Navigating the Workplace

Emily Bibens
Vice President
Woody Bibens and Associates

Danielle House
Marketing Specialist
NTCA — The Rural Broadband Association

Brandon Robinson
Assistant Vice President
Easter Associates, Inc.

John Chen
Communication Manager
NALP

A special thank you to ASAE CareerHQ.org for sponsoring this resource for young professionals.

asaecenter.org/YAEresources
Welcome to the Workforce, Millennials!

A compilation of advice from your friends, colleagues and peers; this third monograph in the series for Young Association Professionals focuses on Navigating the Workplace. The entire ASAE Young Professionals Committee appreciates all of the input we’ve received throughout this project. It has shown us, and hopefully can show you that contrary to popular belief not all Millennials or the Gen-X’ers among us are the stereotypical Me-First generation and we appreciate the guidance and opportunities to learn from many of our ‘older’ colleagues.

While there are too many scenarios, thoughts and opinions on the topic to fit in these few pages we hope that the following accounts can be shared among the community. Even if you don’t read the entire thing, all of the authors have taken time to break out the key takeaways into bullet points — at least read those.

This monograph would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of its editors Adam Thocher and Marcus Miller. Adam and Marcus worked for months to solicit articles, edit articles, and compile them together into this monograph specifically for young professionals. It was their vision that is realized on these pages.

The entire series of monographs from the ASAE Young Professionals Committee can be found by visiting asaecenter.org/YAEresources.

ASAE: The Center for Association Leadership is a membership organization of more than 21,000 association executives and industry partners representing more than 10,000 organizations. We serve as the premier source of learning, knowledge, and future-oriented research to leaders of trade associations, individual membership societies, and voluntary organizations.

ASAE CareerHQ.org is the organization’s center for career resources—the most comprehensive association job board in the world. This all-inclusive online association career center connects top candidates with job opportunities, salary information, tips on career advancement, resume critiquing, and more.

ASAE CareerHQ.org’s resources and career development events are open to the general public and there is no charge to submit a resume or search for jobs on the site.
Navigating the Workplace

Generational Synergies ................................................................. 1
Positive Politics ........................................................................... 3
Three Tips for Navigating Choppy Waters.................................. 5
Networking: Mostly Social, Not All Digital.................................... 7
Generational Synergies

Emily Bibens
Vice President
Woody Bibens and Associates

As association management professionals, our job is to bring together the best team possible in support of our organization’s mission. This means leveraging a variety of generational stereotypes, personalities, educational backgrounds and experiences to create unique synergies and high-functioning, effective teams. Often we read about generational differences and the difficulty managers can have managing multi-generational teams. I agree that such teams present challenges — both for executives and team members. However, instead of discussing generational differences, I prefer to think of generational synergies.

In England, Cambridge University business professor Dr. Mark de Rond analyzed the university rowing team for insights into high-performance business teams. One of his observations was the team’s use of seat racing. The Cambridge rowing team didn’t select the fastest eight individuals to race archival Oxford. Instead, they selected the fastest team by carefully selecting each person and their seat assignment based upon team speed. The aim was to “isolate the effect of a single rower on an entire crew.” The fastest eight individuals were not necessarily the fastest team.

This is how I like to think of putting together association management teams. It’s not so much about having the most experienced individual, the most senior leader, the best-educated staff or some other measurement of personal ability or success. It’s about how the team works together and what they can achieve as a team that cannot be achieved as individuals. I believe that people from differing generations can leverage each other’s experiences and personalities to lead to a highly effective team.

My boss, Sarah, is a Baby Boomer; I am a member of “Generation Y.” Of course, we each fulfill generational stereotypes. Inevitably, I am the one to fix the printer, translate text message ‘lingo,’ and spend the occasional evening talking her through adding formulas to an Excel sheet. She listens to my ideas, directs my Gen Y confidence, and eagerly learns the next great social media site I heard about (and which, of course, we must join).

Rather than dwelling on generational differences, however, we try to divvy up our work based on the strengths we can offer to the team. Often times, our responsibilities do not fall along strictly hierarchical lines. Sarah has 25 years of experience as an association executive; I have 5 years of experience. However, this does not necessarily mean that she automatically assumes responsibility for traditionally ‘senior’ tasks. As a small staff association, we can eliminate many formal lines of command and traditional roles of manager and staff. While larger associations many need more detailed organizational structures, smaller teams may find such structure leads to more tension than synergy.

