

Tips for Networking Events

Professional networking is the process of establishing a mutually beneficial relationship with other people in your profession and potential clients and/or customers. Networking is just another name for the conversations you have with people in your personal and professional communities while you are pursuing your professional goals.

GENERAL TIPS

- Wear your nametag on your right and carry purses and briefcases on your left.
- Give a firm handshake.

STARTING A CONVERSATION AND INTRODUCING YOURSELF

- Switch from guest to host behavior. Greet people who appear to be alone and introduce people you know or have met to each other.
- Prepare an abstract to introduce yourself. Tell the person something relevant or interesting about yourself.
- Identify commonalities and use them as a basis for conversation.
- Use different introductions for different functions.
 - Business: What you do
 - Social: How you are connected with the gathering
- Treat everyone as you would like to be treated.

HELPFUL SMALL TALK TOPICS

- Offer a genuine compliment, such as, “I really enjoyed your presentation. Can you tell me more about your research?”
- Talk about the event itself, such as:
 - “Is this your first time attending this conference?”
 - “What session have you most enjoyed so far?”
- Read up on current events, including sports, particularly on topics that may be relevant to the event or locale where you are networking.
- Avoid religious and political topics.
- Small talk is frequently about personal interests and hobbies, such as:
 - “What do you do in your spare time?”
 - “Have you been doing much traveling lately?”

NETWORKING WHILE EATING

Food is secondary! Your focus should be on having good conversations.

- Never talk with food in your mouth or chew with your mouth open.
- Select easy foods to eat— avoid sticky foods and messy sauces.
- If you are at a standing reception, you should either have a drink or a plate—not both!
- Hold the cup in your left hand, leaving your right hand free to greet people.

HOW TO HAVE THE CONVERSATION YOU WANT TO HAVE

If attending a conference or event, there may be specific people you would like to connect with in order to advance your research/employment opportunities. Think about what you want them to know about you.

- Before the event, prepare two or three brief talking points to prepare for these connections.
- Ask yourself:
 - “What do I want to learn?”
 - “What do I want to share?”
- If possible, find out about the person you want to talk with before you actually talk to them. This can help you find comfortable ways to begin a conversation, such as, “I was looking at the chemistry website and saw some of the interesting work your lab is doing. How did you get involved with that research?”
- Do not be shy! Actively seek out the people with whom you want to connect.
- Be curious and courteous, ask questions, and always listen.

EXITING A CONVERSATION

- Avoid the comfort of talking exclusively with people you already know. Don’t spend more than 10 minutes with any single person.
- When exiting—smile, make eye contact, and say something positive in closing; you may shake hands.
- Good moments for you to exit are when others enter a conversation or when you introduce someone else into the conversation.
- Don’t feel the need to justify your exit—the point of the event is to talk to multiple people.
- Possible phrases for exiting include:
 - “I’ve enjoyed talking with you.”
 - “Thanks for talking with me—I hope we can talk more later.”
 - “I’ve enjoyed talking with you, but I don’t want to take up any more of your time.”
 - “Is it alright if I contact you in the future? And if I can be of help to you, please let me know.”

ENTERING A GROUP CONVERSATION

If you are on the outside:

- If the conversation appears personal or intense, find a different group;
- Look for a physical gap, stand nearby and make eye contact;
- After you have been acknowledged, join the conversation;
- Listen to the conversation and find a way to contribute—don't dominate.

If you are in a group:

- Help others join the conversation;
- Make eye contact and move over to allow space for him/her to join the group;
- During a lull in the conversation, introduce yourself and others to the new person.

FOLLOWING UP

- When you get home, jot down a few notes about your new contacts, including date and where you met, using the back of their business cards if available.
- Follow up with new contacts promptly.
- Maintain contact with people in your network.