Developing your professional network

Dr Claire Conway
Careers Adviser for Researchers
The Careers Service

1 October 2013
Aim
To enable participants to begin to identify what networking is, why it is important to develop their own professional networks and how to build and maintain them effectively

Learning outcomes
- To recognise potential benefits of networking and have reflected on their own objectives for networking
- Be able to identify in-person and online methods for building their own networks
- To make an action plan for developing professional networks
What is networking?

- Networking is the art of building reciprocal relationships that help individuals and the community as a whole to achieve their goals. 
  
  *Brilliant Networking*, Steven D’Souza

- Interact with others to exchange information and develop professional or social contacts.
  
  *Oxford Dictionaries Online*
Why don’t we like it?

- It’s hard
- It’s tiring
- I think that people won’t talk to me/like me
- I might feel rejected
- I don’t know how to ask for what I want
- I don’t know what to say
- I don’t know why I’m doing it
- It doesn’t feel good to be a ‘networker’
- It might give me an image I don’t like
So why do it?

- Meet new people or increase the connections you already have
- Learn info (...that you may not have realised would be useful)
- Connect with expertise and resources
- Learn about and find jobs
- Solve problems in common
- Reach goals faster
- Share experience
How can we see it differently?

- See it as talking to people/information seeking
- Build community - offer to help others - give and take
- It’s about building relationships - not just building contacts
- Play to your strengths - ask open questions, listen rather than talk
- Start small and take breaks - you don’t have to network all day today!
How do we even start?

- Set objectives (and think about the first step)
- Think about best approaches
- Use online networks as a starting point
- Prepare for events by doing some research
- Practise
- Learn from experiences
- Keep practising
Getting started: online networking

- Blogs
- Twitter
- Forums
- Email lists
- Professional association websites
- LinkedIn
- Facebook
- Alumni networks
- Let people find you: create a profile, start a blog, register yourself as an ‘expert’ or for consultancy
Getting started: email/phone

- **Not** - I’m looking for a job!
- More **subtle** approach – “I’m currently working in X department, and have done some research into this career area. At this stage it would be really helpful to talk to people actually working in this area. Would it be possible to ask you a few questions/meet you for 20 minutes, at a mutually convenient time?”

- **Mention mutual contacts:** X gave me your email and suggested I get in touch
- **Phone:** Have some notes to remind you what to say!
Getting started: talking to people

- You can prepare for the four phases of conversation:
  - **Openers**: open ended, neutral questions that invite other people to talk
  - **Sustainers**: comments that keep the conversation going, they ask for opinions or comments
  - **Transitions**: when conversation dries up direct the conversation to something that was said earlier (demonstrates you were listening and shows interest)
  - **Closers**: Keep it short and polite (go to the bathroom, make a call, refresh your drink)
Getting started: non-verbal skills

- Listening skills
  - Pay attention
  - Allow silence

- Body language
  - Think about having an open posture
  - Make eye contact
  - Consider your environment/culture
Leaving...

The best bit...?

- Formulate your escape plan
- Have a definite departure time in mind...you can always stay longer if you want to
- Introduce someone to someone else
- Don’t forget to say goodbye and thank your host
Maintaining your network

- Relationships
- Reciprocate
- Records
- Recommendations
- Relay information
- Reconnect
Following up
Build relationships!

1-2 days after event
- Add them on social network and message/email: ‘nice to meet you’
- Send any links/resources/info you mentioned

In the weeks after event
- Follow up on any project/collaboration that was proposed, e.g. ‘I’ve had time to think about the proposed project, here are my thoughts. Are you still interested in collaborating?’
- Send an email/message with a relevant link/resource/suggestion

Months after the event
- Email your greetings; share or ask for information/resources/advice
- Email an update on your progress and thank them for previous help, e.g. ‘I really appreciated your advice on getting into HR, but I’ve now accepted a job in finance. Thanks again.’
Final top tips... collected by networking 😊

Set objectives... and start small
   - e.g. speak to three people, plan breaks, leave after 30 mins

Do your research ahead of time and focus
   - e.g. who will be there and at what session

Be comfortable
   - wear something you feel great in
   - find a way to relax (deep breathing, probably not alcohol...)

Change your mindset
   - chat to people rather than ‘networking them’ - talk about weather/sandwiches

Look for other people like you
   - the other person on their own will be grateful you said hi!

Note your achievements!
Now it’s your turn!

- Make an action plan for today and the future
- Start working through your actions today
- Practise today on each other/me
- Remember to note your achievements and learn from your experiences
- Keep practising 😊
Resources

www.careers.ox.ac.uk

- Sections on job search networking
- Oxford Careers Network (via Career connect, Oxford alumni only)

- www.slideshare.net/sachac/the-shy-connector