

## CHAPTER 26

# PEOPLE NETWORKING A VITAL AND INDISPENSABLE CAREER SKILL

People Networking 101 is not taught in engineering schools, yet it is one of the most basic, vital, and necessary career skills an engineer must acquire. Knowing how to network is on the same basic career skill level as learning how to differentiate or integrate mathematical functions. An engineering student who cannot perform these basic mathematical functions has little or no chance of graduating with an engineering degree. An engineer working in industry must also have basic people networking skills to advance.

People networking is something you learn with practice and time. You may not do it perfectly at first but with guidance and practice you can learn how to effectively network to advance your career.

### **WHAT IS PEOPLE NETWORKING AND WHY IS IT SO CRUCIAL?**

Many engineers do not realize they are probably already networking in their job. Have you gone to lunch with others and discussed problems you are encountering at work? This is networking. Have you found great time savers when using Microsoft Word, Excel, Power Point, or MathLab, and shared this with others? Have you also asked for help and gotten helped with any of these? Are you a member of an engineering society committee? Or have you recommended another engineer as an expert in their field and who people can get help from? These are all networking activities.

Networking is simply the ability to exchange beneficial information with other engineers in your department, company, city, state, or even other states and nations. It is not only limited to you exchanging information with only engineers, but all types of people at work and in your personal life. You need other engineers and people in your life to be successful. Others can, and will

help you, if you know how to properly network. Networking can save you time, money, and energy in dealing with career problems or technical problems at work.

The reasons for networking according to Diane Darling in her excellent book *The Networking Survival Guide* [1] are

- Sharing of beneficial knowledge and contacts
- Getting and receiving help
- Getting more done with less effort
- Building relationships before you need them
- Helping others

Diane Darling identifies two basic styles of networking; they are strategic and serendipitous [2]. Strategic networking is a conscious and deliberate effort upon your part to meet people and develop a mutually beneficial relationship for you as well as their career. Good examples of strategic networking for the engineer are trade shows, marketing promotions, and client visits. Here you plan in advance to meet new people and network to build relationships. Hopefully these new relationships will benefit your career and your company.

Serendipitous networking is unexpected or not planned. It occurs without preplanning and thought. Often this occurs in more of a social setting rather than a work environment. Good examples of this are at engineering conference social nights and after-hours social events. People meet in a relaxed environment with casual, informal conversation. The participants soon realize they have things in common and start to exchange ideas and thoughts. Usually by the time the conversation is over both have realized they have gained a new friend or acquaintance who could provide some help in the future.

Note that true networking is not a one-sided relationship where only you receive and everyone you network with gives help to you. True networking requires you to share and help others as much or more than you receive. One-sided networking relationships where you only interact with people to get information from them without giving or sharing information or help in return are referred to as schmoozing. Don't become a schmoozer. Also, networking is not selling. Giving a potential client a sales pitch on your company's products, services, or technology is not networking.

► **Career Tip.** Networking is NOT schmoozing or selling.

Networking is one very important career skill that every engineer needs to develop. Here are some hard facts supporting this:

1. Networking to get technical help may be the only solution when you are faced with problems above your skill capability. Networking with

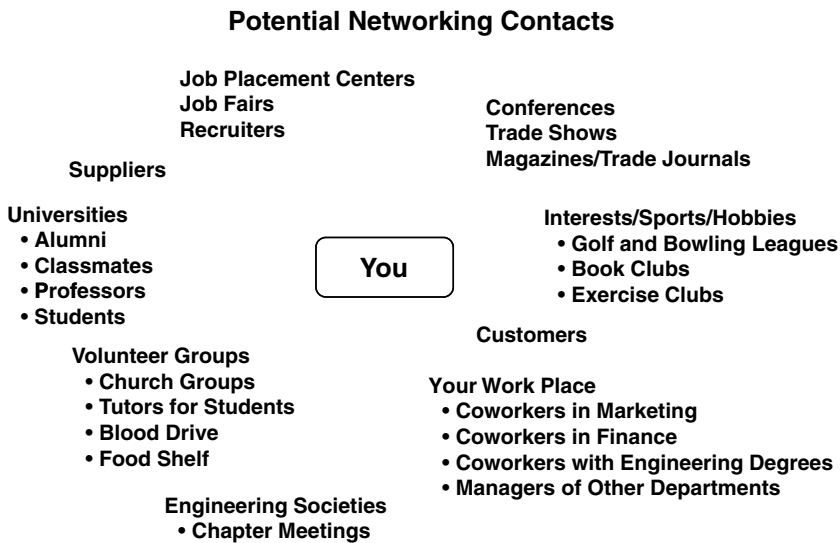
the technical experts or subject matter experts in your company can significantly reduce the time to getting problems solved and products to market quicker.