For example, as a Millennial, I am confident (perhaps overly so) and believe that success is possible, even when the odds may be stacked against us. I don’t believe in the words “It won’t work.” Consequently, I enjoy developing strategy, questioning the status quo and designing ‘blue sky’ plans, goals and objectives. In many situations, I take the lead in developing organizational strategy.

As a Baby Boomer, Sarah is the voice of practicality. She can take my ‘blue sky’ plan and distill it down to something that is manageable, budget-conscious and focused more on incremental, yet impactful change. To draw on the rowing analogy, these are our ‘seat tested’ roles. Our team is more successful as a whole when we fulfill these roles; thinking not about what each of us ought to do based on traditional staff roles but rather what each of us can do to best help the team and the organization.
Given my own experiences, I would encourage young professionals in the association management realm to:

- **Identify your strengths and consider how you can apply them towards supporting the team and organization.** One of my strengths is working behind the scenes to ‘figure things out’ (find consultants, research software — all the miscellaneous research most people don’t like). For a recent event Sarah advised me we had no budget for event signage. I talked her into $50 and, after a trip to the craft store, glued printer paper to foam board complete with little cut out cardboard easels. We went onsite with about 50 signs — and no one guessed they were my arts and crafts project! I enjoy figuring out alternative plans to get around a challenge. That’s my strength and one of my contributions to the team.

- **Be willing to do any job to help the team.** I work for a small staff association so this is absolutely critical. One day I may be developing a strategic marketing plan. The next day, I may be answering the phones or processing attendee registrations. This doesn’t mean you should always take the work at the low end of the hierarchy — after all, we all want to establish ourselves as serious, capable professionals. What it does mean is that pitching in during a busy week — however possible and in whatever way helps the team — is a good idea.

- **Be wary of stereotypes.** Don’t limit the success of your team by pigeonholing people based upon generational stereotypes. My Baby Boomer boss is happier than most to question authority and lead the quest for change. I don’t own a single team trophy from childhood nor did I play a single team sport that supposedly help to define Generation Y. Each of us is composed of pieces of our generation, our experiences, our personality and our education. You may be surprised to find the most tech savvy member of the team is a Baby Boomer!

- **Listen.** As Generation Y we like to talk our way through challenges. However, some of the best ideas we have developed come when I listen to my boss’ idea first. In January, we tried a new educational format at a client’s annual conference where the education sessions were held in exhibitors’ booths. This started with my boss’ idea to better include exhibitors in the conference education and developed (through much discussion and listening) into a very successful, interactive educational format.

- **Maintain focus on the big picture.** During several of our busier weeks we aren’t allowed to mention new ideas (at least not new, ‘blue sky’ ideas). These are weeks to focus on the task at hand and complete work on ideas we are developing already. It’s easy to jump from idea to idea but make sure you focus on a few ideas that are critically important and implement these well. After all, ideas are only as good as the team who implements them.

- **Step up to the plate.** One of my Board members’ mottos is “the world is run by those who show up.” One of the best things young professionals can do is to show up, be prepared and offer to help.

- **Look for synergies and not differences.** Try to turn generational differences into generational synergies. Instead of complaining about Baby Boomers lack of technology experience, encourage them to use their writing skills to create great online content. Direct your Generation Y confidence toward a team confidence rather than an individual confidence — every team needs someone who is confident the team can do great work, even in the face of challenges! Believe in the team and the success of the team.

- **Here’s to everyone finding their “seat” within the association management realm!**
Nobody really wants to talk about office politics…but we should. Albeit uncomfortable, yes, but by sweeping the topic under the rug, we diminish the positive contributions politics can lend to an office’s culture. Just go with me for a minute. On its own, the word “politics” is a polarizing term. Even Merriam-Webster finds it complicated, offering more than five definitions. After scrolling through explanations that apply mostly to politicians and/or the government, there’s a classification most applicable to “office politics”, at least in the private sector: “the total complex of relations between people living in society.” So, there you have it! Politics isn’t always a bad thing; it’s about the relationships that exist between the people of an entity and (consequently) the impact those complex relationships have on success.

At the beginning of my career, I was fortunate enough to work within a very dynamic, diverse team of professionals. We were collectively responsible for a variety of our organization’s high level tasks, goals, and initiatives. Our team had folks of differing specialties, a variety of career paths, and spanned multiple generations (from baby boomers to me as the only millennial). The environment was often stressful; we had tight deadlines and high goals. Each of us was required to balance demanding workloads with the organization’s shifting priorities. Despite all of the competing factors, we produced high quality work that improved our organization. Talk about a crash course in navigating teamwork and complex professional relationships! When I reflect on that experience now, the reason why that team was so effective is quite clear. We were constantly practicing positive politics, asking each other what we could do for one another, while developing and relying on each individual team member’s strengths.

