

Professional Networking: Who You Know Is as Important as What You Know

A resource developed by the AAG's EDGE Project (www.aag.org/edge)

What is "networking"?

Professional networking is the process of developing relationships with people in the field of one's occupation. If you look at the people whose career accomplishments you most admire, you are likely to find they have strong relationships with a variety of other people in the same field—people in different career stages, different geographic areas, different specialties, and/or different kinds of employment. The strength of such relationships is more important than their number.

Ten tips for building your professional network

1. Give as good as you get

Professional networking is a two-way street. Building reciprocal relationships and giving as well as receiving are key aspects of the networking process.

2. Cultivate your professional relationships

Developing and sustaining relationships in your professional life requires the same skills you use to maintain your personal relationships: listening attentively, sharing yourself and your knowledge, asking for what you need, and reciprocating are integral parts of the process.

3. Set aside time for networking, even if you are already employed in a good position

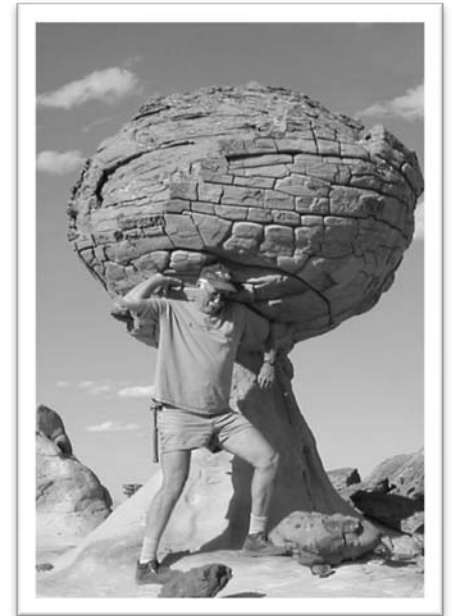
Professional networking can benefit your employer. Using your networks can help your organization identify highly qualified potential job candidates and minimize the risk of a costly hiring mistake. In general, a modest amount of time spent daily and weekly will yield results.

4. Get involved with your communities of practice

Become an active, engaged member of at least two professional organizations that align with your interests. One organization should relate to your discipline and the other should focus on the issues you encounter in your work or the tools and techniques you use to address them. Because so few jobs advertise explicitly for "geographers," networking is an excellent way to identify companies looking to hire employees with your skills and background.

5. Generate good buzz

Strive to maintain a favorable reputation. If you are easy to work with and you keep your commitments, your network will know, and they will spread the word on your behalf.



Volunteering is not an option; it is an absolute requirement for career advancement and for personal growth.

-- Ken Turnbull,
Master networker and
accredited land consultant

6. Mix and mingle at meetings, conferences, and social gatherings

Professional meetings offer opportunities to find like-minded people, to expand your network, to become informed about research frontiers and new products and services, to share research results, to find employees or employment, to gain speaking experience, and to reconnect with people you have not seen for a while. Consider subscribing to the list serves, newsfeeds, and newsletters offered by your alumni groups and professional societies, or browse sites such as Meetup.com to find local social events for professionals who share your interests.

7. Don't underestimate the value of personal contact

Although the internet or other indirect contact methods can be beneficial, they should only be used as supplements for "traditional" networking tools – face-to-face meetings, phone calls, and handwritten notes can all leave a strong positive impression.

8. Use new technologies to your advantage...

Social media have become a great resource for building communities of people with common interests. Social networking sites (such as Facebook) and professional networking sites (such as LinkedIn) are also becoming increasingly important job search and recruitment tools. If you have a professional networking page or a website that highlights your academic and employment qualifications, consider providing the URL on your résumé or business card as a "landing page" where potential employers and contacts from your network can learn more about you.

9. ... but be careful to maintain a professional online presence!

A recent survey revealed that nearly three-quarters of companies plan to increase their use of social networking sites for their initial vetting of job candidates, and over one-third had eliminated a job candidate from consideration on the basis of information found online. You might want to limit access to some of your personal information in order to prevent potential employers and business contacts from encountering sensitive material that could tarnish your professional reputation.

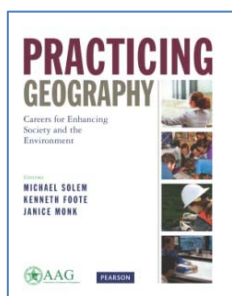


I want my name and my face to be recognizable. People often feel they know me even if they haven't met me.

-- Glenn Letham,
Social media enthusiast and
Managing Editor of GISuser.com

10. Everyone should have a business card

Whether attending formal events or informal gatherings, everyone from students to seasoned professionals should have business cards to share with new acquaintances. A simple and neat card with your name and contact information will suffice and can be obtained at a very reasonable cost. If you are a student or if you are unemployed and do not have a job title, consider a short, descriptive phrase such as "Geographer," "Graduate Student in Geography," or "Aspiring Cartographer" to convey your interests and background.



Material adapted from: *Practicing Geography: Careers for Enhancing Society and the Environment*, eds. Michael Solem, Ken Foote, and Jan Monk. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, 2012.

- Chapter Three, "Switching sectors: Transitioning into and among business, government, and nonprofit careers," by Joy K. Adams
- Chapter Five, "Professional networking," by Tina Cary.

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