How to Prepare for a Networking Event

Have you ever been to a networking event and not known how to start a conversation? Or have you ever been asked, "Tell me about yourself?" and not known how to respond? Here is how to prepare before an event so that you can network with confidence.

DEVELOP YOUR INTRODUCTION/ELEVATOR PITCH

Create an introduction that highlights your relevant academic and professional experiences and goals. It should be a brief (think 30 seconds!) way of introducing yourself, getting across a key point or two, and connecting with someone.

To develop an engaging introduction/Elevator Pitch, complete these statements:

1. I am interested in the following [industry/internships/jobs] ...
2. I am interested in this [industry/internships/jobs] because ...
3. I have related work experience, academic experience, or extracurricular experience from ...
4. Some of my skills or strengths for the industry/internships/jobs are ...

Go back and note a few of the most interesting parts of your responses. These interesting parts will help you craft a strong introduction or an elevator pitch.

Sample: *"My name is James, and I've been crazy about programming since I was 11 years old. My dad showed me how to write a basic algorithm. It just blew my mind that I could do things like that with a computer, so I started following that passion, which led me to study Computer Science at Wayne State, where I'm a sophomore. I've been reading a lot about healthcare mobile app development recently, and I was amazed at your recent case study on the TeleHealth app. Do you have any information about the development process?"*

KNOW HOW TO NAVIGATE A NETWORKING CONVERSATION

Are you attending an event with ten people or 100 people? No matter the setting, express interest in the person's work and ask insightful questions.

Conversations in a networking setting tend to follow this format:
1. "**Hi, I'm** [Insert your name]."
2. **Share your introduction/Elevator Pitch.**
3. **Talk and listen during the conversation**. Be sure to express interest in the company or organization's work (projects, internships, products, news items) and/or ask a question like, "*It sounds like you have a fascinating background. Can you tell me more about the activities you are involved in at [company name]?"*
4. **End by requesting a business card.** When your conversation is over, end by letting the person know you enjoyed talking with them and thank them for sharing their insight. Ask if they have a business card that they would share with you. Use the business card to reconnect with them when looking for an internship or job.

Pro tip: Make sure you share relevant information about yourself and info related to the position or company.

NETWORKING TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Prepare and practice to develop your networking skills. Research networking tips online.
- Know yourself. If walking into a room of 100 people is overwhelming, begin by speaking to 1 or 2 people.
- Read, research, or learn about the industry, what challenges the companies face, the latest trends, etc., and use the information you gather to ask informative questions.
- Both verbal and non-verbal communication is essential. Practice your firm handshake, consistent eye contact, smiling, and good posture.
- Be confident, express genuine curiosity, and stay present and connected.
- Ask for a business card and send a follow-up thank you note within 24-48 hours.