

Networking Tips for endMS Summer School Trainees

Some people are naturally gifted when it comes to networking; however, for others attending a networking event can be as nerve racking as going on a first date, or even worse. Below are articles, with tips and suggestions that might come in handy to mastering the art of networking and maximizing gains from this powerful tool by making valuable connections.

Oh No! Not Networking!

Ann Rolfe, Founder, Mentoring Works

As a devout introvert, I used to hate networking events. I'm not good at small talk, I'm not at ease socialising with strangers and the business version of speed dating is my idea of hell.

Fortunately, networking is more than events where you balance a beverage in one hand, a snack in the other and need a third for business card exchanges!

Networking today is about making connections, building relationships and mutual benefit. There are a number of networks you'll want to cultivate:

Personal Learning Network – people, platforms and media for ongoing education and development. This includes mentors who are older, younger and in similar and different fields to you.

Professional Network – associates and leaders in your profession or industry that help you stay on top of trends and developments and open to career opportunities.

Peer Network – your cohort at work, from school or university, sources of information and opinions. Good for getting the low-down on potential employers and bosses.

Personal Support – friends and relatives who are there for you in a crisis, whether it's the looming work deadline when you have a sick child, your own health issue or lost love.

Social Network – the people you socialise with.

Social Media Network – a great way to know what's going on and be known, but "brand you" is out there forever, so making a distinction between private and public profile has never been more important.

We all need these kinds of networks and we can consciously develop them, using these three steps:

1. Connect

Join professional associations. If there is no industry group for your field, look at groups for young professionals, women, business or special interest groups in organisations like the Australian Institute of Management. Serve on a committee at work, or a community and service group like Lions or Rotary, sports clubs, Toast Masters, Friends of (the museum, theatre, gardens etc.). Reach out to friends, family and colleagues to organise catch-ups. Don't say "we must get together some time." Pick a date and do it!

2. Build Relationships

Take a genuine interest in other people. Listen before you speak, ask before you tell. Get to know them and stay in touch. Offer support and encouragement. Be authentic yourself. Learn how to offer another perspective or opinion respectfully and value differences.

3. Make it Mutual

If you want to gain benefit from networks, you must first give. Volunteer, or at least be an active participant in groups and associations. Contribute and add value to online conversations. Reach out a hand of friendship to others. At a function, be the one to smile and invite the stranger into your group. Introduce them to other people.

If you adopt these three steps, even the dreaded networking event can be worthwhile!

The Before, During and After a Networking Event

Below are some tips to help you prepare before, during, and after a conference or networking event.

Before the event:

1. Know your networking goals in advance.
It is always better to have clear goals in mind to ease the process of networking and coming out of it with meaningful results.¹
2. Research speakers and attendees ahead of time. This is a great way to reach out to them via e-mail, Twitter, or LinkedIn and set-up an appointment with them in advance. ²
3. Dress professionally for a first impression. You can add an original style element to make yourself more memorable.²
4. Bring simple business cards with your name, phone number, area of work or interest, and a permanent and professional email address. ^{2,3}
5. Prepare an elevator pitch to introduce yourself

At the event:

6. Start the conversation by introducing yourself and use informed and relevant topics to ease the process. For example, you can research in advance trending topics at the event, and spark a conversation with someone by asking for their thoughts on topics that you both take interest in. This approach is useful to begin your own conversation, or even join an existing one. ¹
7. Begin by looking for someone who is on their own and is also looking to start a conversation. They could then introduce you to other friends or even break into bigger groups with you ¹
8. Introduce yourself to someone who is a big deal. ¹
9. Don't spend all your time on presenters or talking to one person. Talk to other attendees who you might want to collaborate with.

10. Ask meaningful questions, hear people out, and show interest in what they have to say.
11. Genuinely enjoy the process of meeting new people without focusing on what talking to certain people will bring you while you're doing so. "Networking is a relationship strategy, not a selfish pursuit".²
12. Excuse yourself politely when moving away from a conversation.

After the event:

13. Follow-up with your new contacts. This is a nice opportunity to apply the 3 Rs of Networking: Radar, Recall, and Reward as stated by Mark Jeffries.⁴ Put yourself on the radar and remind your contacts that you exist by sending them an e-mail or even a personal hand-written thank you note a few days after the event.
14. While the conversations you had are still fresh in your mind, recall something that your contact said. People love it when you remember what they said. ²
15. Finally, reward your contacts by offering them something, such as a useful link to an article pertinent to their research or, as Jeffries's example, a link to new sushi restaurants opening up in their area.^{2,4}
16. By using the radar, recall, reward approach you are more likely to receive a response. Once this outreach has been successful, continue to stay in touch by e-mail or phone.

Throughout the three phases, use social channels as leverage for others to reach out to you. They are great tools for making connections with attendees and speakers. For example, you could use Twitter by tweeting the official hashtag for the event you will be attending and asking people to tweet back at you if they will be, are, or were attending the same event. You can also tweet compliments to speakers during and after the event. Using social media sites, such as LinkedIn, is a good first step for making a connection with someone; it is less scary than making in-person connections and also gives you the opportunity to look for commonalities and know others better, and vice versa. This extra step comes in handy for generating meaningful conversations once you meet them in-person. ¹

For more useful tips on networking at conferences, including tips for using social media sites, please refer to the wonderful e-book "How to Network at Conferences....Without Being Awkward" by Diana Urban, Lauren Fitzgerald, and Ben Ratner. ¹

¹ <https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hub/146726/file-205975508-pdf/How-To-Network-At-Conferences.pdf>

² <http://www.wikihow.com/Network-at-a-Conference>

³ <http://students.ubc.ca/career/resources/networking>

⁴ http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/mark-jeffries/3-rs-networking_b_884218.html