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#### EPISODE 241: INGA CARBONI – NETWORKING STRATEGICALLY

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##### Inga Carboni

It's everywhere around you when you start to think strategically about how can I put myself in an environment where I'm likely to meet the kind of people that will enrich me and that I can have something to offer as well.

##### Female Voice

From William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. This is Leadership & Business, produced by the William & Mary School of Business and its MBA program. Offered in four formats: the full-time, the part-time, the online, and executive MBA. For more information, visit [wm.edu](http://wm.edu).

##### Ken White

Welcome to Leadership & Business, the podcast that brings you the latest and best thinking from today's business leaders from across the world. Sharing strategies, information, and insight that help you become a more effective leader, communicator, and professional. I'm your host, Ken White. Thanks for listening. Networking. Love it or hate it, networking is required if you're looking to land a new job in this unusual employment market or if you want to grow and progress in your career. Many people feel somewhat uncomfortable networking, and if that describes you, it might be time to examine the approach you take to networking. Inga Carboni is a professor of management at the William & Mary School of Business. An author and award-winning instructor, she's an expert in strategic networking. She joins us on the podcast to define strategic networking and how you can network effectively inside and outside your organization. Here's our conversation with Professor Inga Carboni.

##### Ken White

Well, Inga, thanks very much for sharing your time. It's nice to see you.

##### Inga Carboni

Thanks. I'm glad to be here.

##### Ken White

And we're recording this during finals. What does that mean for a professor, for our listeners? What's this time of the year like?

## Inga Carboni

Well, designing an exam takes longer than you'd think, and we hate grading just as much as students hate studying for exams. So it is a very mixed emotion time for sure.

## Ken White

I bet. So, one of your areas of expertise is strategic networking. And you and I have talked about this before, and it's such a perfect time to discuss this now with the job market the way it is and new grads looking for work. How do you define strategic networking?

## Inga Carboni

Well, I'll tell you what it's not. I'll start out with that. Most of the time, when people are told, you got to start networking. You got to get out there. People translate it as, well, I got to meet more people. I got to get more contacts. I got to meet and get out there and talk and all that kind of stuff. To an extent, that can be useful. But you can't handle just meeting more people. You can't just handle adding dozens of people to your contact list. What you want are people that are going to be useful and enriching to you in multiple ways. So strategic networking is about understanding what kind of people you want in your network and then positioning yourself in target-rich environments to find those people. So it's a very thoughtful, intentional way of going about building relationships in the professional context.

## Ken White

Is that a one-way street or a two-way street?

## Inga Carboni

It's one way in that it's your intention, but it's two-way in that a lot of times when people first start hearing the term networking, it's when they need a job, or they need something, and they have to get something, and they're like, I got to go out there and network. That's all about what can I get, what can I take from people. It's really not a very effective mindset when you're meeting with people because people pick up on that pretty quick, and nobody wants to feel that they're being manipulated or used to get something. It's not a great feeling to feel it's like you're manipulating people to get something that you want. So, really, what you're trying to do is not network; you're building relationships. Relationships are two-way. I know I hear my undergraduates say all the time, oh, but I've got nothing to offer. I'm just a low-league undergraduate. Well, you've got interest, you've got effort, you've got time, you've got perspective, you've probably got technology savvy. You may have a connection to an institution like your alma mater that matters a lot to somebody. You've got a lot more to offer than you might think. That two-way relationship can be enriching for both people. That's really the goal because those are the kinds of relationships that will sustain you through a

career. These are not things you should do periodically when you suddenly get laid off. These are a constant hum and part of your work and professional life.

### **Ken White**

Start as soon as you start your career?

### **Inga Carboni**

Yeah, and you probably already have. I always think about the undergraduate student who told me that they didn't have a network and what are they going to do. As I got talking to this student, I found out that he was very involved with his fraternity. He was arranging with alums for weekend activities and for homecoming and had worked on all these committees and stuff. I was like, that's your network. These are the people who know you, who see the genuine side of you and what you can do. These are the people that you care about, too. This is a great network. You probably already have a network in place. You just don't think of it that way.

