

Networking with Environmental Professionals

5 Keys to Making Life Changing Connections

WHY THIS GUIDE?

The purpose of this guide is to provide a thorough description of the aspects of networking in the environmental fields to help students eliminate their fear of networking while maximizing their success with it. Someone you meet while networking, or even several people you meet, could change your life. For that very reason, you should make this part of your college to job transition strategy, your job to job transition strategy, or just for fun!

My hope is that this guide will answer all your questions, quell all your fears, and change your life for the better.

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WHAT IS NETWORKING?

Networking is:

- Purposefully making connections and building mutually beneficial relationships
- Getting to know people
- Exchanging information

Networking is not:

- A public interview
- Just for your benefit
- A meeting of tight-knit people who are going to laugh at you for trying to join their secret meeting

Networking also doesn't just happen at events titled "networking". Since networking is the action of purposefully making connections it can occur at after-hours meetings, meet-ups, small groups, large groups, talks, lunches, workshops, training, conferences, or online.

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5 KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL NETWORKING

1. A positive and opportunistic **mindset**
2. **Plan** ahead
3. Make an **impression**
4. Consistent **Follow-up**
5. **Persistence**

KEY 1: MINDSET

MINDSET: THINK OPPORTUNITY

Why are you considering networking to begin with? *Rule number one is to give before you get.* If your intent in networking is strictly to meet someone who will give you a job, you won't likely be very successful. Be open to all opportunities that may be present to you while meeting new people in a networking setting.

The fact is, only you can define what a successful event is for you. If your goal is to talk to one person and you talk to one person, mission accomplished. Baby-steps are better than no steps.

The additional benefits is that you'll very likely meet people that will eventually be your colleagues and even life-long friends. Personally, I think that's a very exciting prospect.

MINDSET: THINK POSITIVE

Almost everyone has a phobia of public speaking and fear of rejection. Going into a situation where you are thinking that your very future is on the line is the WRONG mindset.

Networking is an opportunity to meet people and make connections with mutual benefits. It is not an interview, it is not life or death. You will not look stupid, or pitiful if you are not talking to anyone.

Focus on the positive, the opportunity to meet people or if you really just can't do it; find something, like getting to try a new bar or restaurant or getting some free food.

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Practice these mantras

- I am welcome here
- I have something to offer
- I can go home as soon as I meet my goal
- I can do this

KEY 2: PLAN AHEAD

PLAN AHEAD: CREATE A PLAN

Now that you've decided you're going to network and you've got the right attitude and perspective, let's discuss what you should do to prepare for a networking event.

A plan does several things for you:

- Gives you more confidence because you've thought the event through and you'll be less likely to be hit with unforeseen circumstances.
- It enables you to make measurable improvement because you'll have a quantifiable goal.
- It will allow you to accomplish more because you'll have something to hold you accountable to yourself.

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LinkedIn Networking Notes

Suggested LinkedIn networking plan steps:

1. Create a solid LinkedIn Profile (summary, photo, experience, something that stands out, see the LinkedIn Recommendation document)
2. Determine who (what titles, company types, experience, etc) will you connect with
3. How many will you approach before changing your method (if it's not working)?
4. What will you say?

PLAN AHEAD: WHAT TO INCLUDE in YOUR PLAN

- Goal statement (see how to create a great goal on the next page)
- Determine which events you'll attend by researching who hosts, who attends, fees, etc. Event opportunities include meetups, talks, lunches, workshops, training, conferences, etc. Find events by searching Facebook, local clubs, Google search, and asking on LinkedIn.
- Determine how you will document your success that will be tied to your goal (number of conversations, business cards exchanged, or other) When setting your goal, remember *Quality over Quantity.*
- Brainstorm and document different ways that you could make an impression, be creative but not crazy.
- How you will answer the question, "So, what do you do?"

PLAN AHEAD: SET A GOAL

Your networking plan should include not only how many people you want to talk to but what type of person or info you'd like to get.

Goal statement should include the number of connections and the type of information you're looking for:

- Someone with hiring information
- Someone who can refer you to someone hiring
- Someone who can give you information about a specific job description

Measuring results does three things:

- Forces you out of your comfort zone
- Gives you a go-home check out point if you need it
- Helps you determine if you are improving at each event

Example: I will meet and talk to at least 3 new people and I want to find someone who can tell me what it's like to be a hydrogeologist.

PLAN AHEAD! BE PREPARED

You've now got the right mindset, the goal and a plan. Now you've got to get physically prepared. Here are the things that you can do ahead of time to make you more comfortable and confident when you get to the event.

1 - Attire: Wear comfortable business casual. Jeans are often ok since EP's are often in the field (unless it's specifically a formal event). No shorts, no flip-flops.

2 - Business cards: Bring more than you think you need. Include your LinkedIn Profile URL and make sure it is snazzy and up to date. Old school people will tell you to bring a resume, I'll tell you that is old advice, it's much more convenient for someone to look you up. Job seekers who give a resume often skimp on the follow up because they assume their resume made it from the event to home and to the EP's office the next morning... ummm very rarely maybe. Don't waste the paper.