When we talk about politics and its role in the office, some choose to view the practice through the lens of the stereotypical, (often exaggerated) portrayals of political activity in television and pop culture. It’s easier to readily identify the extremes of tricky, underhanded manipulation driven only by personal greed; the type of behavior that alienates colleagues and creates a tense environment. In this context, the cornerstones of good politics get lost in hyperbole and it’s almost impossible to imagine a scenario in which the values of politics enhance the culture of an office. Despite the negative connotation the word politics carries, “office politics” is not about influence, power or leadership (or at least it shouldn’t be); the concept of office politics encompasses the multifaceted nature of working relationships whether with peers, colleagues of other departments, or members and clients. It’s easy to get carried away thinking of the damage bad politics can do, but what if we step back and think about some of the positive aspects of politics that improve working relationships? Good politicians are kind. They are transparent. They are respectful and fair, and consider all options and opinions before making decisions. They think of ways they can help people reach their goals, and how others can help them do the same. Now ask yourself, is any one of those characteristics one that shouldn’t be translated into office culture?

My team functioned so well because the culture in our office was one of respect, honesty and collaboration in the most genuine sense of the word. We paid attention to each other's strengths, preferences and challenges. We acknowledged sensitive issues, and approached them delicately and candidly. If someone thought of an idea, our team worked through the opportunities and weaknesses the idea presented and we vetted it, together. When tasked with implementing new initiatives, everyone jumped on board and did their part to make it better. We constantly helped each other improve our work by sharing ideas and requesting feedback. Everyone pitched in when and where necessary, and remained dedicated to working as a team.

In a typical association environment, most departments are interdependent and must work as a team to
successfully complete a variety of projects, objectives, goals and miracles. With so much collaboration required for each task, it’s only natural to experience challenge and conflict. Personalities can clash, goals can interfere and the stress can pile up. Conversations evolve into debates and differences in opinion can become conflicts that require resolutions. These potential obstacles make it imperative to cultivate diplomatic, respectful relationships with peers that allow a team to be effective and accomplished.

Even when a team arrives at common hurdles, if every team member is diplomatic enough to remain honest, respectful and considerate, projects will benefit and teams will make progress. Diplomacy, technically defined as “skill in handling affairs without arousing hostility” (Merriam-Webster again, in case you were curious), is arguably the most important factor of teamwork. It’s the key to navigating complex professional relationships. Remember, we learn about each other through our daily interactions, and use that awareness to work together successfully. Pay attention to the relationships and situations that exist within your organization. Use awareness to diffuse small issues that have the potential to become big problems, and practice a positive tone that promotes meaningful discussions and progress. If we embrace the positive values of politics, everyone reaps the benefits.

The insight I gained from working with that team was invaluable, and at such a young age. I was lucky to have been afforded that experience so early in my career. More valuable than the actual on the job training, I witnessed first-hand that the secret to productive teamwork is successfully navigating the complex relationships that exist within the team. And that, as Merriam-Webster tells us, is what politics is all about.
Navigating the Workplace

Three Tips for Navigating Choppy Waters

Brandon Robinson
Assistant Vice President
Easter Associates, Inc.

Facing difficult situations and knowing how to aptly navigate through them is one of the keys to being a successful leader in the association world. It’s especially important when you sit in the chair of the chief staff executive — a.k.a. the executive director or CEO role. Difficult situations will occur, and having the skills to navigate through them is essential. Furthermore, it’s not a skill that can be taught in a classroom or through a book, though I do hope the reader will forgive the irony inherent in an article that purports to do exactly that which the author just stated above cannot be done. So, what I will attempt here is to share my own experience as a younger professional serving as an executive director in the association world, and how I’ve learned to deal with difficult situations.

One of the most difficult situations I’ve faced, as an association executive, was a few contentious and nearly combative Board meetings. Working at an association management company (AMC) I serve as Executive Director to several associations ranging in size from around 40 members to over 1,600. Here are a few tips from that experience.

Stay calm.
When the going gets tough, it’s often easy to let our emotions get the best of us. Remaining calm and in control of your emotional response is a great way to keep this in check. One of the best ways to do this is to think before you speak. Don’t just react quickly. There’s nothing wrong with a little silence. In my situation, the little red devil on my shoulder was screaming for me to get angry and react negatively. I chose to remain calm, think before I spoke, and allow for a little silence. Staying calm is also empowering. By choosing our action, rather than simply reacting, we remain in control of our situation. Viktor Frankl says, “Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.” Staying calm in that space is one of the best ways to navigate a difficult situation and leads to the second tip.