### **Ken White**

I hear a lot of professionals say, but I'm an introvert. I really can't do this. What advice do you have? Because I think most of us are introverts, actually.

### **Inga Carboni**

Well, I completely empathize with that. I'm an introvert. Probably every professor you've ever had is an introvert. They might seem on stage, but then they have to go into a dark room afterwards and recoup. So what we know from the research is that it doesn't matter the quantity of people that you're connected to. What matters is the quality. Who's going to pick up the phone and make a call on your behalf or a text on your behalf and put in a good word for you? Those are the people that you want in your network to consider as a professional relationship. And introverts are actually really good at that. They are good at building relationships. They ask questions, they listen. So they're not going to have the size of a network that an extroverted person sort of naturally has, but they will have quality relationships. And that's the important thing. So, I actually think they're at an advantage when it comes to networking.

### **Ken White**

How does, say, someone joins a new organization, how do they attempt to create that network within the organization?

### **Inga Carboni**

That's really important because the research tells us that it can be 5-6 years before someone gets pulled into the network effectively in a new organization if they're not demonstrating some intentionality. You may not be there. The job, you can only be there

for two years. I've seen managers do this really well. When they create a book, I remember one top-performing leader of many, many teams would put together eight pages worth of contacts. The person who was reporting to them was supposed to take a look at this. They said, here's a person I think you should talk to. Here's their role. I can make the introduction if you want. I want you to talk to this person, find out how their role intersects with you and how your contributions reinforce each other. Then you're going to come back, and we're going to talk about in a meeting. That was a very intentional act that the manager took. There's just not a lot of managers out there like that, but it was, I thought, incredibly insightful, and she was known for being a great team lead. That's the kind of thing you have to think about. One way to do that is look to see which of the managers, the people that you're working with, seem particularly well connected, seem like they have already figured that out. Then, connect with them and take their lead in trying to understand how the network of relationships works. Who are the opinion leaders? Whose voices carry the most weight? Pay attention to those dynamics and understand that those are really important. And then you put yourself in an environment where you're interacting with these people. Volunteer for committees that they serve on. What I meant by a target-rich environment is when you put yourself in situations where you're likely to interact with and meet the kind of people that you want in your network. And if the kind of people you want in your network are well-connected, put yourself in target-rich situations. Volunteer for those committees, offer to give a brown bag, sit in on brown bags. When you start looking, and you start thinking strategically, there's lots of opportunities.

### **Ken White**

I remember one job I landed in one of... My boss actually said, You must go talk to this individual. That was sort of the gatekeeper, right? If this person blesses you, if you get off on the right foot, life is going to be easy. So, you need to identify those people or ask others to identify those people for you within the organization?

### **Inga Carboni**

That's a smart move. When you're coming in, is you talk to your manager, ask them to identify those people for you. And if you don't have the good luck getting in with a great manager, you start to identify those people, and you turn to your manager, and you say, can you make the introduction for me? Send the email, connect us to each other, or invite me to a meeting. You'll have to be proactive about it. But yes, that's absolutely what you should be doing.

### **Ken White**

So, that's networking within the organization. How about externally, either we're looking for work or we just want to grow as a professional.

## Inga Carboni

Yeah, I think that's also great. It's something that people should be doing right from the get-go. If you think about it as building relationships, really your professional network can be found anywhere. A terrific place to start is working with nonprofits in your community, serving on a board, serving on committees, offering to help them do some of their work processes. They're often involved in grant writing or something like that. It's a way of meeting new people in a different environment and letting them start to see how you work. Obviously, getting involved with your industry, but not just going to conferences. If you're going to go to a conference, on the one side, great idea to offer to organize a panel, to help host a session, to work on a committee, to pull together some aspect of it. If that's not within your reach, then you go to a conference, pick out a few people that you know will be there that you would like to connect with, and search them out. It only has to be maybe two or three people, but you're going to go search them out. You do a little reading about them. If you're wanting to connect with them, you probably have things that you want to talk to them about, and you go find them and talk to them. Go to their talks, give them comments and thoughts on what you heard. So, really great ways. And there's also tons of other ways to do that. So you're a runner. Well, you like to run, but maybe also think about running for a charity and joining a group, and you're going to meet other professionals who are doing the same thing, who share a passion about a particular charity. It's everywhere around you when you start to think strategically about how can I put myself in an environment where I'm likely to meet the kind of people that will enrich me and that I can have something to offer as well.

