

Let's say you meet someone at a conference or virtually, by connecting with them on LinkedIn or reaching out to a fellow MRS member via the MRS Membership Directory. Or better yet, maybe you participate in a Faculty Candidate or Research Hire special poster session at an MRS Meeting and you want to stay in touch. After all, the whole point of these sessions is for you to market yourself to decision makers who are actively looking to hire in those types of organizations. In all cases, once you have a contact in mind, you want to make arrangements to have what I refer to as "meaningful engagement", which usually is in the form of a casual conversation (also known as the informational interview). This discussion is your opportunity to engage the other party - to learn what they are working on, and where their challenges arise, and to share what you could potentially do to assist them. This is totally appropriate and professional self-promotion and marketing.

But once you have that meaningful engagement, then what? For those of you on the job hunt right now, you want to ensure that your brand (your promise of value) stays in the forefront of the minds of decision makers, so that when they have a position open or the possibility of a job you can fill, they think of you. To keep your name and reputation in a positive light for the probability that you will be called for an interview, you need to utilize and apply a series of tactics. These tactics are designed to grow your networking partnership, continue to gather information about the other party and their organization, and continuously determine ways where you can engender success for them (and for you as well!).

1 Take and organize notes

With every interaction you have, jot down notes about what you discussed, what the suggested follow up could or should be, and when you want or need to check in with that person again. Organize your notes so you know where to find them. For example, I keep all of my conversations in one notebook – I don't use random pieces of papers or computer files, unless I am discussing a specific project (and even then, my notes start in the notebook anyway).

2 Plan to follow up

Check the guidelines on the [5 ways to follow up after meeting someone](#) on the MRS Career Central page. Put it in your calendar to follow up with them at an agreed upon date. I often conclude conversations with people by stating "when would be a good time for me to check in with you about this again?"

3 Connect on LinkedIn

You absolutely have to have a LinkedIn profile, and you want to make sure you are connected to your new contacts so they will be kept apprised of your activities, contributions to the community, and triumphs. Connecting on LinkedIn also allows you to expand your network because then you can then connect with the other person's connections too.

4 Follow that organization on social media

You should keep up with the organization's announcements by following it on social media. Do this on LinkedIn especially, but also consider following them on other platforms too. And take it one step further and set up a Google alert for that organization. The idea is to stay abreast of the organization's activities which will help to fill subsequent conversations to facilitate better partnering arrangements, as well as look for specific opportunities where you can add value.

5 Use your poster as a business card

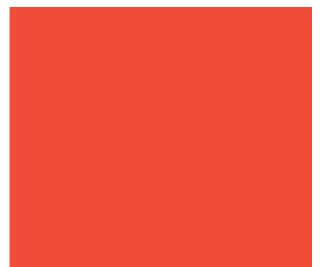
When you reach out to colleagues, either before or after the meaningful engagements, send them a pdf version of your poster. Furthermore, put your poster on your LinkedIn profile (as a file people can view and download) and on your website (if you have one). And hey, why not ask your advisor if you can post your poster (and those of your teammates) on the group's webpage too? And by the way, you can do this both with your traditional research poster, as well as with the specialized poster you create.

6 See an open position?

Reach out to your contact before you apply. Once you have established a networking relationship with a person in that organization, it is perfectly appropriate for you to ask their advice if you see a certain job posting that looks like it could be a good match for your skills and interests. Once you see the advertisement, email your contact and write "I saw this position announced on your website and it looks like a great fit for what I want to do and my experience and expertise. Before I formally apply, can I speak with you for a few minutes to learn more about it (and working for your organization) and see how I can tailor my resume/CV and application for the role?"

7 Continue to look for opportunities to add value for your contacts

See a paper or an article that might be of interest to them? Send it over to them! Hear about a virtual conference or podcast that is in the sub-sub-field of your contact? Share it with them! Meet someone new who could be a beneficial collaborator? Introduce them! Always look for opportunities to pay it forward!



About the Author: Alaina G. Levine is an award-winning entrepreneur, international keynote speaker, STEM career consultant, science writer, corporate comedian, and author of *Networking for Nerds* (Wiley, 2015), which beat out Einstein (really!) for the honor of being named one of the Top 5 Books of 2015 by *Physics Today Magazine*. She is a regular speaker and consultant for MRS. @AlainaGLevine