



Training for Universities

Developing Professional Networks



This programme is aimed at people who are wanting to improve their practical networking skills and to develop strategies to consciously improve the quality of their professional networks.

Networking is recognised by established professionals across all career paths - including researchers and Academics - as an essential tool for career development and professional advancement.

In contrast, many younger or less experienced professionals (including Early Career Researchers or PhD students) often feel uncertain about networking, both in respect to practical "How to do it" issues and the underlying "Should I be doing this?" (often meaning "Isn't this a bit sleazy?").

In this short workshop I introduce you to the tools you'll need to do the job well. I'll show you how to prepare so that it becomes easier than you fear.

- The importance of networking
- Developing communication skills
- Delivering a message
- Dealing with nerves or anxiety.

Trainer: Dr Margaret Collins

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What is Networking?

You've probably heard about it, maybe even been told that you should be doing it... Chances are you've "been there, done that and got the T-shirt" without even knowing it but what exactly do we mean when we talk about developing your professional network(s)?

Why bother networking?!

As a researcher, it is inevitable that you will work long and hard, your time at the bench, at your computer or in the library is very precious.

So why would you use such valuable time to network?

What has networking done for you?

There are many answers to this question and you'll need to do a little bit of digging for information. We can come up with all sorts of theoretical possibilities but what about practical examples...

What unexpected opportunities have you experienced as a result of "bumping into someone", a chance conversation or other apparently random incident?

Where do I network?

What are some of the people, places and situations you already use to interact with and meet people? They can also be used to develop your professional networks. Work from existing links!

There are many online spaces which may be of interest or relevance... I'm sure you know of Facebook but have you explored LinkedIn, ResearchGate, Mendeley, Academia.edu, Bibsonomy, Zotero, CiteULike...

Twitter can be a surprisingly rich networking arena if you don't let it take over your life!

Do think about your current network – who have you contacted recently to ask advice, to share ideas, to gather information? Simply notice and pay attention.

Remember that the entire world is connected by six degrees of separation!
Could you improve your network by reaching out through friends and friends of friends?

Dense vs Sparse?

Operational – Personal – Strategic?

Who do you want to meet?

Conferences and seminars are great places for networking. the speakers and presenters will be published in the programme before the event – but this will usually be the bigger "movers and shakers" in your research area, the keynote speakers.

Before you participate in any meeting, make a preliminary plan of the timetable and highlight talks, sessions or particular lectures you wish to attend.

When you arrive at a conference or meeting, spend some time looking through a more complete account of the proceedings. Has anything changed?

At this stage, conference proceedings will often contain a complete list of oral presentations and speakers and also a list of poster presentations and the authors.

Highlight posters and offered papers that are related to your area.

Look for people who are doing similar work, using similar techniques, may have reagents or information to share, may have solved your problems already...

Make a note of the names of these people, particularly first authors and seek them out.

What do you want to ask?

During a conference or seminar you will meet many different people, other researchers, competitors, potential collaborators, maybe even future employers...

Many people are perfectly happy sitting in a corner drinking tea on their own – I do understand why this may seem so attractive but what a wasted opportunity!

In my experience, people are very happy to speak to you and even the very "biggest fish in the pond" are usually happy to share.

So how do you start a conversation with the person behind an unfamiliar face? For most people, very ordinary questions about their accommodation or travel plans will be an easy start to a conversation. Then use the fact that you are at the same conference - you can comment about the last speaker or the book in their hand, ask what they liked, are they presenting data...

When approaching key speakers in your area make sure you are prepared. Have you read their recent papers? Did you go their presentation? Have a sensible question or comment that they can genuinely discuss with you.

What questions would you like to ask?

How can you raise your profile or visibility?

What practical steps can you take that will raise your professional profile in the areas important to your professional development. Without overcommitting your time or energy can you offer to assist organise a meeting or event, to deliver a seminar or simply share a business card?

What would you like to share?

A networking opportunity is also a great place to showcase your work, your research, your professional talents.

- **Who needs to know about you and your work?**
- **What would you like them to remember about you?**

Your elevator speech

Many people are not so good at small talk and are particularly uncomfortable talking about themselves. However, if we are looking to make connections and develop networks it can be really helpful to say something interesting and relevant in a short and snappy soundbite!

In business circles the classic "elevator speech" is a 60 second summary of why people might want to know more about you. It provides enough information for someone to decide whether they might want to know more about you. In research circles we might not need to be quite so snappy but we still need to offer that hook of interest.

