

Leading from the Middle: Leaders Create Networks-The Lion and the Mouse

5 Conference Networking Tips for Creating Connections to Shining Stars



As we prepare for Creating Connections to Shining Stars (CCSS), my excitement builds for the opportunity to network with current colleagues as well as make new connections. I've already started a list of people I want to seek out for networking. My list will continue to grow as I learn more about the presenters, attendees, vendors and conference facilitators.

Here's a quick Aesop fable that can easily be used as a networking lesson:

A Lion lay asleep in the forest, his great head resting on his paws. A timid little Mouse came upon him unexpectedly, and in her fright and haste to get away, ran across the Lion's nose. Roused from his nap, the Lion laid his huge paw angrily on the tiny creature to kill her.

"Spare me!" begged the poor Mouse. "Please let me go and someday I will surely repay you."

The Lion was much amused to think that a Mouse could ever help him. But he was generous and finally let the Mouse go.

Some days later, while stalking his prey in the forest, the Lion was caught in the toils of a hunter's net. Unable to free himself, he filled the forest with his angry roaring. The Mouse knew the voice and quickly found the Lion struggling in the net. Running to one of the great ropes that bound him, she gnawed it until it parted, and soon the Lion was free.

"You laughed when I said I would repay you," said the Mouse. "Now you see that even a Mouse can help a Lion."

The moral of the story: You never know when you may build a relationship today that may be useful in the future.

Making the Most of Your Time at CCSS

It's often a tough decision to decide whether to travel to a conference. You have to consider time away from your family and work and, of course, the cost of the conference and the travel. Wouldn't it be great to know you will see an immediate return on your investment on these efforts? Here are 5 tips to network efficiently at CCSS or your next conference, and make it all worth it.

1. Rethink your breaks.

Most people spend the time in between speakers running to the ladies'/men's room or checking in with their office. But this is actually the best time to approach people to connect. Leave one of the sessions early to take care of other business and spend your breaks connecting with new folks instead.

Bonus tip: Don't attend every session. Select one session to skip altogether and spend that time in the common area, lounge, or lobby opening a dialogue with other attendees. Rocking Chair networking on the front porch of the Hotel Roanoke was a popular attraction during the 2017 CCSS.

2. Take advantage of social media.

There's an App for That! Be sure to download the CCSS 2019 conference app, start using it and connecting with people before you arrive at the conference, during the conference and after the conference. Utilize any conference hashtags as well. If none exist, be sure to make a list of the speaker and company handles to use in your posts.

Bonus tip: Not only can you connect with fellow participants, speakers, and vendors through the CCSS app, you can also get conference updates and play games with other attendees to win prizes!

3. Never retreat.

A whole day of information is exhausting. You might also have work to catch up on at night when the day sessions are over. However, never skip the receptions and never go back to your room and order room service. You are missing out on prime networking opportunities. If there are no receptions or meals scheduled at night simply sit at the hotel bar and order dinner there. I guarantee others from the conference will do the same and you will still be able to meet new people.

Bonus tip: On Thursday, July 18th at 5:15pm, the VA DEC will be hosting a Meet and Greet in the Hotel Roanoke's

Pocahontas Room. In addition, the hotel has a coffee shop, a restaurant and a large pub for a light meal and networking. New this year, have a complimentary coffee, glass of wine or a cold draft at the Salt Foot Sanctuary, an ideal social experience for small groups featuring a luxurious, handmade and wonderfully aromatic mineral foot soak. Sounds blissful!

4. Stand out with the speakers.

Instead of waiting in a group or line with many others after a talk, email the speakers afterward and be specific about what you took away or enjoyed from their talk.

Bonus tip: Connect with the speaker via the conference app beforehand and share what you hope to get out of the session.

5. Sit in the first row.

Most people avoid the first row and many will purposefully sit in the back. The extroverts are the ones that tend to sit in the first row. Stay up front to maximize your opportunities to connect.

Bonus tip: Don't sit with someone from your own system or teams.

In addition to these tips, be sure not to fall flat with the follow-up. Try to follow up right after the conference and reference something specific that was discussed. Following up is where most people really drop the ball.

See you at the conference! You just may find me at the Salt Foot Sanctuary! #letsnetwork