

## Networking Skills

It may be hard to believe but most people have better things to do than wait for a chance to appreciate your work, collaborate with you or give you a job. Everyone is busy! Don't wait for the 'right' people to discover you, go and find them instead. Networking is about creating and making use of both formal and informal connections with other people to develop your career. It's not easy and there is no one-size-fits-all way of doing it. While some things work in certain situations they may be not very suitable in others. Although, the ability to pick the most efficient approach comes with experience, keeping the below points in mind should make it a bit easier.

### **TRY TO:**

- **Make it a regular activity** – experiences accumulate so the more you do it the easier it gets. You may still not enjoy it but with time it will become more natural and require less effort.
- **Start with people close to you** – ask your supervisor, senior colleagues, lecturers etc. for advice on how to build up your own network of contacts in your field. If you have a good relationship with them their contacts may become your contacts. Also, they may tell you who should be avoided and why.
- **Attend conferences, seminars, workshops etc.** – some connections are built over time so appear at the important events in your field regularly. Talk to new people and foster the relationship with the people you already know. At the same time try to go to as many different events as possible, networking with scientists from other fields may be useful as well.
- **Go talk to the speaker after their talk** – surprisingly often no one takes time to talk to the speakers. By talking to them you show your appreciation and interest making the networking a bit easier.
- **Step out of your comfort zone** – there are hardly any circumstances in which networking can damage your career opportunities. If you can't really fail then there is no need to worry too much about making mistakes.
- **Use the Internet** – sometimes you don't need to meet someone face to face to make a meaningful connection. Reaching out to someone through an email or social media may work. Besides, if you do know whom you want to 'connect' to you should check out their websites and social profiles to prepare.
- **Bring business cards** – the people you network with will also network with other people so exchanging business cards after you connected with someone makes it easier for them to remember who you are and for you to follow-up. If you do bring business cards then keep them easily accessible e.g. if you have a large badge holder put some inside.
- **Have a goal** – it's useful to have a realistic goal before a networking session. You can use it to motivate yourself and also to measure your success. Your goal can be anything from talking to an X number of new

people to establishing collaboration. Keep it realistic or it will demotivate you instead.

- **Make an effective introduction** – prepare your introduction and practice saying it. You should introduce yourself in a confident manner but keep things short. The other person will want to know what you are working on but at that stage won't care about the details.
- **Get to the point** – if there is something specific you want to achieve by talking to someone, value his or her time, and after a suitable introduction get to the point. Going on and on about unrelated things does not increase your chances of getting the thing you want.
- **Take notes** – if you are meeting a large number of people or covering many topics you may want to take notes. Writing a couple of words or a sentence on the reverse of someone's business card may be helpful to remember the main points of the conversation.
- **Know when to stop** – when the conversation is not flowing and you are not getting anywhere don't force it and just move on. Having an exit strategy may be useful to leave a boring conversation gracefully.
- **Follow up** – if you think you established a good connection with someone, remember to follow-up. Don't expect the other person to get in touch with you, remind them about yourself by getting in touch with them.
- **Be aware of cultural difference** – some seemingly small actions may have big meanings in certain cultures. Try not to offend and not to be offended.

### **TRY NOT TO:**

- **Give away your business cards randomly** – don't expect people to get in touch with you just because you gave them your business card. That's not networking. It's spamming.
- **Be the only one talking** – you need to listen as well. Networking is a two-way process, you give and you take.
- **Sell yourself short** – never sell yourself short, you know more than you think!
- **Be afraid to say you are looking for a job** – If people don't know you are looking for a job there are less likely to think about you when they have one to offer or hear about one.
- **Think you need to talk to the most important person in the room** – if you have a chance to talk to them that's great but don't wait indefinitely for that to happen. Instead of waiting be productive and talk to other people. You never know, they may actually be the right people for you.
- **Expect** – it's easy to hope for too much so try not to expect anything. Some things just don't work out.
- **Don't judge someone's importance** – if you don't know the person you are talking to don't assume anything about his or her position. Just because someone is not engaged in a conversation, is old or young or whatever else, does not mean they are not 'important' or they cannot help you in any way. Going for the 'biggest fish' may fail.