

PGR Tips on networking at events

The last issue of PGR Tips advised you to network in order to increase your chances of luck playing a role in your career. Networking is also crucial for setting up collaborations. Everyone knows how important it is, but how do you go about it? How does networking differ from socialising? This issue focuses on the situation of a room full of people, such as during a break at a conference. Here are some short practical tips.

Arrive early or in good time

It can seem more daunting to start talking to people in an already crowded room.

Offer to help the organisers

Offers of help will most likely be appreciated and will get you to speak to the organisers of the event. Then having a specific task or acting as a host and making people feel welcome will give you a perfect excuse to start talking to people.

Be helpful to people

Think how you can be of use to people: your knowledge, or are you able to introduce people to each other? This may not take much effort but may have a big impact on them.

Target people

Find out who will or might be there. If you know someone you would like to meet will be present, ask someone who is likely to know them to introduce you or find them and introduce yourself.

Speak to people who are on their own

People who are on their own are likely to be pleased to be drawn into a conversation. Similarly, it is a good idea to break away from a group of colleagues to talk to people you don't already know.

Prepare a topic to talk about

There is no harm in thinking of something to open a conversation with. Maybe talk about a project where you want input or explore what you both want out of the event you are attending. It doesn't matter if you use the same topic several times, as long as you allow the conversation to take its natural course. Don't bore people!

Find an area of mutual interest

Whoever you talk to, you will inevitably have some things in common as you are attending the same event. Ask open-ended questions and explore where your interests overlap.

Move around

Some people prefer to talk to a couple of people in depth and others prefer to move around, both are useful. If you do want to move on, make a polite excuse (for example, toilet break, getting a drink/ food) or state honestly that there is someone else you would like to talk to.

Enjoy yourself

Be yourself, smile and enjoy yourself. Be honest about your interests.

Follow up

Write an email, especially if you have promised to send or forward anything. Thank people who have been helpful. Follow up contact may be easier if you exchange business cards.