

Ep #66: Why and How to Network with Clinicians as an Introvert



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Heather Branscombe

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Welcome to *Clinicians Creating Impact*, a show for physical therapists, occupational therapists, and speech-language pathologists looking to take the next step in their careers and make a real difference in the lives of their clients. If you're looking to improve the lives of neurodiverse children and families with neurological-based challenges, grow your own business, or simply show up to help clients, this is the show for you.

I'm Heather Branscombe, Therapist, Certified Coach, Clinical Director, and Owner of Abilities Neurological Rehabilitation. I have over 25 years of experience in both the public and private sectors, and I'm here to help you become the therapist you want to be, supporting people to work towards their dreams and live their best lives. You ready to dive in? Let's go.

Hi there, friend. How are you today? Today, I am super excited because I'm recording this and it feels just super like spring around me. And spring, to me, feels like an amazing time to take on fun new projects, right? Like you ever hear of spring cleaning, those kinds of things. So that's the energy that I'm coming to you today.

And I want to share a fun new project we actually have going on at Abilities and how you may be able or want to be able to join for free. Now, the topic today that I want to chat about actually came from a colleague of mine who doesn't actually currently work with me, and I don't actually work with, but is a new work friend of mine, kind of from networking. She was brave enough to ask to connect with me and she actually suggested a topic like this today, which I am super grateful for. So you know who you are. Thank you so much for this topic.

I modified it just slightly because I'm going to assume that if you're an extrovert, that networking isn't an issue for you and that you get natural reinforcements from gaining energy by being around others. If that's not true, welcome, you're still okay to be here. But for those of you who feel slightly activated or even repulsed by the term networking, I'm here to say this episode is actually for you.

Ep #66: Why and How to Network with Clinicians as an Introvert

Before I start, I just want to highlight that this podcast is truly a passion project of mine, because I really do want all clinicians to have the ability to use these kinds of tool sets as a way to magnify their impact, even if they never work alongside us or with us specifically at Abilities. And one way to do that is to spread the message.

So you can help me to do that in a couple of ways. One, if you can follow, rate, and review this podcast to help feed that algorithm, you know it's there, so that when a clinician is searching for this kind of episode or these kinds of topics, this podcast will come up. And second, if you could share this podcast, or better yet, your favorite episode with a colleague, that would be even more amazing.

If you have heard this spiel that I do now quite frequently in our episodes, and you've maybe meant to do it, but you haven't quite done it yet, that's totally fine. Let this be the sign, today's the day that you can help other clinicians. And if this is your first episode, welcome, first of all. Thank you so much for listening. And hopefully, as you listen, you can decide who of your clinical friends would love to hear more of this kind of information to help them at work. Thank you so much in advance for your action here. And with that, let's get back to the episode.

So I wanted to start by first giving you a few compelling reasons for why we want to dive into networking before we go to the how. And this comes from my own experience as someone who could intellectually see that it might be a good idea to network, but it certainly did not feel natural or even, if I'm being honest, desirable early on in my career.

So here are some of my whys more than 25 years into my clinical career. When I think about the network that I have and that I am working on developing, I can definitely say that my network is so much smarter than I am. They have helped me to solve clinical questions, professional questions. They've helped me with new ideas and they've definitely helped me minimally to feel like I'm not alone. And that really has helped me to prevent burnout in my clinical career. So I just want to offer that networking can help your clients and help you to create a bigger impact in your life.

Ep #66: Why and How to Network with Clinicians as an Introvert

Now, next, I just want to share that networking, it's a skill. And like many skills that you might be teaching in your neck of the woods of your clinical practice or anything else, it's a skill that takes time, and consistency can definitely help.

Now, that doesn't mean that you have to do something every day or every week. When I look back on my career, there are definitely times where I did very little or nothing at all in this area. And yet, at the most challenging times in my career, my network has always been there and been so helpful to navigate the storm. So with those potential whys, let's talk a little bit about the how.

Now, I actually talk about this more in depth when I have clinicians that work with me. We have a term in Abilities called caseload development. And I go through that a lot more for those that are working with us at Abilities. But for those of you who may not or are not yet working with us, this is some of the general advice that I give all the clinicians that work with us at Abilities.

