

Building Bridges

Building Strategic Communities for Professionals in Food Safety

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Before We Begin

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Questions

All attendees are muted. Please submit questions at any time using the **Q&A** feature on your screen. Presenters will address questions at the end of the presentations.

Presenter Views

Opinions and statements expressed during this webinar are those of the individual presenters and do not necessarily represent the views of IAFP.



Why this session?

Community Building Entails Conscious Networking: Insightful Lessons from the Field

Who it's for

Emerging scientists, early-career professionals and anyone interested in establishing and improving professional connections.

What we'll do

Real-world scenarios, scientific findings, polls and discussion centered on conferences, online outreach, mentorship, volunteering and interviews.

What you will gain

Confidence in building trust, follow-through, insights and connections to help you navigate complex industry relationships.

Poll #1

What is the worst part of networking for you?

1) Meeting people only because I need a job

2) Anxiety from meeting important people

3) Using social media (LinkedIn)

4) Attending conferences

5) Asking someone for an introduction

6) Asking someone to be a mentor

7) Building relationships outside of your circle

8) Everything!!!

**Networking isn't collecting business cards.
It's building relationships that develop into professional trust.**



Moving from Networking to Relationship Building

Poll #2

What is your networking game plan when attending a conference?

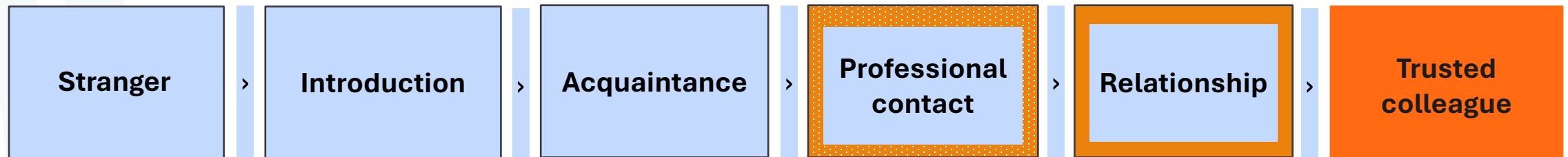
1) Plan ahead –
engage in planning
the event

2) Plan on meeting
whoever I run into

3) Set up meet-ups
ahead of arriving

4) No plans

The Networking Continuum



Relationships move along this line one interaction at a time. You cannot jump to the right-hand end.

Not every person you meet becomes your mentor, your reference, your advocate or your employer — and that's okay.

Access ≠ Relationship ≠ Trust

ACCESS

You were in the room

Attending the same conference gives you access to an industry leader. Access is an opportunity — nothing more.

RELATIONSHIP

You built something

A relationship develops through repeated, meaningful interactions over time.

TRUST

You developed it

Trust is earned through interactions and behavior: following through, showing up, doing the work well.

Only after trust exists do these follow: Mentorship → Sponsorship → Opportunities → Collaboration → Leadership

First Impressions: You have 30 seconds!

A simple introduction framework

Who are you?

What do you do?

What brings you here?

What are you interested in?

What would you like to learn?

**The first person is asking for something.
The second is starting a conversation.**

BAD APPROACH

“Hi, I’m graduating with my PhD.
Are you hiring?”

BETTER APPROACH

“Hi, I’m Betty, a PhD student working on *Salmonella* persistence in fresh produce. I’m interested in how industry approaches environmental monitoring in poultry plants — I’d love to learn about _____ (connect relevance).”

Requests for Sponsorship

The recipient should not have to work out who you are, why you're contacting them, or why you're asking.

POOR MESSAGE

“Hi Dr. Smith, I need a recommendation letter. Can you help?”

Context is a professional courtesy — it answers:

- Who is this?
- Where did we meet?
- Why are they contacting me?
- Why me?
- What are they asking for?

