

Networking at Events

Many times students participate or attend events where professionals are present, for example professional conferences, workshops, trainings, employer, or alumni socials. It is important to take advantage of these opportunities and plan ahead to be prepared to meet new people and expand your network.

Not everyone is a natural when it comes to introducing themselves to strangers or striking up a conversation when there is silence in a group. For most people, networking sounds like a chore. Set reasonable expectations ahead of time for how many people you would like to meet. To help you get started, remember to prepare your elevator speech that will help you know what to say when you introduce yourself to others.

Everyone should be prepared to give a 'cliff-notes' version of who we are and what we do. This should not take longer than an elevator ride (hence the name), but gives you an opportunity to share some important information AND presents a chance for you to make the party you are telling interested in asking you for more information.

This becomes especially important at several venues that you will be participating in as you enter the professional world.

Name:

Education/experience:

Goal of contact:

Show knowledge of employer & link skills to organizational needs:

Ask a well-thought-out question (about the person/organization or whatever!):

An elevator pitch/speech starts the conversation. Remember to listen for clues for what you could ask about, and be genuine. Avoid barging into groups, wait until you've made eye contact. Usually people will make room to include you in the group. Networking is a skill that takes practice, get out there and try! Here are some additional tips for natural and easy ways to break the ice:

Find the Hors d'oeuvres

While waiting in line for the food, start chatting up the person next to you. This is a great opportunity to get a conversation started because you already have something in common: the food. Instead of standing there in silence, start a conversation.

- "Wow, everything looks so good... I'm not sure what to get! What are you thinking?"
- "Yummy, they have ___! Have you ever tried it?"
- "Hmm, I'm not quite sure what that dish is... do you know?"

Ask to join them as they take a seat or many people start with the food line, so being nearby will give you a chance to have a conversation with many people. Who knows, you might leave the buffet with a plate of food AND a new contact!

Find a Loner

If you see someone standing alone in the corner, clutching his or her drink, and looking miserable, don't be afraid to walk up and introduce yourself. Typically, these people need a little help getting the conversation going.

- "Man, these networking events can be so crazy. Mind if I join you over here where it's a little quieter?"
- "There are a ton of people here! The food must be good, huh?"

Initiate the conversation, this could make them feel more relaxed and willing to connect.

Talk About Sports

People love talking about sports. If you're a sports person, use it to your advantage!

- See someone wearing a Red Sox cap? Say, "Are you a Red Sox fan? Did you catch the game yesterday?"
- Overhear a group of people talking about last night's game? Express your interest in the conversation by saying something like, "Are you talking about _____?" then, listen and chime in.

Compliment Them

Everyone loves compliments, especially when they are feeling insecure. If you're struggling to start a conversation with someone, find something to compliment.

- “Yum, that drink looks good. What is it?”
- “Cute shoes! Where did you get them?”

Avoid personal compliments about their looks; that is just creepy!

Just Say Hello

Sometimes, the easiest way to meet someone is to offer a handshake and say, “Hi, I’m Peter.” Simply introducing yourself with a smile and a dash of confidence can work wonders. Treat new people as you would treat a friend.

Keeping the Conversation Going

How can you keep the conversation going after the initial question? It’s easy! Talk about something else you have in common – the event itself! Here are some ideas:

“I’m Gina, by the way, nice to meet you...”

- “Is this your first time at one of these events?”
- “How did you hear about this event?”
- “What a great place for an event, huh? Have you ever been here before?”

After that, try to learn more about them. Questions can include:

“Are you from the area?”

“What line of work are you in or trying to get in?”

Next step: get them talking. Remember, people generally like to talk about themselves. So, once they tell you what they do, ask questions about it. Here are a few:

“That’s very interesting...”

- “What drew you to that line of work?”
- “What do you like about your job?”
- “Why are you interested in working in that industry specifically?”

BONUS: Your Exit Strategy

It’s that time: your drink is dry and you’re ready to move on. When the conversation starts to wind down, don’t try to force more. Remember, you’re there to mix and mingle – don’t chain yourself to one person all night. If you’d like to exit a conversation, try one of these lines:

- “Alright, I’m going to get some food now that the line has died down a bit. It was great meeting you!”
- “Have you met Lisa? She works in your industry as well. I’m sure you both will have plenty to talk about. I’ve got to say hello to someone, but I’ll be back.”
- “Well, I think it’s time for me to head out. I would love to talk with you again, though. May I have your card/contact information?”

Additional Tips for Networking at Events

1. Do your prep work and know what type of people will be in attendance.
2. Read the news so you can be up-to-speed on current events and potential conversation topics.
3. Dress the part. Make note of the venue and expected attire.
4. Arrive on time. You can meet the organizers and work a smaller crowd.
5. Focus on the people, not the food. It’s difficult to shake hands and talk when your hands and mouth are full.
6. Drink in moderation, one or two tops.
7. Position yourself in a high traffic area.
8. Be assertive. “Hello, my name is _____.” Introduce yourself and start conversations.
9. Try not to talk with the same two people the whole night.
10. To keep the conversation going, focus on things you both know about - the guest speaker, the networking event, or the organization hosting the program.
11. Listen and ask questions. Remember, it’s not all about you.
12. Request a business card from those you want to follow up with (jot down notes to keep track of who you meet).
13. Follow up! After the event, get connected on LinkedIn, and send a personal email to request a meeting to continue conversations, reference something from when you met. Best practice is the 72-hour rule.