First of all, when you're thinking about starting to network, you can start very small. So I would say start with your own caseload and those that work with you in your own organization if you're working in some kind of organization. So you want to think about who else is working with your client, especially if it's in an area that you love working with most. Finding like-minded people is so helpful and just so great to naturally reinforce the skill of networking.

It's great to connect with people that love working with the kinds of people that you like to work with. And if you do that, like if you don't even go any farther than that within your own organization that you're working with, so maybe you're in a kind of environment where they only have one kind of discipline, but finding other clinicians that like working with the same kind of clientele with you, that's amazing.

Or if you are working in an organization where there are different disciplines in there, finding those clinicians that are working with the same clients that you are or the same kinds of clients that you are, that is totally okay. It's more than an okay place to start.

Ep #66: Why and How to Network with Clinicians as an Introvert

And then when you're ready, you can use that same caseload to then think about people who are working with your client. Because ultimately, as you start to reach out outside of your smaller bubble, you actually already have something in common, which is a common client.

So I jotted down some tips that I have in terms of reaching out, and hopefully this can be helpful to you. So say you have a common client with someone that you don't know, but you know minimally that you have a similar client in common. My first tip around that is to reach out in your preferred method of communication.

And this is where email is a great place to start, especially if you feel introverted, because you can look at the email again, you can do it at a time and a place that works for you, so it often feels safe for both sides. And professionally, it's very acceptable to reach out by email.

So think about how you want to reach out first. And then secondly, ask about them. And so again, if you have a common client, you can ask about them in relation to their client. And you can also think about it in relation to them as a clinician. So asking questions like, are these the kind of clients that you normally like treating or seeing or whatever that verb is that's appropriate for your discipline or their discipline? Do they like these kinds of clients? If not, what are the kinds of clients that they like to do?

You just want to get to know them as a clinician a little bit more. And then as you do that, you're able to much more naturally share your passion. That's my third tip, is to share your own passion naturally. And when you are interested in other people, there's that natural reciprocation. They're often going to ask about you and that's your ultimate permission to share about you and what's important for you and what you're doing with the client. So seek first to understand, and then to be understood.

And the fourth tip I would have about that is to give them value as they ask for it. So don't offer advice to them if they don't ask for it. In networking it really is about what you give, not what you will get, within your own healthy boundaries,

Ep #66: Why and How to Network with Clinicians as an Introvert

of course. But if you think about what you can give first, you will get so much more in return and you don't even have to worry about it.

So once you have started to do this both internally within your own organization, if you have one, and then you start to do that outside of your organization around some clients, you may want to extend beyond that. And that's where networking events can be a great way to do that. And all of those same tips apply to those events as you were with a client.

So you're doing that skill, you're just generalizing that skill to a more – when you're doing a networking, obviously, it's like one to one, it's a little quicker, you're talking to them versus email. But you will have that skill set and your confidence and the evidence that you have that you can do that over email, you can bring that in person.

So I don't know about you, but those kinds of groups or those networking events are what I normally think about when I think about networking. But if you think about the kind of pre steps that happened before that, one, they actually are networking in that like pure definition of networking. And then two, it just gives you a lot more confidence to be able to move forward to the more "normal" networking situation.

Now, depending on what you think about networking, and that's something super interesting to check in with yourself. But depending on what you think about it, you may actually be in a heightened nervous system state before, during, and after that kind of event. So you just want to notice that and you want to be kind to yourself. You may want to do things in advance to help to regulate your own nervous system before, during, and after these kinds of events to help.

Now I offer you that because I do that myself. So for me, time and specifically alone time is super important so that I can make sure that I have time before and after these kinds of events to kind of process and to give myself that space to regulate my nervous system again.

Ep #66: Why and How to Network with Clinicians as an Introvert

This is where you can remind yourself about your own skills that you've developed, again, within your organization and around your clients as you go into this type of activity. And again, I keep saying this because I do this myself. I don't know, you may or may not have considered me an extrovert, whether you actually know me in person or are just listening to me, know me from this podcast.

But the truth is I'm not an extrovert, I'm just not shy. I definitely identify as an introvert. And so what that means to me is that connecting with people can actually feel draining to me. So I know that in advance, and when I still want to do it, I just plan for that accordingly.

So before I get there, there's often a mini pep talk involved for me because my nervous system is activated and I know that this is actually something that I want to do. So I choose to do it anyway.

