Social networks are usually defined as a set of actors or nodes and the relationships or links between them. Both nodes and links are taken as a priori, given, but even a casual assay of real actors in real networks yields endless examples of nodal "irregularities" – beans are spilled, tongues wag, leaks happen, whistles are blown – and associated anxieties about such irregularities. These suggest that "competent" nodes are an ongoing social achievement rather than a static structural given. Children, apprentice lawyers, novice spies, colleagues, neighbors, and potential BFFs all must be socialized to gain an understanding of the rules that govern who ought to be told what when and how. Members in social networks continually police the behavior of neighboring nodes and negotiate the rules that govern information flow. Such efforts range from casual exhortations - "you'll let me know if you hear anything" or "don't breathe a word of this" - to common law, contracts, and official secrets statutes.

Zooming across multiple scales and substantive areas, this talk looks at how new nodes are trained and certified and how existing nodes are subject to ongoing reminders of the expectations of the networks they are part of. It concludes with the suggestion that how we learn to be nodes reveals something about a networked social self.