BALLISAGER NEXT CHAPTER · JOB-SEEKING NETWORK

The Coffee Chat *Playbook*



Advice from people who are doing it, ranked by the group's own stars.

Workshop · 1 October 2026

5 stages

50 ideas on the wall

39 stars cast

On 1 October 2026 the group mapped a coffee chat from start to finish, across five stages. Everyone wrote their best advice on post-its, then starred the ideas they would actually use. This playbook collects that advice — starred ideas first — with a few findings from research that back it up.

THE FIVE STAGES

01
Strategy
Who + why

02
Prepare
Before you meet

03
Ask
How to get a YES

04
Meet
Making the conversation count

05
After
Follow-up + sustain connection

WHAT THE GROUP VOTED FOR

The group's top five

#1 Borrow a name

STRATEGY · FIVE STARS

Mention someone they know when you reach out.

★★★★★

MEET #2

★★★★

Ask deep questions

Show genuine interest in their area.

MEET =3

★★★

Be curious

Focus on the relationship, not the job.

AFTER =3

★★★

Email, then LinkedIn

Follow up in writing and connect.

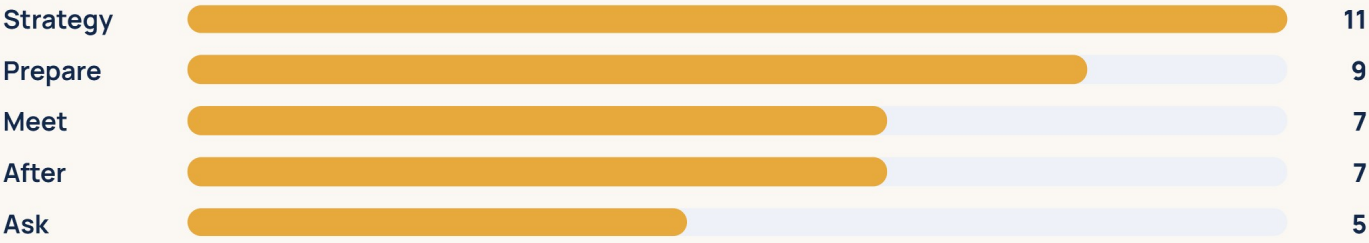
PREPARE =3

★★★

Come with questions

Prepare your questions before anything else.

☆ WHERE THE STARS LANDED



🕮 WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

Referrals open doors

Labour-market studies find referred applicants are more likely to be hired than cold applicants, and tend to stay longer. Your #1 idea is well backed.

IZA World of Labor, referral research review

Curiosity is likeable

People who asked more questions, especially follow-ups, were liked more by their conversation partners — just as your #2 and =3 picks suggest.

Huang et al., J. Personality & Social Psychology, 2017

Stars are the group's votes. Advice is lightly edited from the original post-its.

STAGE 01 · WHO + WHY

Strategy

01

Choose who to meet, and know why them.

> *A name opens the door. Lead with someone you both know.*

GROUP FAVOURITES

1	TOP PICK **Mention someone's name when you approach — they notice you more. Colleagues can be as useful as the hiring manager.**	★★★★★
2	A former colleague working at a company you are interested in.	★★
3	Hiring managers and department heads: would they need a profile like mine? Would I like to work there?	★
4	People working in a company I would like to work for — for inside information you can use in an application.	★
5	Referrals from friends, colleagues and relatives.	★
6	Map the companies and the names in your area.	★

MORE IDEAS FROM THE BOARD

- People who are hiring, and people who recently got a job
- A person you know through someone else
- Someone with a similar study background
- Call the hiring manager
- Previous managers and old colleagues — keep the relationship going
- People with similar profiles, or in your target sector

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

Look beyond your inner circle

A LinkedIn experiment with 20 million users found moderately weak ties — people you share only a few connections with — led to the most job moves.

Rajkumar et al., Science, 2022

Wake up dormant ties

Executives who reconnected with contacts unseen for years got more novel advice than from current contacts — and the old trust was still there.

Levin, Walter & Murnighan, Org. Science, 2011

STAGE 02 · BEFORE YOU MEET

Prepare

Do the homework, and arrive with questions.

02

> *Questions came first. Research on the person and the company came a close second.*

GROUP FAVOURITES

1	TOP PICK **Questions — prepare them before anything else.**	★ ★ ★
2	Read the person's profile, understand their current role, learn about the company — and be relaxed enough to talk about more than the job.	★ ★
3	Ask relevant questions that bridge their expertise and your experience.	★
4	Check their LinkedIn CV, their last company, and their posts.	★
5	Practise your elevator speech with AI.	★
6	Identify the company's priorities and potential needs.	★

MORE IDEAS FROM THE BOARD

- Prepare 5–7 questions about their job and CV in advance
- Prepare what you will share about yourself
- Talk to people who know them
- A LinkedIn or Facebook search to understand the person
- Study the contact's LinkedIn profile
- Read the company's financial or annual report

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

Plan for follow-ups, not just openers

Prepared questions get you started, but it is follow-up questions — building on what they just said — that make people like you more.