2. Networking with other engineers who have similar interests is the premise of why engineers join a society. Networking for mutual benefits is the reason why many engineering societies continue to gain members in the age of the Internet. People prefer face-to-face discussions. Engineering societies are an excellent means to find out how others solved technical or career problems. It is an excellent means to find out what career openings are available at other companies.
3. Networking with cross-functional team members opens up resources and helps when faced with difficult problems that are outside your area of expertise, or deal with the business aspect of the job.
4. Many key jobs are filled in corporations without ever being posted or advertised. These un-posted job openings are filled through networking with key people in the company. By networking people can find out in advance when people are leaving and it allows an aggressive engineer to secure the job before it is posted.
5. Karen Susman, author of "102 Top Dog Networking Secrets" identifies that greater than 80% of jobs are filled by referrals, people networking over cold calls, and just submitting a resume [3].

## WHO SHOULD YOU NETWORK WITH?

You do not know the next time you will need someone's help nor the type of help you will need. So the simple answer to this question is network with everyone you can. You should be networking every opportunity you have at work and out of work. To help you identify potential people to network look at the network diagram in Figure 26-1. Shown in the center is you and surrounding you are potential places or people to seek out for networking.

Universities are an excellent place for networking. At the university you have the opportunity to network with alumni, classmates, professors, and even students. Attending alumni events and keeping in touch with old acquaintances is great for networking. If you are taking a class, your classmates are good candidates for networking with. As always, networking with professors will keep you in touch with the latest advances in technology. Even volunteering and helping students is a good place to network. These students are the future employees and leaders of our companies and networking with them will give you insights into what they are thinking and what motivates the next generation of engineers. It is also an excellent means of recruiting the top talent of the class for your firm.



**Networking Opportunities Are All Around You**

**FIGURE 26-1** Potentially great places and contacts to network with.

Job placement centers, job fairs, and recruiters are other great networking opportunities, especially if you are looking for employment. Getting to know these people and taking the time to develop relationships keeps you in touch with the latest career opportunities in the industry. If you are solidly networked in this area, your contacts will be contacting you first as new opportunities arise.

Networking with your suppliers is another good career move. Your suppliers will have knowledge about new and improved ways of building products and new processes. Networking with this group will provide you with valuable insight into the next generation products and processes that are becoming available. Early insight into this technical data can keep your company's products on the leading edge technology. Suppliers are also a great source for ideas on how to improve your production processes and reduce costs and at the same time improve the quality of your products.

Another excellent reason for networking with suppliers is the fact that suppliers are in contact with other people who are using their products. These other people who already have bought the products are successfully using them, are great sources of help when you run into problems. More than likely they have already run into problems you are experiencing and have solved them. One prime example of this is new software programs and tools. Software user groups are formed for this specific purpose: to solve problems and get better performance out of the software.

► **Career Tip.** When procuring products from a supplier, also ask for names of people who are already using the products. This way, if you encounter problems, you will have other users of the product who you can refer to for help.