BETTER MESSAGE

“Hello Dr. Smith. We met at the student luncheon at IAFP this summer. I'm completing my PhD in food microbiology and applying for roles in manufacturing quality. I'd appreciate the chance to ask you a few questions about moving into industry.”

The Professional Ask Ladder

1	Information	“Could I ask about your experience in industry?”
2	Advice	“Would you recommend I build XXX experience first?”
3	Introduction	“Is there someone in your network I should learn from?”
4	Sponsorship	“When they hear of an opportunity for you, they recommend you – even when you are not in the room.”
5	Recommendation	“Would you consider supporting me with a professional reference on X, Y, Z?”

Don't start at Level 5 when you haven't established Levels 1–4.

Recommendations: Your Reputation is Attached

“I know this person well enough to put my professional reputation behind this statement.”

The scenario

Five minutes at a conference — then a request for a recommendation, a job referral, a support letter and an introduction to a senior executive. What would you do?

Try instead

Keep in contact by demonstrating competence so they get to know you and naturally think of you when opportunities arise.

Avoiding a rejection

Be strategic so you don't get a “no”.
This only comes from the other person valuing you.

Relationship Building is a Two-Way Bridge

Not: “What can you do for me?” But: How can we support each other?

Share an interesting paper

Ask thoughtful questions

Volunteer

Serve on committees

Help organize an event

Share relevant information

Offer technical expertise

Thank people

Introduce others

Contribute to discussions

INSTEAD OF “Can you help me find a job?”

“I saw the recent discussion on sanitation validation and found the point about X interesting. I'm researching Y and thought you might find this paper useful.” Demonstrate interest.

Professionalism Beyond Networking

Showing up

Showing interest/care

Meeting deadlines

Responding to messages

Taking responsibility

Flagging problems early

Following through

Accepting feedback

Doing unglamorous work

Understanding hierarchy

Respecting people's time

Communicating clearly

Two volunteers. Same opportunity. Different outcome:

Person A: Agrees to take the meeting minutes, then disappears even missing the meeting. Later asks for a larger role.

Person B: Agrees to take the meeting minutes. Clarifies expectations before the meeting occurs, attends the meeting, and delivers the minutes in a timely manner.

The meeting Chair later learns of a job opportunity for an early career professional... which Person would be thought of?

Scenario: The CEO Standing Alone

A

The transaction

“Hi, I'm looking for a job. Here's my résumé.”

The conversation ends where it started.

B

The conversation

“Hi, I'm Betty, a graduate student in food safety. I attended your session and was interested in your comments about Y. Here's what I learned. Say something that prompts interest and a response.”

Option B creates an opportunity for an actual conversation — and a reason to follow up.

The Follow-up Turns a Conversation Into a Relationship

WITHIN A FEW DAYS

“It was great meeting you at IAFP. I enjoyed our conversation about environmental monitoring, particularly your point about X. I'm going to look into the resource you mentioned — I'd be glad to stay connected.”

DON'T FOLLOW IT WITH

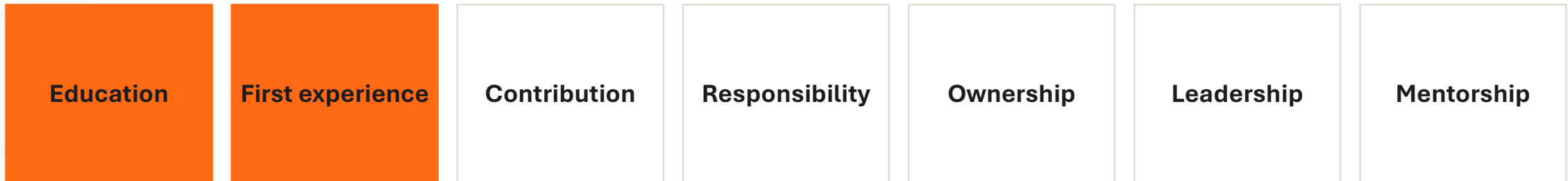
“Also, do you know anyone hiring?”

