



Why networking?

"Science is politics," says **Alexander Heyl**, a genomics researcher at the Max Planck Institute in Berlin, Germany. And networking is part of the politics. "Networking is important because it keeps you current in your field and makes you aware of what others are doing and what are the opportunities out there."

It's not just finding a better job and not just about networking with people higher up in the hierarchy.

For instance your peers are:

- going to hire you later,
- going to review your papers
- and your grant proposals

And furthermore you want to network because:

- you are seeking collaboration
- looking for exchange of information
- being asked as a board member (side jobs)
- panel discussions etc

What is networking and what isn't?

It's not about selling yourself but it's actually much more like building relationships, friendships. An evening like this is an excellent networking opportunity, as long as you don't just talk to the people you already know very well.

"Networking isn't about marketing, it's just about staying in touch with people and offering to help them. Eventually they'll offer to help you."

But on the other hand it's also not all coincidence; it's somewhere in between.

selling	networking	coincidence
need to know	nice to know	don't know
circulate	meet people	stay alone
take / get	offer / give	don't exchange
keep contacts	share contacts	what contacts?
expose yourself	be interested	don't talk to strangers
against the other	collaborate	alone
win - lose	win – win	loose (maybe win)
attached	in contact	detached

Tips for networking

1. Join a club or branch organization
2. When going to a conference, decide beforehand who you want to speak to
3. Have your own 'one minute story' ready
4. Be generous to others: bring people together
5. Be yourself; don't fake
6. Never critique other people while talking to someone
7. Write some topics you've discussed on the back of business cards
8. Keep in touch; maintain your network
9. Evaluate your contacts twice a year



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Networking: A Career Necessity

E-mail has revolutionized the process, but personal contact remains paramount

By Sam Jaffe

A gadabout scientist in business suit and silk tie replaces yesterday's white-coated gent stuck in the lab. Today's life science researcher works in an interactive profession that requires enormous amounts of conversation, idea sharing, and plenty of social skills. "Science is politics," says **Alexander Heyl**, a genomics researcher at the Max Planck Institute in Berlin, Germany. And networking is part of the politics. "Networking is important because it keeps you current in your field and makes you aware of what others are doing and what are the opportunities out there."

For most professions, networking has one and only one goal: finding a better job than the one you already have. While that might be a primary goal for graduate students and postdocs, anyone with a tenured position has other priorities. "Your peers are not just going to hire you later, they're also going to review your papers and your grant proposals," explains **Donald Burke**, a biochemist at the University of Indiana.

That means that scientists don't have to just keep up with what others in their field are doing, they have to build relationships with each other. Sometimes it requires picking up the phone and calling a peer when there's really no pressing news or request needed. And that's the part that some researchers don't like to do. Often their work schedule is so crowded that the concept of calling another scientist just to chat seems preposterous. Yet it can be a valuable use of time, according to **David Parker**, president of DP Parker and Associates, an executive recruiting firm that specializes in the sciences. "If you're in touch with someone frequently when you don't need them to do something for you, they'll be a lot more interested in helping when you do need something," he says. "Networking isn't about marketing, it's just about staying in touch with people and offering to help them. Eventually they'll offer to help you."

One easy way to trick yourself into enjoying the task of networking is to focus on the benefits you can offer to others, rather than your own goals. "If the word networking makes you think of insurance salesmen at a luncheon, then just call it being a friend," says **Kevin Eikenberry**, owner of the Discian Group, a management consulting firm that concentrates on the education field. "People are more willing to help people who've helped them, so go out and help them. It's not quid pro quo, but the good you do in the world will come back to you."

Networking at the Scientific Meeting

The grand prix event of networking is, of course, the scientific meeting. These conventions often gather everybody working in a specific field at one place and time. Unfortunately, that place is often a nondescript ballroom in a town far from home, and it probably occurs at a time when most researchers would rather be with their families or in their labs. Nevertheless, conferences can be crucial to your career. "I urge scientists to attend as many conferences as they can, even when they're not presenting," says Parker. "For one thing, it's going to give them ideas. But it is also good for their careers. There's nothing like face-to-face contact, and these days conferences are one of the only ways you can get that."

Researchers at large universities or large cities find that networking comes easy. Bumping into an acquaintance on campus or on the street occurs naturally, and a quick meeting at a coffee shop is easy to set up. But having an active network of friends and peers is all the more important for people who work in geographically isolated places.



There's no better example of working in relative isolation than Israel, which has the highest number of PhDs per capita than any other country, yet is physically separated from the rest of global science by the fact that the country is still in a state of war with most of its neighbors. Since the early days of its founding, the Israeli government has kept a special account called the Fund for International Scientific Relationships. The sole purpose of the fund is to dole out money to allow the nation's scientists to travel to Europe, the United States, and Asia to attend meetings and visit other scientists. "One has to be able to exchange ideas and it's hard to do that when you live in a semi-isolated country," says **Raffi Goren**, a horticulturalist at the Hebrew University's campus in Rehovot, Israel. "Going to meetings and seeing colleagues takes on a special significance for Israeli scientists, precisely because it's so expensive and hard to arrange."

Email is probably the most useful method of maintaining ties to your network. It's free, easy to use, and doesn't require a massive time commitment of the person on the other end. And everyone's got it. "E-mail, more than any other modern technology, has really revolutionized science," says **Nina Allen**, who heads a microscopy center at North Carolina State University. "So much time used to be spent waiting for information. Now it's instantaneous."

There are limits to E-mail use though. Frequent messages with little content can be as annoying as junk E-mail, especially to those who feel that a reply is necessary for every letter received. "There's only 24 hours in the day," says molecular geneticist **Martin Vingron** of the Max Planck Institute in Berlin. A definite no-no is passing along nonscience related E-mails such as chain letters, jokes, or charity requests. "There's a law of diminishing returns on the number of E-mails you send out," says Parker. "You don't want to get to the point where someone is automatically deleting your E-mail because they know you have nothing of substance to say most of the time."

That's not to say that networking needs to be all business. It's important to get to know people on a personal basis, especially when meeting face to face in a conference setting. A long talk over a drink about subjects that range from your latest research to sharing your kids' pictures is probably far more productive than a brief sharing of critical information in a hallway. Just remember one golden rule of networking: don't do it when you're drunk. Imbibing a beer or two with colleagues can be relaxing and memorable; meeting colleagues for the first time with a lampshade on your head isn't.

Even when not filling up at the martini bar, scientists still have to be careful about what they say when talking to peers. "You have to disclose something about your research and your methods if you want people to talk openly to you," says NC State's Allen. "But you also don't want to spill all your beans." Allen recounts the story of one of her graduate students who met a luminary in her field at a conference and described her research in detail to him, flattered at his interest. A few months later, she found out he was doing the exact experiment. "It's one of the hardest lessons to learn for a young scientist: knowing what to say and when to stop talking and start listening."

Yet Allen and other established scientists don't think that being appropriately reticent should stop you from attending meetings, establishing contacts, and building relationships with others in your field. "The iconoclast working in an ivory tower just doesn't get anywhere these days," says **Anthony Trewavas**, a molecular biologist at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland. "Networking has certainly helped my career. When people think who to invite to meetings or sit on panels, the names that come first are those they know."

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