Networking at engineering conferences and trade shows is putting you in contact with the movers and shakers of industry. You will be in contact with the people, technology, and new products. You will be exposed to new methods of producing products as well as the latest engineering design capabilities and tools. Networking with people who publish engineering magazines and trade journals is another great career advancing opportunity. Publishers have an unbelievable contact network that includes hundreds of people. Writing an article and getting it published is a lot easier when you personally know the publisher and the review board. Their helpful suggestions can significantly improve your articles and help establish you as an industry expert.

Do you have a favorite hobby or recreational interest out of work? If you are a member of a club you have an excellent opportunity to network with other people who have similar interests to you. These clubs might include golf leagues, bowling leagues, book clubs, and exercise clubs. When people meet and network at a social event it is usually more relaxed and people are willing to share their knowledge and experiences. Who knows? Your next job lead may come from a recreational club contact.

Networking with people who have the same technical background as you, will provide you with people you can refer to for help when you run into technical problems within your engineering discipline. Most likely they will have previously faced the problem you are working or may know someone who has, giving you a short-cut to solving a problem and hopefully a short-cut to success.

Networking with other engineers who have different backgrounds is another excellent career move. For instance, if you are a mechanical engineer, then networking with electrical or software engineers can yield contacts and potential sources of help when you face technical problems outside your technical area of expertise.

► **Career Tip.** Networking with other engineers of similar and different technical backgrounds is an excellent career move.

Another great area for networking is with your customers. More than likely your customers are going to know others who could use your products. These users might be in the same company or different companies. If you have a good customer network, new customers, new sales, and new work will be finding you instead of you searching them out.

Another excellent place to network is at engineering society meetings. When you join an engineering society and attend meetings, you are in the

company of people who all have very similar interests to you. You are in the company of other engineers who come to these meetings to meet people who have similar backgrounds, have a desire to share knowledge, or receive help, and hopefully expand their technical knowledge base. By using these meetings to network with other members, you are developing a large network of people who offer the greatest potential for you to achieve a full and rewarding career.

► **Career Tip.** Joining an engineering society and networking with other members is an excellent career move.

Finally, the last area to consider networking with is voluntary organizations. You need to keep balance in your life and volunteering to help others and networking with this group is one way to do it. Sometimes our jobs can overtake our lives to the point that we have no life outside of work. One way to counter this and keep balance in your life is to join a volunteer organization and network with others in the organization. There are many volunteer organizations you can become a member of such as United Way, Habitat for Humanity, Green Peace, Food Shelf, and church groups, blood drives, student tutors, and the list goes on and on. Joining these groups and networking with these people, will provide the necessary balance to your life.

Now that you understand the importance of people networking to your career and where to network with people, let's move on to some simple tips on how to network.

## SIX EASY STEPS TO FOLLOW FOR SUCCESSFUL NETWORKING

Networking is basically having a conversation with people. It is about opening up to others and sharing something about you and taking the time to learn about others. It is a two-way interaction for the purpose of simply getting to know each other and learn about each other others lives.

**Step 1. Introduce Yourself and Shake Hands or Use an Ice Breaker.** Start out with the very basics when you meet someone for the first time and introduce yourself. By introducing yourself, it means sharing your name and some small fact about yourself.

Make sure you look directly at the person and, if appropriate, shake their hand. Note that this is an American custom for greeting and may not be suitable for other cultures. The Japanese culture bows instead of shaking hands and do not look into the eyes of another person until they get to know each better. Other cultures have different methods of greeting people for the first time. In Terri Morrison's book, *Kiss, Bow, or Shake Hands*, she describes how to greet people in 60 different countries [4]. She has a very creative writing style. It is an easy to read book, and well worth your time.

If you can reveal a small fact about yourself, it gives a little added personal touch and opens up the potential to start a conversation. Some small little facts you may reveal about yourself include such things as:

1. What company you work at.
2. Where you are from, town, city, or state.
3. What department you work in.
4. What type of engineer you are—electrical, mechanical, software.
5. The reason you are at the meeting.

If you are too uncomfortable about starting out with a formal introduction, and many people are, there is an alternative approach to starting up a conversation. This technique is to use ice breakers. Ice breakers allow you to start a conversation without giving away personal information. Many men and women feel too uncomfortable about striking up a conversation with a complete stranger, or giving their personal information, like their name and where they work, before they get to know them.