“Are you interested in buying X?”

“Have you considered Y for your business?”

A great conversation disappears without follow-up — and evaporates under an immediate ask. Give the relationship room to develop.

The career ladder: skip rungs **and it will be obvious**



An advanced degree is a foundation — not a guarantee of immediate seniority.

“I have a PhD. Why am I analyzing data and documenting investigations?”

“These are the experiences through which I learn how this organization actually operates.”

How do you show you're ready for more?

Lead a meeting. Manage a deadline. Write the technical report. Coordinate stakeholders. You demonstrate readiness for large responsibilities by handling smaller ones well.

Networking is a Powerful Tool When Used Well

Common moves:

Industry → consulting · academia → industry · technical → management · food safety → quality
academia → technology · industry → academia · operations → food safety · corporate → regulatory

Twenty years of experience — and a cold network

The profile is outdated. Contacts haven't heard from them in years. No recent conferences. Nobody knows what they're interested in now.

Twenty years — and a warm one

Relationships maintained throughout. People know their expertise, their interests, and their standard of work — before the search begins.

Networking works if you nurtured it.

*Dig your well before you are thirsty.
Plant your seeds so you can harvest.
Build the bridges before it floods.*

Conferences: Establishing viable connections

BEFORE

- 5 people you'd like to meet
- 3 relevant sessions
- Key lesson learned
- 2 questions you can ask
- 1 thing you can contribute

DO

- Introduce yourself in 7 words
- Start with a key lesson learned
- Ask question concisely

DON'T

- No interruptions
- Immediately ask for a job
- Don't monopolize conversations: keep it brief
- Treat senior people as job boards

Focus on others or the topic. It's not about you.

The Bridge Builder Toolkit

Before you reach out

- ☐ Do I know who this person is?
- ☐ Do they know who I am?
- ☐ How did we connect?
- ☐ Why am I contacting them?
- ☐ What exactly am I asking?
- ☐ Is the ask right for this relationship?

Before a recommendation request

- ☐ Does this person know my work?
- ☐ Can they speak to my abilities?
- ☐ Have I built a real relationship?
- ☐ Have I given enough context?
- ☐ Would I be okay if they said no?

Before accepting a responsibility

- ☐ Do I understand the expectations?
- ☐ Can I realistically complete it?
- ☐ What is the deadline?
- ☐ What if I hit a problem?
- ☐ Have I communicated clearly?

Build bridges, don't burn them

- 1** Introduce before you ask.
- 2** Build relationships before you need favors.
- 3** Earn trust through small actions.
- 4** Respect the reputation of the person you're asking.
- 5** Treat networking as a lifelong practice — not a job-search tactic.

Your network isn't the people you know — it's the people who know you and want to see you succeed.

Thank you!



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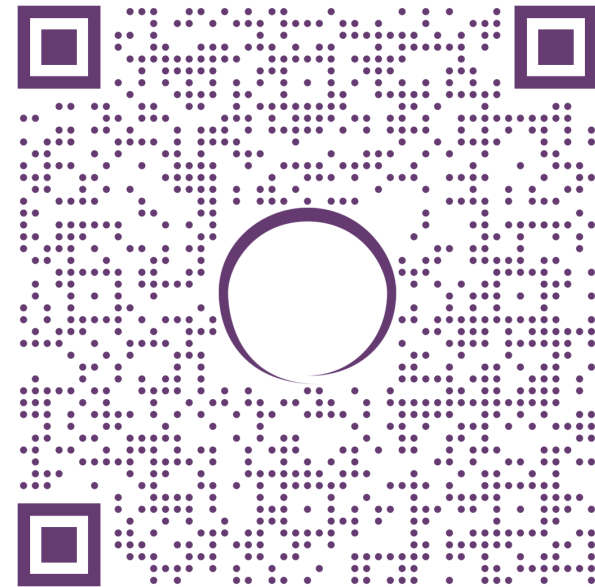
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