

BUILDING AN ORGANIC NETWORK

By Abby Ferri

As Safety 2018 came to a close, I reflected on what brought value to me during the conference. Technical and creative educational sessions are the foundation of events like Safety 2018, but another element usually brings me equal or greater value.

Although cliché, networking is the most valuable part of any conference I have attended. Just as people make safety come alive at your organization, meeting new people and connecting with colleagues brings life to the conference experience.

Networking often gets an eye roll when mentioned, and this is usually because people think that networking is a one-way street. The perception is that a networker is looking to get something. There are many reasons a safety professional should network, and not just to find a new job.

Networking Can Demonstrate Your Value Within Your Organization

Bring new ideas to your company by networking with professionals in the safety field who may work in different industries. Often, we spend a lot of time with professionals in our same industry, which can create a vacuum effect. Attend events such as local ASSP chapter meetings which are attended by safety professionals representing diverse industries. A manufacturing facility can implement lessons learned on a construction job site, a public agency can take lessons from private industry, and insurance risk control professionals can provide insight into best practices from many industries. Expanding your knowledge and professional network helps support your current position and brings valuable ideas to your employer.

Another benefit of networking is that you may cross paths with your current employer's business partners. You can leverage your network to open doors or smooth out relationships. In my experience, by networking with agencies that were owners of construction projects that my previous employer bid and worked on, I was able to act as a bridge between my employer and our clients due to my safety network. Often, my connection with an owner's safety professional could smooth job site relationships or allow us to proactively address concerns before they became larger issues.



Think of networking in a nonstrategic way, have fun and build connections. When the time comes, your organic network will look out for you and you will do the same for them.

Network to Support Fellow Safety Professionals

Many times I have been able to pass along the name of a qualified colleague to a frustrated hiring manager. On the other hand, anyone with a position to fill should be networking with their local ASSP chapter and other ASSP communities to find excellent candidates. Even before the job hunt, networking can help safety professionals fine-tune their job interview skills. Keep an elevator pitch in mind when approaching a national, regional or local event. Practice that pitch as you meet new people and expand your network.

Networking Is Proactive for the Individual

If you are looking to make a career move, the best time to network to find

your next job is when you are still employed. Karen Wickre, former editorial director of Twitter, emphasizes how networking is a practice of give and take:

Be helpful. When someone reaches out, just do it. . . . Most of the time I can't offer instant resolution. I just hear them out, paint the picture I know, and think broadly about useful advice and interesting people who can further the conversation. I do this simply because I believe that we all need help along the way, to figure out next steps, clarify priorities, perhaps hear a snippet of an idea or get a sense of the landscape. Each of us will need some of these things eventually. Just don't get all quid pro quo about it. Pay it forward.

Don't wait to network until you need something; it will be obvious to your colleague, and you will be frustrated when it takes longer to get what you need because you must spend time building a foundation with your peers. It is a lot easier to ask a favor when you have established a professional relationship with people in your industry.

The bottom line is that you never know what will happen in the near or distant future. Building your technical education in safety is important, but your network can make a difference for job hunting or impacting projects at your current workplace. Think of networking in a nonstrategic way, have fun and build connections. When the time comes, your organic network will look out for you and you will do the same for them. **PSJ**

References

Wickre, K. (2015, Aug. 26). I've spent a lifetime building a mighty network. Here are my secrets. Retrieved from <https://medium.com/backchannel/i-ve-spent-a-lifetime-building-a-mighty-network-here-are-my-secrets-8590d893d30c>

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