

# Building your network

Your network is one of the most valuable and lasting business assets you will ever have. Even from the beginning of your career, you are just as likely to find your first job through your network as you are through advertised positions.

Beyond the immediate value offered by job opportunities, your network will also help you identify business opportunities. It will create cross-fertilisation of ideas, leading you in new and often unexpected directions. Your network will help you find and access the resources that will help you achieve the best outcomes in your work.

Ultimately, the best business opportunities are grown via trust, and your network is the first and fastest avenue to address each new opportunity from a position of trust.



Image courtesy of FreeDigitalPhotos.com and image creator (iStock.com)

## Who is your network?

- Peers
- Mentors
- Academic staff
- Alumni association
- Professional association
- Former employers and colleagues
- Family friends
- Mutual contacts

## How do you start building a network?

Business events, conferences, meetings of your professional society – these are all rich sources of opportunity.

But walking into a room full of strangers can be incredibly daunting, even for the most outgoing among us. It can be extremely hard to join conversations with groups of people that you don't know, but who already know each other. This is particularly the case when most of the people are probably older than you, more established in their careers, and where you might feel that your relative inexperience puts you at a disadvantage.

The truth is that most people come to such events with the intent of networking. And at professional society meetings such as at the RACI, the majority of established career members are actually keen to help give the next generation of scientists 'a leg up' if they can.

Nerves are normal, and it takes time to get comfortable with networking. So here are some tips to get you started.



# Tips for networking at events

## Plan ahead

Starting conversations isn't always easy. So come with some questions to ask, such as "What is your favourite part of your job?" "What is your best advice for a young chemist just starting out?" "How did you get into your area of work?"

People *love* to talk about themselves. Give them the opportunity to do so. Then conversation will start to flow.

## Come prepared

Get some cards printed. They're cheap, and the whole point of networking is that you want people to remember you. Most importantly, you want them to be able to find you.

Your card doesn't have to be fancy. Just your name, phone number and a proper, professional email address. A photo is also a great idea.

## Build rapport

It takes time to build any relationship. By keeping notes, by remembering the people you have met, you have the opportunity to grow your network over time.

And when you come to an event, you can then start with the people you already know, who can in turn introduce you to other people.

## Get involved

Networking, like any form of trust, is a two-way street. Get involved in your profession and your professional society. Giving a little of yourself, and the investment will be rewarded.

## Share

Networking, like any conversation, is reciprocal. You can talk about your study, what you have enjoyed, your career goals, your professional views on science issues of the day.

## Follow up

If you had a particularly interesting conversation or rapport with a new contact, you can always send your new contacts little items to keep your name fresh in their mind – 'thank you' notes, articles of interest, courtesy emails, any sort of items that reference the conversations you had and the rapport that you are building.

## Keep notes (and business cards)

After you have met a person, make a few notes. What did you talk about? What are their interests? Did they talk about work, or family, sport, books, whatever?