Ice breakers are simple statements that offer the other person to comment and generally are very neutral and noncontroversial in nature. Here are some great ice breakers.

1. The weather is great (or bad)?
2. Did you see any of the (sporting event) last night?
3. If you are at a presentation or class, you can compliment the speaker, and ask their opinion.
4. Ask for directions to the next meeting room or presentation, or ask about the program planned for the day.

Ice breakers are great because people do not feel like you are purposely out to get information from them, and it gives them an opportunity to interact with you without revealing too much. Ice breakers can also be used to bridge the awkward silence that comes once you have introduced yourself.

You do not always need to start a conversation with a stranger by introducing yourself. You can start out with an ice breaker and after you are feeling more comfortable and would like to get to know this person better, introduce yourself and get their name.

**Step 2. Body Language and Active Listening.** Body language says many important things about you. For instance, the best body language is to maintain eye contact, smile, nod your head in agreement, and be a good listener. This body language tells the person you are talking with that you are genuinely interested in what they have to say.

When you are looking around, not making eye contact, appear to be distracted with other things on your mind, you are using the wrong body language and sabotaging your networking efforts.

► **Career Tip.** Good body language and active listening are networking skills an engineer acquires and uses often.

Being a good listener is a great networking skill to develop. Good listening means you do not interrupt the person or cut them off in mid-sentence. You let the person talking finish expressing their ideas. If you agree with the person, you can actively listen by repeating what they just said and how you agree. This provides positive feedback to the person you are networking with that you heard them. Susie Cortwright's website identifies 10 tips for effective listening [5]. Richard Weaver and John Farrell identify active listening as a critical skill for managers in their book *Managers as Facilitators: A Practical Guide to Getting Work Done in a Changing Workplace* [6].

When networking there will be occasions where you find yourself disagreeing with the opinions expressed by the person you are trying to network with. This will require you to invoke your diplomatic skills. You might repeat back what they said and then offer your own opinion on the subject matter. However, when networking, it is not advisable to start arguing the first time you meet a person.

**Step 3. Making Small Talk and Sharing Conversation.** People networking is not about interrogating people for your benefit. It is about having a conversation with a person and getting to know them. Finding out what you have in common and sharing information. Most conversation starts out slow and with small talk. Small talk is simply talking about something trite that all people have in common. Here are some good and safe small talk conversation subjects:

1. The weather
2. Person's commute to work or the meeting
3. Newspaper headlines for the day
4. Any great vacation plans
5. The immediate surrounding and conditions of the room, too hot, too cold, just right, easy to see, hard to see, which way to the rest room, what is planned for lunch.
6. If you are at a meeting and it is break time, you can ask for clarification on a certain point that you are not sure about. Ask a simple question, what they meant when they said . . . .

During the course of the small talk you are trying to establish a relationship with this person so that they feel comfortable about sharing information with you. You are assessing them on their willingness to share information



with you. Debra Fine explains very well in her book, *The Art of Small Talk*, “How to start a conversation, keep it going, build networking skills, and leave a positive impression,” and points out the value of small talk to networking and how mastering this skill can be a great door opener [7].

When trying to initiate small talk or network in general, there are definitely certain subjects to steer clear of and not bring up at all. These include such things as race, politics, religious beliefs, age, weight, sex, and any inappropriate jokes. By inappropriate jokes, I mean any joke that you would not tell in front of your spouse, children, parents, or gathering of civil leaders.

**Step 4. Sharing Conversation and Exchanging Information.** After you have had an opportunity to make some small talk with a person and they are open to further discussions with you, then you can probe further into their background and experiences. The next level in the conversation is to exchange basic information about yourself and find out basic information about them. Hopefully each of you is a great reference or source of knowledge for the other. The idea is to discover, through conversation, what the valuable knowledge each person has and share it with each other.

