…integrate networking activities successfully into your professional life as a scientist

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She worked for 10 years as a biologist in basic medical research, 3 years of which as a subproject leader of an immunology-related CRC. During this time, she gained her own leadership experience and supervised doctoral students as well as students and successfully acquired third-party funding.

Congrats, you've obviously realized that networking is a key element if you want your academic career to prosper and now you are prepared to take on this challenge. However, although our ability to cooperate is the crucial evolutionary advantage of our species, this also requires most of us having to leave our personal comfort zones. Many of my clients experience an aversion to "sell" themselves or their work, but you should reframe this idea, for in reality networking means, you make yourself visible as a professional and you start to build and to maintain a supportive professional community.
Thus, networking is a complex, but not at all a complicated issue once we have grasped its core.

Step 1: Starting Out – The Network Map

I recommend you start with designing a network map in order to visualize all those people you are professionally related to and since when, how and in which context you have begun to connect with them: Simply use dots and arrows that represent the direction (does it work one-way or is it bidirectional?) and the strength of each relationship. From now on, you can always use this document to enter new relevant contacts.

Ten years of employment as a researcher have also given her a comprehensive insight into the communicative, social and organizational structures of the academic system. Since 2008, self-employed as a certified online trainer, face-to-face trainer and coach. Her core topics are career development, visibility in networks, self-leadership, communication, supervision and leadership with a focus on competence orientation for people of all people working in academia.

Step 2: Goal Setting

Don't worry, you don't have to contact everybody in your network map. That would make no sense. To integrate your networking activities into all your other tasks, you should proceed in a systematic way. To start with, you need some orientation. Goals will provide you with such a sense of direction. So, what is your next professional goal? Do you want to stay in research and are you on the way to becoming a professor? Or are you planning to move to the private sector? Or are you still undecided and your goal is to make a decision regarding your professional future? You should formulate your central goal unambiguously.

Your motives are crucial at this stage, too. How important is it for you to achieve this goal? Why do you find this goal attractive? And why is it important enough for you to leave your comfort zone in order to really put things into action?

Do you see a concrete link between achieving your goal and connecting this objective with your networking activities? This will require that you dedicate some time to explore unfamiliar terrain and that perhaps you even have to muster up some courage to contact others. For only when you can find a convincing reason yourself why you want to get in touch with others along the trajectory to your goal, you will really go for it. Simultaneously, it is essential that the person you want to relate to is fully aware of your goal, so that they can immediately comprehend the context of your request and develop a clear picture about you and your situation.

The different perspectives from years of coaching practice give her a complex informal knowledge of the special working conditions in the academic-scientific field. She conducts trainings and coachings in German and English.

Step 3: Identifying Helpful Contacts

Before you start to identify a person that might be able help you on the way to achieving your goal, you have to consider exactly what you need in the current situation on your path. This concerns the purpose of your request. Do you need information, feedback, expertise, mentoring or anything else? You should always be as precise as possible. If you have a clear notion of the purpose of your potential initiative in the network, you may consult your network map to check who can possibly offer you what you need or who may know someone presumably able offer that. Before you contact your *"candidate"* e. g. on a conference or online, you should gather some information about this person so that they will understand why you are addressing them.

Last But Not Least: What Is The Proper Size Of Your Network?

There is no *a priori* rule with regard to the ideal size of your network. In some cases, a handful of influential partners, i. e. a mentor or some collaboration partners, may suffice to have the necessary impact on your career, while others may rely on empowering networks that bring together more than 100 people regularly interacting and supporting each other in their careers. Indeed, it depends on each individual what suits them best. You have to figure that out for yourself.