You need to be clear:

- what can you offer,
- what skills/resources do you have,
- what difference do you make,
- what or who are you looking to meet?

It can be very powerful when you can enthusiastically and simply explain why you do what you do, what inspires your passion for your subject.

One of the really useful aspects of a conference is that, with the exception of the biggest international gatherings, it is often a relatively small and close-knit research community.

One point of "networking" is that if the person in front of you doesn't have the information, resources, reagents or resources you need, there is a strong possibility they will know someone who does!

This idea finds expression in the notion of "six degrees of separation" or the small world theory.

What do you do?

It helps to be ready and prepared to discuss your work in ways that make it accessible to specialists and non-specialists alike.

If the person in front of you doesn't have (access to) the resources you need, they may know someone who does but only if you can explain things in a way that they easily "get and can share."

Spend time preparing ways to describe your work to different people...

Can you think of a situation that is "a bit like" yours but maybe from a totally different area or discipline...

Analogies often allow non-specialists to understand and remember your work, for example:

The idea of beads organised along a string provided the concept of genes being organised as discrete elements on chromosomes...

The analogy of the functioning of the mind being similar to the operation of a computer...

Observing burdock burrs stick to the fur of a dog's coat inspired the development of Velcro.

The "lock and key" theory of the interaction of enzymes, substrates and products...

Comparing the flow of electricity along a wire to the flow of water in a pipe...

If you were to present your situation to an outsider, what analogy might you use to explain it?

Networking: you are always communicating something!

When you start to mix with colleagues, move around a conference arena, the coffee area, the lecture theatres... these are the places networking occurs.

Whether you are aware of it or not you are always communicating something to the people around you.

Your body language speaks more than your words – are you consciously aware of this?

If your answer is "No", you may be conveying messages you wish you weren't!

Making an impact

There is a large body of evidence to show that we make a lasting impression on the people we meet within the first few seconds of meeting them.

These first impressions aren't always accurate, they aren't necessarily fair but...

First impressions are important and they last a long time.

If you make a poor first impression, you may not get a second chance to make a better impression!

You need to think about:

- how you stand
- how you sit
- the gestures you use
- how you make eye contact with people in the room
- the sound of your voice
- the questions you ask...

There are several different components to making an impact during a meeting or a presentation. These include the actual words you use, the way that you use your voice and also your general appearance and body language.

Have you ever wondered...

What does "confidence" look like?

What does "confidence" sound like?

How do you show that you're listening?

How do you know you're communicating?

So what have we learned?

My objectives for this session were for us to:

- Increase our understanding of the professional importance of networking
- Improve our ability to communicate confidently in networking conversations
- Understand the importance of body language in effective communication
- Have tools to deal with stress or anxiety related to networking
- Have strategies to develop collaborations or increase visibility.

What have I learned from today?

Some Resources to support your networking skills

Amy Cuddy: Your body language shapes who you are...

http://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are?language=en

David Burkus: How to hack networking

https://www.ted.com/talks/david_burkus_how_to_hack_networking?language=en

Simon Sinek 2009: Start with why: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u4ZoJf_VuA

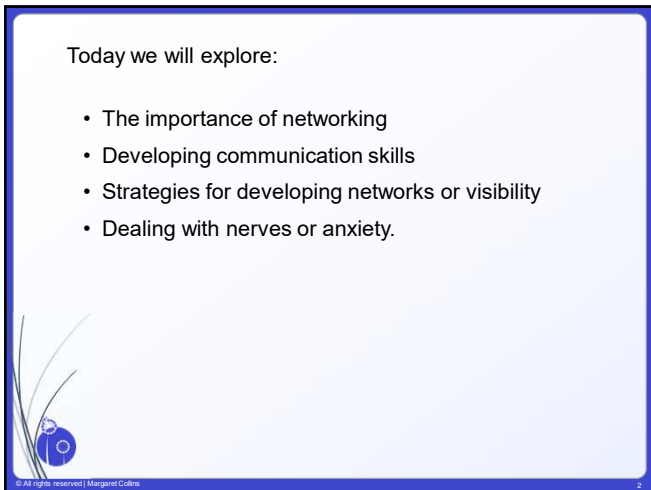
Herminia Ibarra: How leaders create and use networks:

<https://hbr.org/2007/01/how-leaders-create-and-use-networks>

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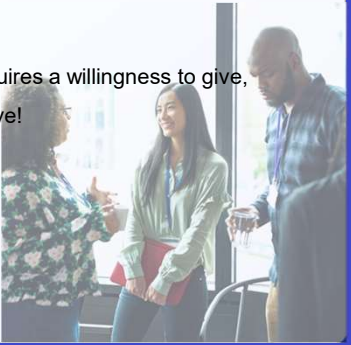


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What is networking?

