



11 Tips to Forming Professional Relationships

1. On day one, you will receive a packet which includes the names of all conference participants, including their organization, contact information, etc. Take a moment to skim this packet for organizations that you recognize or that you may wish to learn more about. Note that contact person's name, and if the opportunity arises, make a point to introduce yourself and express your interest in their work.
2. Carry your business cards, and a way of collecting them. Most professionals will have them ready, so be sure you are able to follow up on an invitation to contact an interesting person after the conference if you should receive one.
3. Attend peer group meetings. Getting up early is tough, but these small, informal gatherings are a great opportunity to network on a more personal level, and get to know other attendees in the course of a conversation topic that is of interest to you.
4. Make session selections that speak to your goals in professional development. Not only will you be attending a valuable learning experience, others who chose the same selection may have insights to share.
5. Take note of persons of interest who speak up during the session. If an attendee makes an interesting point, or raises a question that speaks to you, take a moment to speak with them after the session ends, introduce yourself, comment on their point, and perhaps continue discussions over lunch!
6. Lunch is a great time to get to know unfamiliar people. Make it a point to sit with different people often, and ask lots of thoughtful questions if conversation doesn't flow immediately.
7. If you are attending the conference with other people you know, perhaps from your organization, make sure to spend time on your own, interacting with new people. There will be plenty of time in the evenings to regroup, so make the most out of sessions and lunches by mingling with new people.
8. Make a point of attending as many of the conference activities as possible. Receptions and tours are great, casual opportunities to meet new people and form relationships.
9. Remember, particularly if this is your first conference, or if you are feeling shy; many seasoned leaders have a great deal of experience in attending conferences of this nature. If it seems like they know a dizzying array of people, it's because they do, but that has not always been the case. They once stood in your shoes as well, and it took many years to forge those relationships that they now enjoy. If you see someone standing alone, take a moment to stop and chat, you never know who might have the next piece of great information that will fuel your next project or inspire your career!
10. Remember your value! Although you may wish to obtain the insights of someone with more experience, you have a unique perspective on the work you do, and the world in which we live. Maybe YOU are the source of their next great inspiration for a project, or the work you do lends a new outlook to a current project.
11. Follow up. If someone inspired you, or gave you valuable advice, follow up after the conference with a quick email of thanks. It opens the door to future discussion, and is a much appreciated gesture.