

Early Career Cheat Sheet

Practical tips to prepare for networking:

Before and during the Event

1. Know What You're Hoping to Get Out of It

Before the event kicks off, take a moment to think about what success looks like for you. Are you hoping to meet potential collaborators, learn from industry leaders, or just get your name out there a bit more? Having a clear goal will help you decide where to focus your time and energy.

2. Do a Little Prep Work

Take a look at the conference schedule and mark the sessions, speakers, or workshops that catch your eye. If you can, check out who else is attending - LinkedIn is great for this. A bit of planning can really help you make the most of your time and spark some great conversations.

3. Break the Ice with Confidence

Small talk doesn't have to be awkward! Keep a few easy openers in your back pocket, like:

"What brought you to this event?"

"Have you been to any sessions you'd recommend?"

These simple questions can lead to some meaningful chats.

4. Make It Easy for People to Find You

Give your LinkedIn profile a quick refresh - make sure your photo is recent, and your info is up to date. If the event has an app or a hashtag, start engaging before you even arrive. It's a great way to warm up connections and stay in the loop.

5. Be Kind to Yourself

Conferences can feel overwhelming...and long! Don't feel like you must do everything or talk to everyone. Take breaks when you need to and give yourself permission to skip a session or two. You're doing great just by showing up.

After the conference

1. Send a Friendly Follow-Up

Try to reach out within a day or two after the event. A quick message that mentions something specific you talked about can go a long way. For example:

“I really enjoyed our chat about digital marketing at the conference—your recent project sounded fascinating! I’d love to hear more when you have time.”

2. Connect on LinkedIn (With a Personal Touch)

When you send a connection request, add a short note to remind them who you are and where you met. When making connections at the conference,

3. Keep Your Contacts Organised

It’s easy to forget who’s who after a busy event. Use a spreadsheet, a contact app, or even LinkedIn’s notes feature to jot down names, how you met, and any follow-up ideas. It’ll make staying in touch much easier down the line.

4. Be Helpful

If you come across an article, tool, or connection that might be useful to someone you met, don’t hesitate to share it. It shows you’re thoughtful and genuinely interested in keeping the relationship going.

5. Keep the Conversation Going

Networking doesn’t stop when the event ends. Every now and then, check in - congratulate them on a new role, comment on a post, or suggest meeting up at another event. Little gestures help keep the connection alive.

Top Tips to Overcome Networking Challenges

1. For Introverts: Set Boundaries That Work for You

You don’t have to meet everyone to have a great experience. Focus on a few meaningful conversations instead of trying to work the whole room. Look for quieter spots where one-on-one chats are more natural and relaxed.

2. If You’re Feeling Anxious

It’s totally normal to feel nervous. Try a few calming techniques - like deep breathing or grounding exercises - before heading in. And remember, most people are just as eager (and sometimes just as nervous) to connect as you are.

3. When Conversations Don’t Click

Not every interaction will turn into a lasting connection - and that’s okay. Some people might be distracted or just not a great match. People are often juggling the needs of their organisations in who they need to network with, people can be neurodiverse, people can be experiencing brain fog – remind yourself that there can be many other factors for why someone appears distracted. Don’t take it personally. Focus on the people who are genuinely interested in connecting.

4. If English Isn't Your First Language

Keep a few simple phrases ready to help you start conversations with confidence. Translation apps can be a great backup too. Most people will appreciate your effort and be happy to meet you halfway.

5. Quieting Imposter Syndrome

You belong here. Remind yourself of your strengths and what you bring to the table. Networking isn't about proving yourself - it's about learning, sharing, and growing together.

Get a senior colleague to introduce you!

Some additional networking tips:

- **Remind yourself that everyone is a person outside of work & titles**
 - What connects you all to blue spaces?
 - What hobbies you might have in common?
 - Where in the country are you based?
- **It is normal to join a circle when networking - you might have to create your own path into the conversation**
 - When there is a slight pause in a conversation, you can join by saying something along the lines of:
 - "Sorry to interrupt you, do you mind if I join your conversation? I am new to the sector, and it would be great to learn more about you all!"
 - It can feel unnatural or even 'rude', but this is completely normal for a conference setting. Conversations can be sparked very quickly, but speaking from experience it is always great to have more people join your circle and keep the conversation growing!
 - Don't forget to introduce yourself and tell people where you're working and what your role entails.
- **Everyone loves to share their work! & their path into it**
 - People in this field are usually very passionate about the work they are doing. It makes it very easy to have conversations that allow people to share what they're doing or any ideas for projects they have.
 - Don't be afraid to learn something new, or to say that you don't know much about their subject area. Often these are people's favourite moments because they can introduce you to their passion!

- o Everyone has something that can add value to your own thinking. We often work in silos, so you never know when a conversation can spark an entirely novel research / project idea!
- **Ask if people are part of any working groups outside of their job**
 - o Many people might be trustees, volunteers etc. with other organisations that might be useful networks for you to join as well! They may be able to tell you about other events or conferences that you haven't heard about yet that could be beneficial for you.
 - o They may have done courses that have helped advance their career.
 - o They may know about specific scholarship / exchange programmes.
- **What would you do differently if you were starting your career now? What's your biggest piece advice for someone just starting their career.**
 - o Use this opportunity to learn from experienced delegates life lessons. Some may resonate with you or offer a useful perspective that could inform your own career journey.