## Ken White

We'll continue our discussion with Inga Carboni in just a minute. Our podcast is brought to you by the William & Mary School of Business. When it comes to choosing an MBA program, people sometimes look to the rankings, among other things, for guidance. The William & Mary MBA program is ranked among the best in the world. The Financial Times includes William & Mary's full-time MBA program in its global top 100. Fortune ranks the executive MBA program in its top 20, and US News & World Report lists the online MBA program in its top 20. If you're thinking about pursuing an MBA, check out all the indicators of quality, like a world-class faculty, unparalleled student support, and a brand that's highly respected, the William & Mary MBA. Reach out to our admissions team to learn which of our four MBA programs best fits you: the full-time, the part-time, the online, and the executive MBA. Check out the MBA program at William & Mary at [wm.edu](http://wm.edu). Now, back to our conversation with Inga Carboni.

## Ken White

This job market is strange, for a lack of a better term, it's just so strange right now. And networking is the way to go, as we know. If I'm putting in an application, it's not going to

get you anywhere. If you haven't created that network and you are trying to find work, any advice about how to approach networking at this point in the game.

### Inga Carboni

Yeah. So when you are at that place where you're like, oh, I need a job, right? And I haven't thought about my network. Again, I bring you back to that first idea, as you probably do have a network already in place. One of the exercises I do with MBA students is I ask them to go back to somebody that they knew at least two years ago, whether that was a former boss, a coach, a professor, somebody in their life that they were once in a good, strong professional relationship with a positive relationship with, but have lost touch with. They're not working on the same project. They're in different organizations or whatever. Go back to them, reach out to them, say, hey, I'm on the job market, and you're somebody whose advice I always remember and value. Can I talk to you? I force the MBAs to do it as part of an in-class exercise, and they love it. They come back. I've had job offers come out through this exercise, but I think more than that, it's just been connection with people that mattered to them and understanding the value of reinvigorating that connection. My guess is that people have those. They may just feel strange about reaching out. If you shift that mindset from, I'm just trying to get something from people and you shift that mindset to, I want to build relationships at this time, and we'll just see where it goes, then you may find yourself more open to those kinds of opportunities. So do that. Alma mater, I know at William & Mary, we try to connect students to the alums here. Reach out, connect with people. There's lots of opportunities if you're being intentional and you're looking for it, and you might say to yourself, jeez, I might already have a networking place.

### Ken White

In higher education, of course, there are some people from different cultures, and when networking is just something so... It's like an out-of-body experience. It's just something my culture, I hear people say, we don't do. What advice do you give to somebody from a culture that doesn't network?

### Inga Carboni

Yeah, I think that's tough. There's certainly a lot of cultures where you are not really encouraged to create new relationships because you have strong relationships within family and kinship networks that are just fine and in place. But I have worked with a number of people from other cultures. Every summer, I work with Yali, the Young African Leadership Institute. People come from all different parts of Africa, and these people are doing the work. They understand that they are making these connections, that it's not necessarily in their comfort zone, but they find a way to put it in their comfort zone. They're reaching out to people under conditions that are understandable to them. They're advocating on behalf of their organization. They are working within kinship networks, so reaching out to an uncle or an aunt, often very loosely defined in

some cultures, to connect with them, to find out more about what they're doing and how they're doing it. I think it is hard for people for other cultures, but if you redefine what you're doing, that you're looking for it on behalf of a larger cause, I think it can be a lot easier to do. And then redefining what is appropriate. Again, thinking about reaching out to uncles and aunts in an extended way. But I agree, it's hard when that's not something... United States, we are, from a very early age, encouraged to be outgoing and meet people and go out to meet people. And that's not the norm in a lot of other cultures.