Increasing the number of people you know
and who know you...

Effective networking requires a willingness to give,
often before we receive!



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Where do I network?

What/who are my networks?

- Friends, family, neighbours
- Hobby groups
- Social networks
- Church/charities/interest groups
- Colleagues
- Professional associations
- Online communities...
 - LinkedIn
 - ResearchGate, Mendeley, Academia.edu
 - Twitter.....



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Why bother networking?

What are some reasons to network:

- In general?
- For you specifically?





What has networking done for you?

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What/who are my networks?

Within my organisation...
Outside my organisation...

Dense Sparse
Operational Personal Strategic
Breadth Connectivity Dynamism



Map and label/analyse your possible networks

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Planning to network



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Who do you want to meet?

Depends on what you want to achieve...

Your list may include:

- Movers, shakers and influencers
- "On the ground" researchers
- Decision makers
- Examiners, editors, referees
- People who have contacts/networks
- Potential employers
- People who can share
- People with experience of...



Who is on your list?

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What would I like to ask?

Prepare your questions in advance...

- Research-specific questions
 - theory/practice/scope/opinions
- Job opportunities
- Experience needed
- Job shadowing/site visit
- Desirable achievements/characteristics
- Things to avoid
- What's it really like to...



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What would you like to share?

Be prepared to share information first:
It often helps if you have something to offer
specific knowledge or skills, service,
information, news, contacts...

- Who needs to know about you?
- What do you want them to remember?

What can you do to help them remember you?



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Making
"small talk"



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Networking – does small-talk work?

Research shows that we work more effectively with people we like and trust...

Sometimes we simply need to get to the point!



Prepare well and be flexible!

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Networking - Effective communication

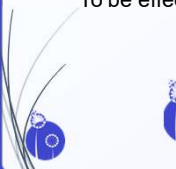
The tools you have are:

your **words**,

your **voice** and

your **body language**.

To be effective your intentions must be congruent.



What do you want to convey?

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Networking – Making small-talk

Can you talk about FORE?

- Family/friends/personal stuff
- Occupation – job-related topics
- Recreation – sports, hobbies, news items
- Education – research or HE related...
 - Watch the news for stories/themes...
 - What's trending in current journals?



Have a list of topics to try!

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Networking – Making small-talk

What do you talk about at a conference?

- The conference – interesting speakers, social events...
- Travel arrangements, accommodation
- Their work, their University, your work
- What you want from the Conference!
 - What really excites you?
 - What are you really passionate about?



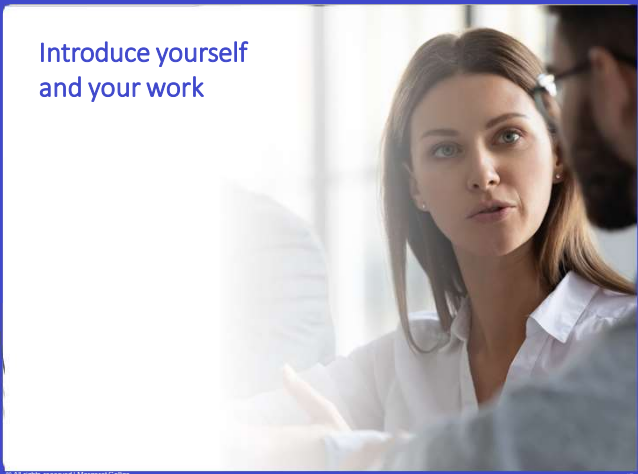
Make it easy for them to talk.

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Introduce yourself and your work



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Discussing your work

Talking to people can bring many challenges.

Use analogies or stories to associate your ideas with something they already know or understand:

- bring your ideas to life
- allow others to really understand
- make them memorable.



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Your introduction...

How do you introduce yourself to people?

- I'm only a... I just do... I work at/with...

How would you like to be known?

- For your job title or role?
- For your contribution, your expertise, your passion?

