

# SKILL-BUILDING & NETWORKING IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

By Maya Khamala



“During an economic slowdown, it’s important to focus on what you can control—improving your skills and reaching out to your network,” says Heidi Parsont, CEO and founder of TorchLight Hire.

It’s hardly news that the global COVID-19 pandemic is having an extraordinarily harsh effect on the economy. A shift in mindset is necessary in these times of uncertainty, but it’s important to remember that it is still worth your time and energy to build new skillsets and continue to network during the pandemic.

## Skill-Building

Choosing to see physical distancing or quarantine as an opportunity rather than a roadblock can help you gain a competitive edge. Building a mix of hard and soft skills in this obligatory ‘downtime’ could turn you into more of an asset in the eyes of employers. While hard skills are something no one is born with, like coding, accounting, or budgeting skills, soft skills are elements of your personality (which can also be learned over time), such as interpersonal skills, strong communication, and leadership.

There are a ton of online learning platforms to choose from when endeavoring to build skills, from e-books to helpful podcasts and engaging webinars devoted to honing professional development. Online courses and certifications, offered via sites like Coursera, Google Skillshop, Hootsuite, LinkedIn Learning, Khan Academy, Skill Share, Udemy, EdEx and Class Central, are also great resources. While some are free, others (typically the interactive courses) come with associated fees.

## Networking

By leveraging blogs, online groups and social media, you can successfully forge important professional connections with people online. Indeed, this is a skill as important as any other nowadays. The connections you make can in turn be rewarding professionally, both in the immediate sense, as well as down the line when we’re past this current crisis. Effective networking is about making lasting impressions to get lasting results.

Connecting with people online has never been so easy—at least in terms of the digital tools at our disposal. One way of making the most of these tools, however, is understanding how to write messages people will respond to. For instance, it’s typically wise to avoid overly vague or forceful demands in favour of concise, yet personalized messages meant to meaningfully engage someone. Message templates can easily be found online to help you get started.

The bottom line? Even in times of adversity, challenges can be reframed as opportunities for growth. Skill-building is a form of personal enrichment and networking is not desperate or over-the-top as some would believe, but rather, a strategic way of speaking for your experience rather than hoping and waiting for your experience to speak for you. So, without allowing panic or uncertainty to take over, start by making time for skill-building and networking sessions each week. The simple act of making time is a powerful start!

If you need inspiration or help getting started, visit [yesmontreal.ca](https://www.yesmontreal.ca) to view our upcoming workshops or to set up a meeting with one of our Job Search counsellors – we’re online and we’re here for you!