3 - Introduction: Practice it and be prepared by knowing the general lingo. Have a great handshake, somewhere between vice grips and jellyfish. Make eye contact.

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There are also many ways to show up and leave like a ghost without anyone even knowing you were there. Hopefully, after you've read all this great stuff and I've given you the inside scoop as to how engaging Environmental Professionals are, that won't happen to you!

KEY 3: MAKE AN IMPRESSION

MAKE AN IMPRESSION: PRACTICE YOUR PITCH

Practice your response to questions like “So, what do you want to do?” Don’t reply with, “I want to be an [insert degree name]”. Tell a story, talk about your favorite college elective, talk about the how much you learned to love GIS when you worked on that one intern project.

This is possibly the most terrifying aspect of networking. What if I get this wrong, what if I sound stupid, what if nothing comes out of my mouth?

Some Environmental Professionals can be intimidating, usually not on purpose, but some really do enjoy putting students on the spot. Keep up the positive mindset, don’t sweat it, it’s meant to help you not harm you.

Pro Tips!

- Show as much confidence as you can (eye contact, mind your posture, confident handshake that you practiced, smile!)
- Remember the mantras
- Don’t get caught off guard, be able to intelligently discuss career option by knowing some of the lingo

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MAKE AN IMPRESSION! INITIAL CONTACT

Typically, you head straight for the check-in, easy. The next step is up to you. If you were meeting someone there, look for them while you also scope the situation.

Top 3 people to talk to if you're not ready to approach people:

- The hosts
- The check-in people
- People by the food

When you're ready: Approach people in odd numbers, it's easy to break into a one on one conversation.

Pro tip 1: Check with the hosts ahead of time if you can volunteer at the event, having a role automatically gives you greater confidence and will put you in the path of attendees making that initial greeting a little easier.

Pro tip 2: Connect with someone on LinkedIn who is attending and ask to meet them there

MAKE AN IMPRESSION! CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

After the exchange of “What do you do?”s are over you may need additional conversational material to avoid awkward silence. Plan some opener questions ahead of time. Environmental Professionals have a lot of things in common, that is one of the great things about networking with them!

Here are some basics that are typical but obviously **do not apply to everyone** (use your judgment):

- Eco-conscientious
- Enjoy the outdoors
- Love to travel
- Like to drink beer
- Usually liberal (not always, good practice with conversation in any professional environment to leave politics out)
- You might be surprised how many go to church (also avoid religion)
- Typically into sports

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KEY 4: FOLLOW-UP

FOLLOW-UP!or don't bother going at all.

Send an email reminding the person you spoke to of the conversation you had. Event attendees meet a lot of people; what would they remember about you? If they said they would do something for you, remind them; there is a 95% chance they will have forgotten by now.

Invite them to connect on LinkedIn. Don't skip this, and make sure your LinkedIn profile is complete, this puts your credentials right in front of them.

Use **GOOGLE** to search templates for follow up emails.

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OPPORTUNITY!!!

This is the perfect chance to stand out from the crowd. Be professional in your messaging. Show them you are capable of writing, spell checking and following up.

Make sure your LinkedIn is maximized.

Show that you've got initiative. Ask them to give you feedback on your resume or LinkedIn profile. Or if they can introduce you to someone in the field you want to be in.

FOLLOW-UP! SAVE CONTACTS

When you follow-up with your new connections some will respond and others won't. Some will provide you will helpful information and others won't.

It's still important to keep those contacts somewhere, whether it's in a spreadsheet or just keeping their cards on file so that you can follow-up again later. *Make a note* where you met the person or something you talked about so you can refresh their memory of you.

A good time to try to reconnect is when you've gotten serious about a job search and, unlike when you met at the networking event, now you have a better idea what type of job you're really looking for or after graduation to let them know you're still looking.

Finally, don't forget the first thing I told you back on page 6: *Rule number one is to give before you get.*

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KEY 5: Persistence

PERSISTENCE: DON'T GIVE UP!

The final key to successful networking is *persistence*.

Respect the process, it takes time to build a network of other environmental professions who trust you and recognize you.

Realize you may not make that life changing connection on the first or even fifth event, but at some point if you're offering value whenever you can, sticking to your values, being a go to person, and just being genuine, connections will happen.

WHAT TO DO NEXT?

Get online and seek out the environmental professional groups in your area

Decide to attend at least one event and put the next meeting date on your calendar

Go back to slide 1 and keep working on your plan

Learn some EP Lingo so you don't get caught off guard

Check out the industries and jobs out there, have an idea who you want to meet

LESSONS LEARNED Track your results. Be aware and try different things to see what is working for you

Keep following The Environmental Career Coach for additional tips and guidance!

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Good Luck!



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- How to Make a Memorable Business Card
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- Motivation
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- Workshops
- Chat time
- And more...