Let’s look at a very subtle and interesting fact. Assume the person you are networking with knows at least 25 other people. And these other 25 people in turn know at least another 25 each ( $25 \times 25$ ). This means the person standing in front of you represents a knowledge base of 625 people. That is quite a vast network of people.

Moving beyond small talk starts with you both sharing basic information about yourselves. These may include technical background, company you work for, and your job. To move the conversation in this direction you can either share your background first or ask about their background. A word of caution here is not to share too much personal information. Most people do not want to hear about your hardships nor any gory details of your medical health. Keep the exchange of personal information more toward your positive career accomplishments, or your technical background and experiences.

The information exchange should be two-way. The information exchange should be facilitated through conversation with both of you doing the talking and listening. If you find yourself doing all the talking, stop and ask some questions.

There are basic reasons for networking with people. The first is to find someone to help you with a particular problem. The second is to make an acquaintance who you could call upon in the future if you need them and vice versa. And the third is to share your background and knowledge with them in case they should need your help in the future. Ideally, you network for all three reasons since not every person you meet will be able to help you.

If your purpose is to find help, then you want to gradually steer the conversation toward asking for help. After you have both exchanged some basic background information, steering the conversation is as simply as stating, “I have this problem I am trying to solve at work and involves . . . . Do you have any help you can offer or know of anyone who could help me?”

If you are not networking to solve a problem you should be networking to expand your acquaintance network and put valuable contacts into your contact database for future use when you really need them.

Finally, an excellent way to increase your network is by helping others get what they want. If you have the answer or solution to their problem then by all means you should share it with them. If you don't have the answer, but know of someone who would, then share this contact information. Once you help someone out, these people generally never forget the help you gave. They enter you into their databank as a valuable resource and refer people to you. Second, they are more than willing to help you in any way they can with your problem including doing networking on your behalf to help solve your problem.

Zig Ziglar in his book, *Top Performance, How to Develop Excellence in Yourself and Others*, points out that "You can have everything in life you want if you will help enough other people get what they want." [8].

► **Career Tip.** Helping others get what they need is a primary goal of people networking.

Stephen Covey in his book, *The 8th Habit: From Effectiveness to Greatness*, identifies that crucial challenge of our world today is this: to find our voice and inspire others to find theirs [9]. Helping others get what they want is key to success.

**Step 5.** *Exchanging Contact Information and Ending the Network Session.* All networking sessions come to end. Social etiquette dictates it is your responsibility to make sure the session ends on good terms and in a polite manner.

Prior to ending the session, if you feel the person you have met is a "good fit" for you and you would like to enter them into your contact base, then you need to make sure to obtain their contact information before you end the conversation. The best thing to do is exchange business cards. Your business card should have your name and some sort of contact information? The best thing to do is simply ask them for their contact information in the form of a polite question. "May I ask you for your contact information. Here is mine. I would like to be able to contact you in the future in the event I may need help. Would you mind?" Or after providing some help to the person, you could give them your contact information and tell them to contact you if they have need of any more help.

If for some reason you do not feel this is a good networking contact, or you are apprehensive about sharing your personal contact information, you should politely end the conversation and move on without requesting or sharing your contact information. In the event they ask you for your contact information, and you do not want to share your contact information, simply say, "I do not have any cards," and ask if they would just give theirs to you.

► **Career Tip.** Always end a networking session on a positive and polite note. Leave the door open for future contacts.

Ending the networking session is very easy. You should always thank them for talking with you and how nice it was to meet them. Here are some simple methods.

1. Thank you so much for talking with me. I enjoyed meeting you. I need to get going; there are several other people here I need to talk with. Please contact me if you need any help.
2. Thank you. I enjoyed meeting and talking with you. I have to leave and get back to my desk or go to another meeting.
3. Thank you. I must get going. Your helpful ideas are wonderful and I can't wait to try them. Thanks for sharing them with me. May I contact you if I have any further questions?
4. Thank you. It was very interesting talking with you. I especially liked it when you said . . . then repeat something they said which you found interesting.

