Description

Academics generally expect that they will be recognized and rewarded based on the merits of their work. But as the numbers of new PhDs continue to rise, for many of us, research alone will not be enough. Networking—face-to-face interaction with potential colleagues—is becoming increasingly important for academics.

Make Friends, Not Networks

The first thing you should do when networking is to completely forget that you are networking! If you approach networking simply as a way to meet people who may be able to help your career, you will likely come off as disingenuous. This is the exact opposite of the result you want.

Instead, practice getting to know a little bit about others. Not every person you meet will become your best friend—in fact, maybe none of them will—but making new friendly acquaintances and remembering a bit about them the next time you see them is a valuable talent.

Conferences are Just the Beginning

Conferences are a good place to start increasing your network, but at conferences you are limited to, at best, your larger field, if not a more specific subset of your field. The key to networking is to broaden your circles of engagement.

There are a variety of ways to get to know academics outside of your department or school. You can, for instance, become active in graduate student organizations which draw from the entire school or attend public discussion groups or an academic lecture series. Even if the subject is not squarely within your area of research, this is a beneficial environment: you are expanding your network of colleagues.

After attending a few events, you will likely start to notice a core group of regular attendees and you will probably also come to recognize the person or people in charge of organizing the group and its activities. These are the people you want to get to know better because once you know them, they will generally introduce you to other regulars.

Talk to Strangers

But for some people, the thought of striking up a conversation with a stranger is terrifying; it's definitely something that may take some getting used to. But if you prepare ahead of time, it can take off much of the pressure. For instance, approach someone you have seen more than once at a lecture series and ask them how long they have been attending. At an event, identify the organizer, approach them and thank them for putting the event together. If you notice that a speaker has a free moment, introduce yourself and tell them how much you are looking forward to their presentation.

Especially in job interviews, your circle of professional acquaintances may become just as important as your latest journal article or conference presentation. If you are neck-and neck with another candidate,

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but an interviewer hears from another colleague that you are friendly and easy to work with, it may be the edge you needed. Whether or not the other candidate is just as easy to work with doesn't matter if no one on the interview panel knows that. Your networking just paid off.

Of course, there is still no substitute for excellent research. That being said, personal relationships are becoming more important in academia, so work to develop and expand those relationships as you continue to improve your work.

Category

1. Promoting Research
2. Using Social Networks

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