Huang et al., J. Personality & Social Psychology, 2017

Find the common ground

Even small similarities, like a shared birthday or first name, made people more willing to help a stranger. Look for genuine overlap.

Burger et al., Pers. & Social Psychology Bulletin, 2004

STAGE 03 · HOW TO GET A YES

Ask

Make the request specific, personal and easy to accept.

> *Say exactly why you are contacting this person.*

03

GROUP FAVOURITES

1	TOP PICK **Write your one-liner, plus the reason you are contacting them specifically.**	★★
2	Use news or an event related to their function as an icebreaker.	★
3	Add something personal: someone in their team you have already spoken to, and what motivates you.	★
4	Call and give a good pitch, explain your motivation, and suggest a week or time to keep it focused.	★

MORE IDEAS FROM THE BOARD

- Ask questions, and show you are motivated for the position
- Push, and be honest: "You need to see me!"
- Respect their time, and fit their schedule wherever possible

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

People say yes more than you think

In several studies, people asking for help underestimated how many would agree — by as much as half. Your yes-rate is higher than your gut says.

Flynn & Lake, J. Personality & Social Psychology, 2008

Give them a reason

Adding a reason to a small request lifted agreement from 60% to over 90%. For bigger asks only a real, specific reason helped — so say why them.

Langer, Blank & Chanowitz, 1978

STAGE 04 · MAKING THE CONVERSATION COUNT

Meet

Be curious. The relationship matters more than the pitch.

> *Every star at this stage went to curiosity.*

04

GROUP FAVOURITES

TOP PICK

1 **Keep the conversation engaging. Ask deep questions that show your interest in the area.** ★★★★

2 Be curious, ask questions, and focus on the relationship. ★★★

MORE IDEAS FROM THE BOARD

- Be cheerful and positive — let them talk, and listen
- Be authentic, be yourself, and do your research
- Arrive 10 minutes early
- Use open questions
- Smile
- Start with small talk, such as the weather
- Find anything you have in common with the person or company
- Have your elevator speech ready, and be present
- Stand out — like the one blue post-it on the wall
- Leave with an action point: an introduction or a referral

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

Let them talk

Talking about ourselves activates the brain's reward system — people even gave up money to do it. Good questions are a gift to the other person.

Tamir & Mitchell, PNAS, 2012

They liked you more than you think

After first conversations, people consistently underestimated how much their partner liked them. It probably went better than you fear.

Boothby et al., Psychological Science, 2018

STAGE 05 · FOLLOW-UP + SUSTAIN CONNECTION

After

Say thank you, then stay visible.

> *Email first, then connect on LinkedIn.*

GROUP FAVOURITES

1	TOP PICK **Send an email, and connect on LinkedIn.**	★★★
2	Email after the meeting to thank them — then take actions for yourself and work on them.	★★
3	Send a thank-you message — and if there is a job, confirm that you applied.	★
4	Connect on LinkedIn, react to their posts, and share your CV.	★

MORE IDEAS FROM THE BOARD

- A thank-you note the next day
- Thank them, then contact the next person they suggested
- Send your CV if they ask for it

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

Thanks doubles future help

Helpers who were thanked were about twice as likely to help again (66% vs 32%) — making the next intro or referral far more likely.

Grant & Gino, J. Personality & Social Psychology, 2010

It means more than you expect

Note-writers underestimated how pleased recipients would be, and overestimated how awkward it would feel. Send it anyway.

Kumar & Epley, Psychological Science, 2018

BEFORE YOUR NEXT COFFEE CHAT

Your coffee chat checklist

The group's starred advice, turned into steps you can tick off.

01 Strategy

- [ ] I know who I want to meet — and why them
- [ ] I have a name I can mention, or someone who can introduce me

02 Prepare

- [ ] I have read their profile, role and recent posts
- [ ] I know the company's priorities and likely needs
- [ ] I have my questions written down
- [ ] I have practised my elevator speech

03 Ask

- [ ] My message has a one-liner and says why them
- [ ] I have suggested a week or a time

04 Meet

- [ ] I arrive early, curious and ready to listen
- [ ] I ask deep, open questions — and follow up on the answers
- [ ] I leave with an action point — an introduction or a referral

05 After

- [ ] A thank-you email within a day
- [ ] A LinkedIn connection, and I engage with their posts
- [ ] I act on what I learned, and contact the next person

Small asks, often. Most people are glad to help — and glad to be thanked.

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Coaching that Listens | Culture that Includes | Learning that Inspires