When the networking session is coming to an end shake their hand. Note again that this is an American custom and not appropriate for all cultures. The handshake at the end signals you are leaving and you are happy to have met them. You are pleased with what they have to say and hope in the future to continue networking with them.

*Step 6. Follow Up with a Thank You.* As Barbara Safani points out in the article titled "Seven Rules for Networking Success," "Always thank your contacts in person and follow up with a letter." If your handwriting is legible, the personalized touch is always appreciated [10]. I would like to add that a note or e-mail is also acceptable and widely used today.

## GREAT TIPS FOR MAKING NETWORKING EASY

*Practice, Practice, Practice.* The first tip for making networking easy is to simply practice. Start your practicing outside of work with friends, neighbors, and people you meet as you go about your normal activities. Practice starting up conversations and entering into small talk. Make a game of it see how many new people you can meet in a single day. You do not have to become friends or tell them your life story. A simple 3 to 4 minute conversation allows you to practice some ice breakers and become comfortable with the process of meeting new people.

Let other people talk about themselves. Another great tip for making networking easy is to ask some simple questions and get people talking about themselves or opinions they hold. Stay away from political and religious questions but rather concentrate on the weather, hobbies, sports, or the morning traffic. Sometimes just a simple question like "How are you today?"

can go a long way to get things going. Who knows, other people may be wanting to network with you, but too afraid to start up a conversation.

Ask open-ended questions. Open-ended questions are questions that people cannot answer with a simple yes or no. These are questions like: What is your technical background? What do you enjoy most about your work? What was your most interesting assignment? What did you think of the presentation? In doing so you are providing them with the opportunity to talk and share.

► **Career Tip.** Most people like to talk about themselves and what they have accomplished. Simply ask questions.

Be prepared and do your homework before going to events. If you are attending an industry or work-related event do some research on the people who will be attending. If possible, do some researching of the attendees and their companies. Have a rehearsed one minute commercial ready to say something about yourself or about the subject that you are there to network for. The commercial should be based on your goal. If it's to get a new job, then speak about that. If it's to volunteer or whatever the case, be prepared.

► **Career Tip.** Create a one minute commercial about you or the reason you are networking.

Here are some simple questions to ask yourself to help you get prepared for the event.

Why are attending the function?

Are you attending to network for a new job?

Are you attending to share news about something or the organization you belong to?

Are you attending on someone else's behalf and what were they looking to accomplish?

What is the best possible thing that could happen for you at the event?

Sometimes, even with all the preparation you may simply not feel like networking. If this is the case here are some ideas to help you overcome these feelings.

Find a friend or coworker to network with. Making yourself do things you are uncomfortable with or prefer not to do is always hard. Just like many other tasks in life, having a friend or coworker to do something with makes the task a lot easier. You can team together and network jointly, taking turns talking and sharing. A team member may think of items you might not think of. They are also there to compare notes or fill-in the blanks you may have missed.

Get yourself pumped up. Just like the athletes do before the big event, they spend time preparing and thinking about the event to come. They envision themselves completing the perfect pass, scoring the touchdown, or hitting a home run. They envision themselves being successful and accomplishing their objectives. Envision yourself successfully networking around the event, meeting people, carrying on conversation, learning about others and their experiences.

*Overcoming Your Fear.* In Zig Ziglar's book, *Top Performance*, he points out that fear is simply false evidence appearing real [8]. If you examine your fears about networking you will realize most are based on preconceived notions that more than likely will not occur. You are simply sabotaging your chances for success. Here are some common fears and counter actions you can take to control them.

I don't know what to say ---- Start by saying hello and how are you  
----- Have a small commercial ready about yourself

I'll look stupid—you will only look stupid if you do not network. Everyone there is thinking how not to look stupid; you are not alone. Practice and being prepared are the key to overcoming this fear.

I don't know what to wear—contact the event organizer and ask about dress attire. Pick out something that makes you feel great when you wear it.