Once I'm at the event, here are the tips that I have for myself that may or may not be helpful to you. Again, I ask about the other person first. And that's why I'm really trying to get myself into a more grounded and less activated nervous system place because when I do that, that allows me to just be more naturally curious about other people.

When I'm curious about other people, it takes the pressure off myself. And then it lets me share about myself when I feel like it actually adds value. And as you've probably heard before, people like talking about themselves. And I like it when people ask me questions. So coming into that with that curious mindset can be really helpful.

When I'm connecting with a person, I'm looking for the natural connections, the things that we have in common by asking those kinds of questions. And then I look for those simple ways that I can help them, in a way, obviously, that works with my own boundaries. But there's often some simple ways that I can help them.

Ep #66: Why and How to Network with Clinicians as an Introvert

I often like the thought, and I like to hold onto this thought that these are just people that want to help other people. So if that thought can be helpful to you, I invite you to use it.

The summary of all of this is really I'm just using my curious clinical mind to be present in the moment, because it really isn't about me. It's really about connecting with another person. And I know that as I'm more present, and having a calmer nervous system myself, that allows me to be more present and to actually have a more authentic connection with the person that I'm talking with.

The next step you want to think about is how you're going to keep up with these connections. And again, you get to decide what that looks like for you. It's really like the way I like to think of it is like friends outside of work. Some friends outside of work I connect with via phone or text, or sometimes it's just over social media. But I like to set time aside every once in a while and think about who I want to connect with next in my work environment, especially as I'm trying to solve some kind of work challenge.

I find even the connection itself sometimes can help me to solve the challenge on my own without anything being given outside by that work colleague that I'm connecting with. There's nothing about that particular connection that they've given me anything outside, but sometimes just connecting with them and processing verbally can be really helpful for myself.

So this has actually led me to create a project that I alluded to at the beginning of the episode and I want to share with you a little bit now. I've really felt the need, for a variety of reasons, to host some small, intimate networking events at Abilities for my work colleagues. And by the time that this episode comes out, we will actually successfully have hosted our first one.

Now, don't worry, you haven't missed anything. That definitely will not be our last event. But the whole purpose of these events is to, again, set up an intimate but not exclusive, again, this is my way of trying to make it as introvert-friendly as possible. So intimate but not exclusive events. And I'm starting with colleagues

Ep #66: Why and How to Network with Clinicians as an Introvert

that I know and colleagues that my friends at Abilities know and that we want to get to know better. And then we plan to go from there and extend from there.

And I'm excited because I'm focused on creating events that hopefully seem very doable and manageable for most clinicians and that ultimately will be fun. Because what I noticed at the end of events, once you get over any anxiety you may have by going in the first place, going to these events can actually be a ton of fun.

So this is my invitation to you. This is me saying that it is intimate but not exclusive. So if you are interested in coming to an event that's either near you or maybe even not near you, please send me an email. My email is Heather@abilitiesrehabilitation.com. I'd be more than happy to keep you on the list and to give you an invite when the next one occurs to see if you would like to come to one of our events and to get to know both myself, some colleagues at Abilities and also some other amazing connections that are out there.

So with that, I hope that you have some takeaways from this. You get to decide what networking looks like for you, what your next best step is. So give it a try and let me know how it goes. Yes, I am busy. I say this all the time, I am busy, but I am never too busy to connect with you. Have an amazing week and I will talk to you soon.

If you enjoyed today's show and don't want to worry about missing an episode, you can follow the show wherever you listen to your podcasts. And if you haven't already, I would really appreciate it if you could leave a rating and review to let me know what you think and to help others find *Clinicians Creating Impact*.

It doesn't have to be a five-star rating, although I sure hope you love the show. I'd really want your honest feedback so I can create an awesome podcast that provides tons of value. To learn more about me and the work that I do, visit my website at www.abilitiesrehabilitation.com/clinicianscorner to download your free Getting it All Done at Work process and to see what I'm up to. Thanks so much.

Ep #66: Why and How to Network with Clinicians as an Introvert

Thanks for joining me this week on the *Clinicians Creating Impact* podcast. Want to learn more about the work I'm doing with Abilities Rehabilitation? Head on over to abilitiesrehabilitation.com. See you next week.