### **Ken White**

To go back to the exercise you were talking about earlier, where you call somebody from a few years back that you've lost touch with. You had a name for it, dormant tie?

### **Inga Carboni**

Yeah, it was a dormant tie exercise. Yeah.

### **Ken White**

I encourage everybody listening to try that. That just sounds so cool to find somebody you haven't talked to for a while just to catch up.

### **Inga Carboni**

Yeah. I really had to twist their arms to get them to do it. But I finally said, wouldn't you be happy if somebody that knew you a couple of years ago said, boy, you've always been somebody I really admire. I just want to reconnect with you. And they all were like, yeah, we'd love it. But what if they don't like it? And I was like, well, they don't have to take your call. But that's not how it worked out. They all had a really great experience with it. There's a lot of research that says that those dormant ties, the ones that we've let sleep for a while, are actually the real powerhouse of our network. These are the ones that we can reactivate if the relationship was good at some point. Sometimes, you can go back a long way. You can go back 25 years to your college roommate, and you had a great relationship, but you lost touch. It's a great excuse to get back in contact, and that extends your network.

### **Ken White**

Not only that, but you feel like you talked to them yesterday. It feels so good, right? I saw you teach a couple of times the reciprocity ring. I just think this was so cool. Can you explain that exercise?

### **Inga Carboni**

It is a structured activity where you decide about some things that are important to you that you're looking for that you want, and you are facing a group of people, maybe their

colleagues, maybe their coworkers, and you ask them for this thing. It might seem crazy that you're asking them. For instance, I did this with a bunch of executives, and one guy who was very much a naysayer got up and said, well, I have a band. We play, and I've always wanted to have a gig at this particular place. And so what I really want is somebody to give me a gig there, which obviously didn't think it would happen. We have people go up and they ask, and then people then take notes, and then each person says who they think they can help. It's astounding what's in the room. This particular guy, he didn't get a gig. He got an opportunity to audition. Somebody knew the person who ran this place and gave him that. We've had people who said they've always wanted to be on Oprah. They always wanted to go to an Oprah show, and tickets were found because somebody's cousin worked at this place and was able to find it. It was amazing. It wasn't amazing just to see just how much is in the room when you don't think that it's in the room. It shows you the value of putting out what it is you want and need and also the value and the great feeling of being able to give. But it also just showed you how good it feels, how good it feels to give. So this one guy who was so blase about this and didn't really think and was brought up dragging his heels and stuff like that was so overcome with all the goodwill in the room that he was working so hard to try to help everybody else. And we find this that's actually been demonstrated over and over again, this idea that people want to reciprocate what they're given directly, but also that they tend to pay it forward, that they just become more engaged in giving all around. It's another beautiful side effect of this idea of building a network with this idea of, what can I give? How can I make this two-way? How can I make this mutual? Because you don't just do that for you. Everybody you touch in that network then also becomes encouraged to be like that. You really start an enriching, supportive environment. You can really shift organizations to being places where people collaborate, not because they're forced to, but because they really want to help each other, that they really want to go above and beyond to make each other be able to shine the best light that they possibly can. So it's an amazing... The exercise is a very structured example of what you would hope people would take into their workplace.

## Ken White

That's our conversation with Inga Carboni, and that's it for this episode of Leadership & Business. Our podcast is brought to you by the William & Mary School of Business, home of the MBA program offered in four formats: the full-time, the part-time, the online, and the executive MBA. Check out the William & Mary MBA program at [wm.edu](http://wm.edu). Thanks to our guest, Inga Carboni, and thanks to you for joining us. I'm Ken White, wishing you a safe, happy, and productive week ahead.

## Female Voice

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