I am just not good at this—If you truly believe this then you will be terrible at networking. Networking is an easy skill you can learn with practice. If you believe you can learn this and improve, you will be highly successful. It is up to you what you want to believe.

In addition to these tips, Jeanne Martinet in her book, *The Art of Mingling*, has an excellent section on “tricks and tips for the tongue tied” to help people who are having trouble getting the networking skill developed [11]. I highly recommend you read her book.

## NETWORKING AT YOUR WORK PLACE

Networking at your work is a career must. You are dependent on other people in your company to get your job done. Stop and think about all the people you interface with in a day's or week's time. Establishing a good networking relationship with these people is critical for your career advancement. Whether it is supplying material for products, checking and documenting designs, marketing products, finance, or getting technical advice, networking with other people in your company is all part of your job.

The best places to network at work are meetings, hallway conversations, and the company cafeteria. Networking at work can lead to better job assignments, promotions, and finding solutions to very difficult technical

problems and even people problems. It should be a natural reflex when meeting new coworkers to ask them to share what department they are in, what projects they are working and correspondingly, for you to do the same. By sharing your work information you are essentially marketing your skills and opening the potential for others to ask you to join their project or team which, of course, is excellent job security.

Make sure you take advantage of every meeting you attend to make new acquaintances and network with other participants. These people attend meetings hopefully with the same desire as you—to help the team accomplish their goals. If you network during meetings, you will soon develop a people network that contains contacts from nearly every department in the company. If you network properly, you will also have these contacts for future projects that you can call upon when in need.

In an article from IEEE USA *Today's Engineer* on “Networking: Getting to Know You,” author Amina Sonnie shares some important tips about networking on the job [12]. She identifies that during meetings you should share what you know about the company or project that might interest people in attendance. By sharing and participating you are opening the doors to further valuable exchanges. If possible, make sure you meet and know everyone’s name and their background. If you don’t know, then simply ask them.

► **Career Tip.** Network at company meetings to build your contacts for future work.

However, stopping the meeting so that you can learn about people is not an efficient way to run a meeting. So to overcome this you might want to arrive early at the meeting and introduce yourself to people as they arrive. Another tip is to wait until the end of the meeting and introduce yourself and start a conversation. If you do not know people in the meeting, you can start an attendance list and make sure all attendees write down their contact information (phone and email). At the end of the meeting obtain a copy of the list so you can easily follow up with people who you think could be a good networking candidate.

One easy way to learn the people in your department is to get hold of your department’s organization chart. Then when you have a department staff meeting, network with everyone. Find out their backgrounds, schools they graduated from, and the projects they are working on.

Networking with nontechnical people in your company is also another good career move. Oftentimes, you are going to be faced with problems that are not technical in nature and will require you to get help or guidance from people who are not engineers. For example, these might include parts procurement, or legal matters when implementing a new contract. Other examples include financial help when determining costs and revenues.

## HOW TO CONDUCT A NETWORKING SESSION FOR A NEW JOB

In an article from IEEE USA Today's Engineer titled "Build Your Network Purposely (Before You Need a Job)", author Debra Feldman points out the best time to start networking for a new job is before you need a job [13]. Networking for a new job should be a conscious focused effort to make contacts in companies or industries that have job openings for your skills. Attending trade shows, engineering conferences, or engineering society meetings are all excellent places to focus your networking talents with the intention of finding new job opportunities. In an article from IEEE USA Today's Engineer titled "Engineers: Work on your Networking Skills" author Nancy Salim points out that face-to-face networking is the path to approximately 80% of all new job opportunities [14].

Networking for a new job requires you to go prepared to an event with a well-rehearsed 1 or 2 minutes commercial about yourself, contact information, copies of your resume, and the ability to quickly record or recall people you meet and the opportunities so that you can follow up. Here is an example of how to conduct a networking session for a new job.

