

Network

Connect Connect Connect

Networking is the single most important thing you can do to drive your career forward! Networking is connecting with others to exchange information, contacts, referrals and advice. It can expand your sphere of influence, leading to the creation of new relationships and business opportunities. In networking, who you know is less important than who knows you and who is willing to champion for you and your accomplishments. Therefore, how you conduct yourself, interact with others and deliver your overall message (verbal and nonverbal) are vital to successful networking.

Networking can take place anywhere at any time – in person, online or by phone. Here are a few DOs and DON'Ts to keep in mind when networking:

DO

- Be genuine, relaxed and professional (mirror with body language)
- Be respectful and mindful of appropriate boundaries
- Remember and use people's names
- Maintain soft eye contact when networking in person
- Introduce others and be a connector of people
- Offer to assist or help others without an expectation of getting something in return
- Exchange business cards
- Praise the accomplishments of others publicly and always remain positive
- Summarize action needed and schedule follow up
- Get Involved with like-minded Individuals: professional associations, university alumni groups, affinity groups

DON'T

- Be overly assertive or aggressive
- Overstay your welcome when the other party tries to end the conversation
- Stare or let your eyes wander – both can signal disrespect and trigger discomfort
- Forget your manners, especially dining etiquette
- Monopolize the time or take advantage of your connections
- Forget the importance of small talk. It helps establish a good rapport
- Make political, racial, sexual, physical ability or religious comments or joke

You've met them – now keep them!

- Know what you want from the contact
- Keep your unsolicited resume on hand
- Gauge your bond correctly
- Be cordial, not presumptuous
- Request a mentorship, if appropriate

Tips

1. Ask your HR partner for help finding a mentor
2. Volunteer to be a mentor at your location
3. Consider peer mentoring and mentoring circles
4. Prepare your Development Blueprint to discuss with your mentor

Join a Group or Start One

Being part of a group is a good way to build relationships and make important connections. Don't have a networking group near you? Determine if there is an interest at your location and get one started.

Suggestions:

- Professional Associations:
Use these helpful links to find organizations that fit your interests:
 - ASAE
 - Weddle's
- SSC Organizations and Groups:
 - Associate Resource Groups – find out about these groups and how to join on myApron
 - University Alumni Groups– look for your College/University in Outlook or SharePoint and reach out to them for more information
- Supervisors & Above in the Field:
Women in Leadership: for DSs and above - ask your HR partner for more information

How do I get a mentor?

Mentors can be assigned to you through your boss, a formal mentorship program, an HR partner or you can seek them out on your own. Look for somebody who is typically one or two levels above you in the organization, who excels in an area you would like to learn more about and who you can easily connect with in a personal and professional manner. This person will be a confidant for you so it should be somebody whose input you value.

Once you have found someone you would like as your mentor, follow the same tips in “Connect, Connect, Connect.” You are building a relationship and should try to put your best foot forward.

Mentoring relationships require a lot of time and attention, so be prepared to devote time to that relationship. Also, be respectful of your potential mentor's time. When asking them to be your mentor, be aware they may not have the bandwidth to take on the relationship. If that's the case, allow them to respectfully decline. There are other associates who may be able to help you out, your HR partner can help you find them.

When asking an associate to be your mentor, describe why you chose them specifically and what you are looking for out of the relationship. This will help set the tone and manage both of your expectations from the beginning.

Get the most out of your mentor meetings

To get the most out of your mentorship, it is beneficial to go over some initial ground rules. Here are some great questions to review together as you start your mentorship:

- What are our goals for the partnership?
- What obstacles or limitations would we need to plan for?
- What is the level of confidentiality of the discussions?
- How do we want to communicate with one another?
- How do we define success for the partnership? How committed are we to that success?
- What topics would we like to discuss?
- How often would we like to meet? Where, when and for how long? How often?

As you develop this relationship, check in on the progress of your goals. If you've accomplished them, it's ok to move on to another mentor relationship or end the meetings. If your needs are not being met, openly communicate expectations and decide if it's a relationship you would like to keep.