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The Four I's of Networking: Building Strong Connections



Folks:

The posting below gives some great advice on building strong networking connections. It is by Dr. Chris Golde, director of special projects, Office of the Vice Provost for Graduate Education, Stanford University, and is from her excellent blog *Grad|Logic: Navigating the Ups and Downs of Graduate School*. [Gradlogic.com]. © 2016 Chris Golde. All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.

Regards,

Rick Reis

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The Four I's of Networking: Building Strong Connections

Building your professional network requires active effort.

There are 4 steps as you move from meeting people to creating enduring connections. Remember them as the **Four I's**.

Identify

Initiate & Inquire

Invest

Intensify

(I know that is really five.)

Step One: Identify

Identify who you might add to your network and identify where you can meet new people. Strangers can become great colleagues and friends.

People. Who do you want to add to your network? Consider people within your university and outside of it. Who are people who are “up” from you? (Check out [Networking in Three Directions](#) to think broadly about who could be added to your network.) Each person you touch is in the center of his own web.

Networks you are part of. What networks can you tap into? Think about your advisor’s network; your department & its alumni; friends & colleagues from other institutions.

On-campus opportunities. Meet people at seminars, talks, classes, workshops and social events. Push yourself to try something new, like a seminar in another department. It’s a chance to meet someone new.

Conferences and meetings. Conferences exist to build professional networks. Identify a mix of larger meetings (Modern Language Association, Society for Neurosciences) and small specialty conferences (Midwestern Medievalist Meeting) to attend. Have a plan to practice Step Two over and over. Some of the most productive conferences I have attended were when I spent nearly all of my time in the lobby and coffee shops rather than in sessions.

When you are with your intellectual “peeps” you have ample opportunities to find interesting people. Do not squander this opportunity.

- Identify presentation sessions where you have a particular interest. Meet the presenters. Those in attendance share your interests; establish at least one new contact at every session you attend.
- Poster sessions are designed to foster interactions. Talk at length with a few selected authors.
- Receptions and meals are other places to meet new people. Challenge yourself to start up a conversation with a stranger.

Step Two: Initiate and Inquire

Creating the connection is the second step.

Connecting Up

When you are initiating a contact with someone more experienced and knowledgeable than you are, be especially respectful and professional.

Meeting someone in person. Approaching someone directly (i.e., the speaker after a talk) or arranging an introduction from a mutual acquaintance are two ways to meet someone “up” from you. Prepare a question to start the conversation. Briefly introduce yourself and explain your reason to meet. (“I am Chris, I study ABC at XYZ University, and I have relied on the theory that you developed.”) Then ask your question.

If the conversation goes well, be prepared to trade business cards. If there are others who want to talk to the person, exit when you have used your fair share of time. Plan to follow up as described in Step 3.

Sometimes the conversation does not go well. This happens. It may not be about you at all. You don't know what else is on this person's mind (a sick child, a looming grant proposal, another appointment). Take a few minutes to debrief with a friend. Could you have said or done something differently? These are chances to learn. After briefly licking your wounds, take it in stride, and move on. No need for Step 3!

Approaching someone by email. Many connections are initiated by email. Above all, keep the initial email short and to the point. A few tips to improve the chances for a response:

- **Clear subject line.** Make sure it doesn't look like spam. The subject line "A question for you" may never get opened. Be specific: "UMichigan grad student seeking advice about dissertation."
- **Introduce yourself.** One short paragraph is sufficient.
- **Specific, answerable question or request.** If the email can't be quickly and easily answered, it is likely to sink forever. Every year I get an email that asks, "What do you think are good dissertation topics in the area of graduate education?" Really?!? This is not answerable.
- **Use a professional tone.** "Hey, Dr. Golde." Nope.

Wait 10 days before repeating the request. We are all overwhelmed with email. Stop after two inquiries.

Connecting Across or Down

Networking is about building rapport. Initiating with a peer (connecting "across") or with someone who is more junior or novice (connecting "down") requires you to make the first move. Even if you are an introvert, you can do this. This is a skill that requires practice.

- Introduce yourself.
- Ask questions. The first question is the hardest. Pick something open-ended that requires a longer answer. "What surprised you most today at the conference?" "What do you hope to get out of this talk?" "Do you do research in this area? What is it about?"
- Find commonality. "I also study parasites." "I am also from Utah."
- Show interest. Nod and respond.
- Listen and smile. You don't have to do all of the talking. People love a good listener.
- Four I's to avoid: Interruption (listen with full attention), interrogation (hold up your part of the conversation), insult (never speak badly about others), I-I-I (focus on the other person, not on yourself).

Initiating a conversation with a stranger is hard. Set reasonable goals. Examples of small goals that can help you practice Step 2:

- Sit down with people I don't know and talk to one person before this presentation starts.
- Talk to three new people at this reception, before finding my friends.
- Go to a seminar outside of my department this week and ask one question.

Step Three: Invest

Following up—investing in the relationship—is step 3. If you want to maintain this connection (and you won't want to keep up with every person you meet), then invest in it.

Say “thank you” right away. Send a follow up email within 48 hours. Everyone loves to hear this. Thank the person for her time. For the idea that she gave you. For making the time in the lunch line pass so quickly.

Over time, figure out ways to keep the connection going. You can ask more questions. You can send resources. “I thought you might find this article interesting.”

The first few times you reconnect—in person or on email—remind the person who you are and where you met.

Step Four: Intensify

Strengthening existing ties requires cultivating and tending relationships over time. Be purposeful. Propose a time and place to reconnect. “We met last year at the Annual Conference. This year, can we set a time to meet for coffee? I would like to bring you up to date on what I have been doing and ask for some advice.”

“Same time, next year” connections can grow over the years. You will change a lot from year to year, and many senior scholars enjoy seeing new researchers develop. We appreciate playing a small role in their growth by providing advice from a different angle.

Tell people how their help paid off. It is satisfying (and surprising) to hear how advice takes root and makes a difference. It encourages us to keep giving advice, and to respond positively to requests for time.

With peers, take it upon yourself to initiate activities. One member of my grad school cohort hosted a potluck every fall for all of the current and new members of our specialty area. A grad school colleague from another school organizes a dinner every year at the annual meeting. Every year a few new people are included. These are chances to intensify relationships with peers and build new ones with those coming behind us.* * *

Take Step One today. Make two lists: people you want to add to your network and opportunities where you can meet new people in the next few months.

In the next two months, where are three times you can practice Step Two?

Learn more about networking: Read [Networking in Three Directions](#) and [Why You Should Network|Seven Myths Dispelled](#).

What makes each Step easier for you? Leave a comment.

Thank you to [Brian McDonald](#) of [MOR Associates](#) who introduced me to “Four I’s of Relationship Building” during a leadership training program. I adapted his list for graduate students.

Posted in [Skills](#) and tagged [Academic Life](#), [Academic Stuff](#), [Graduate School](#), [Networking](#), [PhD](#), [PhD Life](#) on [February 6, 2016](#) by [Chris Golde](#)

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