

Building and nurturing networks

Speaker: Dr. Mary Carroll, Union College

Networking is an essential piece of everyone's career, regardless of profession. Networking is the process of gathering and maintaining formal or informal relationships for the purpose of exchanging information.

Networking is NOT about looking for a job. Networking is about:

- Connecting with people
- Exchanging information
- Learning about industries and opportunities
- Developing and improving strategies for job search
- Discovering information, contacts, and ideas

Networking: (noun)

1. act of linking computers
2. practice of gathering of contacts: the process or practice of building up or maintaining informal relationships, especially with people whose friendship could bring advantages such as job or business opportunities

MSN Encarta (On-line)

Identifying a network

Networks consist of classmates, friends, faculty, friends, research collaborations, past employers, colleagues, and people met at the seminars, conferences, workshops, and job interviews.

Networks include people who have anything at all in common. At an ACS function, Mary Carroll was able to connect with then ACS President Bill Carroll upon discovering they shared the same last name. While they have no relatives in common, the discussion of their common name broke the ice and led to deeper discussion.

Networks also consist of all the people known by the people in your network, which is what makes them so powerful.

Schmooze: (intransitive verb)

to converse informally; CHAT
also: to chat in a friendly and persuasive manner especially so as to gain favor, business, or connections

Merriam-Webster OnLine

Events such as ACS local meetings and social hours are the ideal opportunity for building networks. Networking consists of schmoozing; the less work-oriented atmosphere of a social hour is meant to create an ideal schmoozing environment.

However, for many people, it can be difficult to engage a stranger in informal conversation. Consequently, people at such events tend to converse with people they already know well.

Speed-Networking at ENY

Such was the case at the Eastern New York (ENY) local section meetings, where Mary Carroll often takes her students. Instead of meeting established chemists and building networks, her students would talk only to each other.

To encourage students, and others, to actively network, the ENY executive board introduced speed networking to their social hours. As of October 2005, 20-30 minutes of each ENY meeting is devoted to speed networking.

Speed networking is fairly simple:

- 1) Each person must find someone he or she does not know.
- 2) They must exchange names and business cards, then converse for the allotted time. (The allotted time must be long enough to establish interest but short enough that questions are left unasked.)
- 3) When the time is up, they must find someone new and repeat the process.
- 4) After the meeting, participants follow-up with their new contacts using a brief email or phone call.

Speed networking works, because it is an ice-breaker. Because everybody has to meet someone new, there is no impediment to approaching an unknown person and simply chatting.

It is generally well-received; in ENY, the only objections were from members who had been there for a few decades and felt like they already knew everybody. However, no one has stopped attending the meetings, and member interactions have improved, with the most marked difference being the interactions between the students and the established chemists.

Speed networking: (noun)

method of making a potential business contact by briefly talking to a series of people at an organized event and exchanging contact details

Macmillan English Dictionary (on-line)

Maintaining the network

However, new contacts are made, regular contact is crucial to maintaining a network. Contacts should be updated regularly, through phone or email, with information relevant to their interests. Contacts who have provided special assistance, such as reviewing a resume or helping land an interview, should receive a thank-you note.

A strong network is key to both finding a job and developing a career. ACS provides numerous networking opportunities through national, regional, and local meetings, workshops, and social events. Other opportunities exist as well—professional societies, volunteer organizations, community and school activities, and on-line communities, like linkedin.com and listservs.

Follow-up activities

- Form a networking support group to trade ideas on making new contacts.
- Establish speed-networking at your local meetings
- Host a job fair; use speed-networking to break the ice between employers and job-seekers.
- Create a networking luncheon or dinner. Have participants keep a list of the people that they meet. Put the names of people making five or more new contacts into a drawing for a door prize.