1. Start out by greeting the potential contact, saying hello, and introducing yourself. Let the contact introduce themselves.
2. Create some small talk and assess whether or not the person is really interested in talking. If they respond unfavorably to your small talk then it is time to move on. Tell them it was nice meeting them and politely move on.
3. If they respond favorably to your small talk then it is on to the next step. Inquire about what company they work for and what they do. Listen closely and use the active listening technique to make the contact know that you are paying attention and have heard them. When they are finished, share with them what company you work for and what you do.
4. Next inquire about whether their company is hiring or not.
  - a. If the answer is no, then ask if they know of any other companies hiring with your type of skills. If they identify other companies hiring, you might ask if people from these companies are in attendance and could they provide introductions, if possible. If not, you might want to thank them for their time and express how nice it was to meet them and politely move on.
  - b. If the answer is yes, their company is hiring, you can probe further by asking what type of people and skills they are looking for. If there is a fit between your background and skills with their job openings, then share your two minute commercial about your skills and ask if they think your background would be a good fit.

5. At this point, if they respond favorably to your two minute commercial, you have several options. Your objective at this point is to get an interview. Here are some actions you can take.
  - a. Ask them how to best make a contact in their company to get an interview. If they provide a point of contact, ask if it is okay if you use them as a reference.
  - b. Offer to send them a copy of your resume. Could they share their email address? In return, give them your contact information.
  - c. Ask if they would like a hard copy of your resume and give it to them on the spot.
  - d. Make sure you have their contact information (business card) in the event you need to get back to them or the point of contact does not work out.
  - e. If you are really forward you can ask if they have any hints or recommendations on how to present yourself to the point of contact they just provided. Are there any special skills the hiring individual is looking for or anything else they can tell to improve my chances.
6. If the individual wants to talk more and starts going through your resume, you might suggest getting a separate table in a quiet area off the beaten path where you both can talk more. At this point, you are essentially going into the interview mode. You should be ready to impress.
7. After you have shared all the pertinent information and sense it is time to end the networking session, make sure you end on a positive note. Thank the individual for spending time with you and sharing information. Mention how helpful it was and how much you appreciate it. Finally express how nice it was to meet them. Smile, shake hands, and gracefully move on.

When you connect with someone and have a good networking session, it is good etiquette to follow up within a few days of the meeting with an email or snail mail note, thanking the individual for their time and sharing information. Offer your help and request they call upon you if they should ever need it. Make sure you store their information in your contact base for future reference.

## HOW TO BE A FANTASTIC NETWORKER

As Jay Levison and Monroe Mann point out in their book, *Guerrilla Networking*, to become a super networker, you do things that will want people to meet and network with you [15]. You stop trying to meet people and start doing activities that others will see as valuable activities and make them to want meet you. What are these activities? Mann suggests such things as write a



book, be a network hub, and sponsor networking sessions. Other activities include doing something radical, solve a problem, name drop, and help someone else become successful. In other words, go way beyond just meeting people, take matters into your own hands, and get people to want to meet you.

## SUMMARY

People networking is a vital and necessary career skill an engineer must acquire. It is not taught in engineering schools and it is something you can learn on your own. It simply takes practice. You should be networking with nearly everyone you meet since you do not know when the next time you will need someone's help. Build your network on the job and at other functions you are attending. Potential networking contacts are all around you.

Networking is not only about getting information but also about sharing information to help out others. Networking can open doors to wonderful new opportunities both at work and outside of work.

Create a two minute commercial about yourself and be comfortable with using it when networking. Make sure you can create small talk when the conversation drags or hits an uncomfortable pause. Networking can be easy and fun once you have mastered the skills.

For further information on networking I recommend you conduct an Internet search on "people networking" and "meeting people."

Have you identified any career actions you want to take as a result of reading this chapter? If so, please make sure to capture these ideas before you forget by recording them in the notes section at the back of the book.

## ASSIGNMENTS AND DISCUSSION TOPICS

- 1 Develop a two minutes commercial about yourself highlighting your skills and key achievements.
- 2 What are some benefits of people networking?
- 3 Name the six steps in successful networking.
- 4 What is active listening? Give an example of how you use it.
- 5 What makes a super networker?

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