preferably in a different organisation, so the advice is not tangled up with your own employer's politics. Ask for a defined, limited commitment: a conversation every couple of months for a year, with a clear topic each time. Come prepared with a question, not a vague wish to be guided.

- Be specific about what you want help with: a step-up, a move into a new sector, handling a difficult stakeholder.
- Report back: tell them what you did with their advice. People keep mentoring those who visibly use it.
- Choose differences: a mentor from a different background to yours will challenge you more than a copy of yourself.

Sponsors are earned, not requested. A senior person starts speaking for you when you have consistently delivered, communicated well and made them look good. You can help the process by making your results visible to them, and by being clear about where you want to go. Do not ask a near-stranger to be your sponsor. Ask for their view on your plan, and let the relationship grow from there.

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Read the room before the CV



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Keep it warm with a simple rhythm

A network decays quietly. Most people lose contact not through disagreement but through busyness. A light system prevents that without turning it into admin.

Keep a simple list, in a spreadsheet or notes app, of the thirty or so people who matter most. Next to each name, note when you last spoke and one personal or professional detail worth remembering. Then set a rhythm.

- Weekly: send one short message to someone on the list, such as an article they might like or a congratulations.
- Monthly: have one real conversation, by phone or in person, with someone from your thinnest circle.
- Quarterly: review the list, remove no one out of pride, and add the three most useful new people you met.
- Annually: have a proper catch-up with each of your closest contacts, even if you have nothing to ask for.

The point is consistency, not volume. A message that says I saw this and thought of you takes thirty seconds, and it is remembered. Ignore the guilt of long gaps. Reaching out after two years is better than staying silent for three.

Using recruiters as part of your network

A good specialist recruiter is a useful node in your network, but they are not a substitute for building it. They see many employers, know which teams are changing, and can tell you how your profile reads to the market.

Treat the relationship as a two-way one. Be clear about what you want and what you would never consider. Be honest about your salary expectations and your notice period. Respond promptly even if you are not interested, because a polite no keeps the door open for the right call later.

- Share your direction, not just your CV: a recruiter can only help if they know what a good move looks like for you.
- Offer referrals: if you cannot take a role yourself, naming a colleague who might is a real favour.
- Ask for market feedback: how is your experience perceived, which gaps matter, and which sectors value your background.
- Respect confidentiality: never ask a recruiter to reveal who else is being considered.

Recruiters are one source among several. Keep your direct network strong so that you are never dependent on a single route to the next role.

Do not forget to thank people. When someone gives you advice or an introduction, tell them what came of it a few weeks later. It closes the loop, shows respect for their time, and makes them far more willing to help you again. In a sector this size, gratitude is one of the cheapest and most effective reputation tools you have.

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Leadership in facilities is a serious job



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Common mistakes, and how to avoid them

Most networking failures are not dramatic. They are small habits that quietly undermine goodwill.

Watch for these.

- Only appearing when you want something: people notice, and they remember.
- Collecting contacts without conversations: a thousand connections you have never spoken to is not a network.
- Badmouthing a former employer or colleague: the sector is small and the story will travel.
- Being vague: if people do not know what you want, they cannot help.
- Never following up: the conversation is the start. The follow-up is where the relationship is made.
- Forgetting your own team: your direct reports, peers and even your juniors are future colleagues, clients and employers.

A final test for any contact you make: would you be happy for them to describe how you behaved to a future employer? If yes, carry on. If not, change course now.

One more point on mindset. Do not wait for a perfect moment to introduce yourself. Most people are pleased to be asked a sensible question about their work, and far fewer are put off by an approach than you fear. If you are shy, set yourself a small, fixed task: speak to one new person at each event, ask them what they are working on, and listen properly. That alone puts you ahead of most of the room.

Your network-building checklist

- [ ] Write down everyone you could contact today and sort them into peers, seniors, supply chain and outside.
- [ ] Identify your thinnest circle and set a target of two real conversations a month there.
- [ ] Choose two or three places to show up regularly for a full year.
- [ ] Update your LinkedIn headline and summary so they describe scope and outcomes, not just a job title.
- [ ] Comment thoughtfully on three posts a week from people you want to know.
- [ ] Send three short, specific messages this week to people you have not spoken to for a year.
- [ ] Offer one concrete piece of help to someone: an introduction, a template or a recommendation.
- [ ] Find one mentor and agree a defined, limited commitment with a clear first topic.
- [ ] Start a simple list of your thirty most important contacts with the date you last spoke.
- [ ] Share your direction honestly with one or two specialist recruiters and ask for market feedback.

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The interview is a two-way assessment



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Next steps

Networking in FM is not about being outgoing. It is about being reliable, curious and useful, repeatedly, in front of the right people. Start small, stay consistent, and treat every conversation as the start of a relationship rather than a transaction.

A practical next step: today, write down five people you have not spoken to for over a year, and send one of them a short message that gives something before it asks for anything. Maxwell Stephens is a specialist Facilities Management recruitment consultancy, and a confidential conversation about your direction is one more way to widen your view of the market.

A FINE POSITION TO BE IN

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