If you really believed in your value or expertise,
how would you introduce yourself?



Think of a few different ways to introduce
yourself and try them out with a trusted friend!

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Your Elevator Speech(es)

I'm currently investigating what makes one virus more toxic
than another, the molecular mechanisms of virulence...

I think the specific location of different proteins is important
in this so...

I'm hoping I can meet someone who is great at microscopic
imaging techniques.



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Your Elevator Speech(es)

I'm just finishing a postdoc in molecular virology though for
my next job, I'm trying to find a way into health policy and
planning ...

I'm hoping I can meet someone who has experience
working in health economics or government planning
departments....

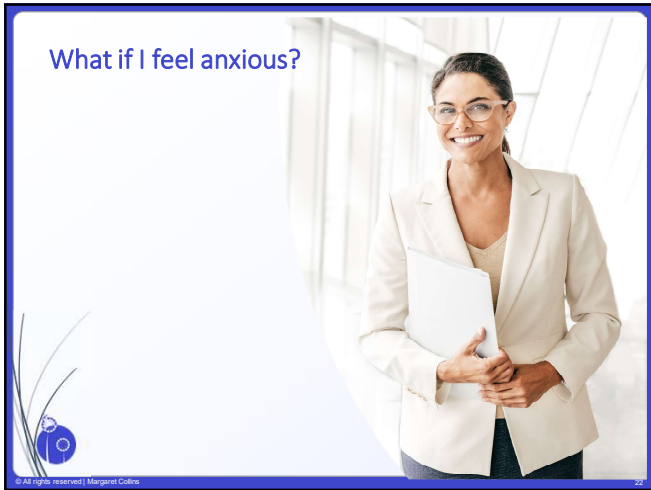


It's much easier if you're prepared!

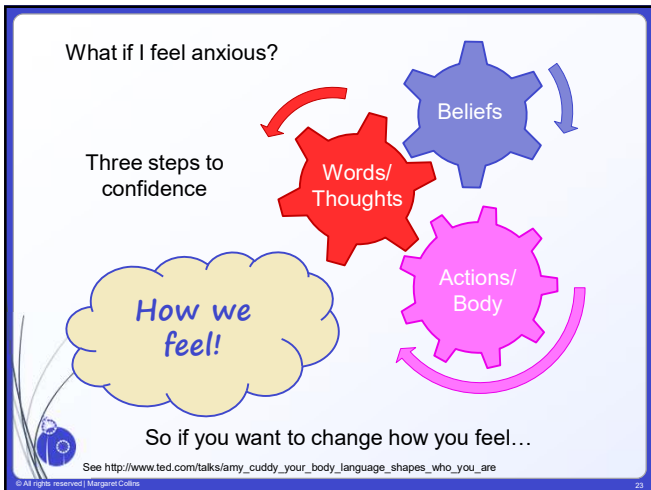
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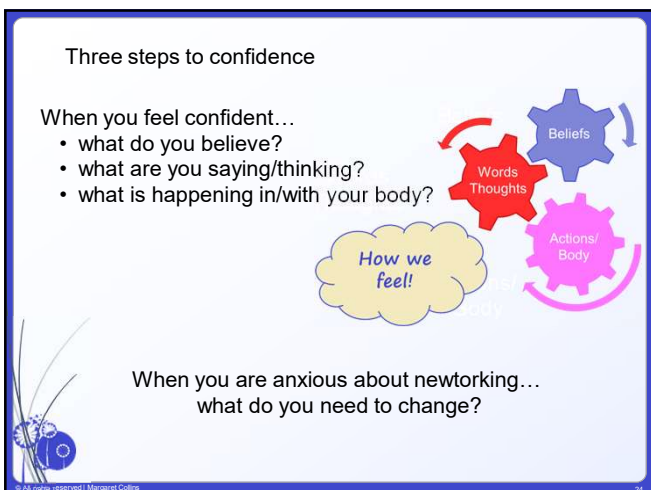
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More helpful self-talk



*Turn anxiety to excitement – breathe!
My racing heart sends blood to my brain
The more I prepare, the better I'll be
I'm not the only one feeling anxious...
Two conversations, that's enough!
Smile, breathe, make eye contact
I have something worth saying*

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In summary



- The importance of networking
- Developing communication skills
- Delivering a message
- Dealing with nerves or anxiety.

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If you fail to plan, then you plan to fail!

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