

Networking at Conferences – A Few Thoughts

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- “*Networking*” - the word itself sounds rather manipulative, contrived, insincere, perhaps even exploitative.
- It really means making professional connections (often personal friendships).
- Why go to conferences? – Chiefly, to communicate your research results and to meet people in your field. In the old days, reprint requests were important in identifying potential research collaborations.
- A research group becomes part of an “*extended family*”.
- It is a research director’s responsibility to send graduate students and postdoctorals to national and international conferences and to make sure that they are introduced to other researchers at these conferences.
- Go to all the social events (receptions, dinners, etc.) at the conference. Perhaps, even play squash or tennis!
- Ask questions during the sessions and in the coffee breaks. Be engaged. Most important - don’t be shy about introducing yourself to others.
- Have some business cards printed up with your name, affiliation, contact coordinates, etc. This is the easiest way to introduce yourself during an official function (e.g., the conference banquet).
- Prepare your oral and poster presentations carefully. Make letter-size copies of your posters and have them available to hand out during the poster session. Discuss the research of your neighbors in the poster sessions with them.
- Be sure to follow up on any commitments made during the conference to send your research papers, CV, etc. to others.
- Such networking often brings lifelong international friendships and research connections, your kids often grow up together. Many international collaborative grants available these days (NATO, France-Canada, France-Quebec, France-Italy, EU, NAFTA, South America, etc.). Exchange students and postdoctorals are becoming more common. Future worldwide travel possibilities!