

Article 6: Networking

By: Ashlyn DeVaney

Networking as Connection

When I moved to college 11 hours away from home, I knew 3 people. I was intimidated by the thought of having to go out and make friends. Yet, I did it! I met people and through them, met other people. Now, I have an established community.

If you read that and think, okay... and? That is normal. Wonderful! I ask you then, What do you think when you read the words “professional networking”? Because those words give me a small case of the heebie-jeebies.

But why?? Networking isn't just a professional concept — it's something we do all the time, often without even realizing it. It happens in everyday conversations:

“Hey, do you know any good churches around here?”

“You've been going through a lot — I have a mentor who could really offer support.”

“Know anyone giving away a puppy? I'd love one!”

“Do you know any cute single people I might click with?”

“You're getting into long distance running? You should meet my brother — he trains for ultra marathons!”

We naturally connect people, ideas, and opportunities — and that's networking at its core.

As I have been navigating networking this summer, I have found Jeff Perry's article on the 4 Myths of Networking to be quite insightful when it comes to altering my mindset on networking from scary and risky, to natural and helpful. Of his 4 myths, 2 really resonated with me.

The second of the 4 myths is “Networking is selfish or manipulative.” Perry simply states: “networking is about creating mutually beneficial relationships where both parties can support each other's goals.” This is the same mindset I have with friendships. The best relationships I have are the ones that I both give and receive support, love, and connection. In professional networking, you are investing time into people to connect. As a result, you give and receive.

The third of the 4 myths is “networking is only needed when you need something.” Networking is about cultivation. Perry argues that “building relationships takes time, and if you wait until you need something to start reaching out, you’ll be starting from scratch.”

On a personal level, the relationships you likely lean on are those you cultivate over time by showing others you find them valuable. In professional networking, the same is true. “If you consistently nurture your network over time, you’ll have a group of people you can turn to when you do need support,” says Perry, “whether that’s advice, a referral, or a new opportunity.”

Brené Brown, a leading researcher on vulnerability and connection, teaches that “Connection is why we’re here; it is what gives purpose and meaning to our lives.”

A need for connection translates to work lives too. You are still a person. Take a breath and network with confidence. You may find the depth in professional relationships is different from what you have with your best friend. Yet, that doesn’t make your professional relationships fake or wrong. Don’t get bogged down by crippling networking myths. Seek connection.