Listen to understand.
When situations get tough, it’s easy to respond with the standard fight or flight response (see above). However, by listening to understand, you might be able to discover a previously unseen third option. Listening to understand isn’t easy and involves really trying to see an opposite or conflicting viewpoint. As I sat in some of these Board Meetings, I really tried to comprehend the speaker’s point of view. I was less worried about my response - there would be a nice silence to think through a response. I was trying to fully understand what was being said. A great tactic to listen to understand is to parrot back what you thought you heard just to check and ensure you’ve understood. Do not just be thinking about what you are going to say next. Instead, really focus on what the other person is saying. This is a great tool to help stay calm as well.

Manage expectations.
As you navigate through difficult situations it’s often easy to promise the world in search of a solution. It’s important, though, to always manage expectations and make sure any promise is attainable — the “A” in S.M.A.R.T. goals. This might be one of the toughest recommendations for a young ambitious professional. It certainly was for me. It can also be a great way to avoid difficult situations in the first place. My natural tendency is to offer whatever solution will make the other party happy, though this can set up dangerous and unobtainable expectations in the future. As the chief staff executive, it can also put your staff in the awkward position of either telling you a particular task cannot be done or forcing them to spin gold from straw. Let me be clear, though; there’s nothing wrong with aggressive goal setting, just make sure to manage expectations and make sure you are being realistic with your promises and solutions.
Facing difficult situations is a given in any career field, and maybe more so in the association world. We are often charged with producing monumental results from miniscule resources all while working with sometimes challenging volunteers.

Young association executives are not immune to any of this. We may not have the experience as more seasoned association executives. However, by employing these few recommendations we can successfully navigate through them. And most importantly, we can learn from these situations and ultimately deliver more value to our Associations.
Navigating the Workplace

Networking: Mostly Social, Not All Digital

John Chen
Communication Manager
NALP

When Brandon Robinson from ASAE's Young Professional Committee asked me to write an article about networking it got me thinking about the time I've spent in Washington, DC. Four years ago I moved from California to Washington DC to take my first post-college job as an association professional. While in DC I’ve had a remarkable time — some of it due to all of the activities this city has to offer, some of it due to my newly found career path, but most of it due to the amazing people I’ve met here; both personally and professionally. As I think back to my time spent in DC, there are a handful of defining moments that come to mind when I think of networking and meeting new people.

Taking a no fear approach (or at least faking it)
A few months after moving to Washington, DC, I flew back to California for the holidays. My nephew was five years old and the entire family went to the mall for your typical family photos. My nephew needed to answer the call of nature so I took him to the bathroom to do his business. While waiting in line, he started saying hello to everyone and started a conversation with anyone he could. Naturally, everyone was polite and talked to him (who can ignore a five year old in a three-piece suit?). He eventually turned to me and said “Uncle John, I want to live here!” Everyone in the room started laughing and so I asked him why? “Because everyone will come visit me and I can meet lots of people!” Now who among us wouldn’t want this? I was able to convince him that his mom and sister wouldn’t want to live here and we left to finish our photo session.

Upon returning to the east coast, I started reflecting on my nephew’s desire to build relationships and his uninhibited ability to talk to anyone — two qualities in which I was severely lacking. Yet, these two qualities are essential when it comes to building your personal and professional networks. I knew that I needed to start meeting new people and expand my circles. There was no way I was going to survive a new city entirely on my own. I realized that my ability to foster new relationships with people throughout my career and life would be critical to success and survival. Too often in networking opportunities we concern ourselves with what to talk about, or feel that we don’t have anything to add in a conversation, or that others are “out of our league.” To my five-year-old nephew, none of these mattered to him, he just wanted to talk. What if you can’t seem to find opportunities to meet people in person? What does one do if the prospect of meeting people in person terrifies you?

Lesson: The best networking take places when you don’t know, or don’t care, about the title or influence of the people you are speaking with.

Networking in online social spaces
When I thought about my nephew and his ability to talk to anyone at any moment, I realized I lacked this ability. This was evident in my first 10 months of living in DC. I tried meeting people through sports leagues, volunteering, and online meet up sites. I was faced with the same problem every time; it’s awkward, it’s weird, it’s tense (especially for an introvert as myself). It felt like being on a first date — all the time. Then during my first full summer I attended a social media conference in town put on by YNPN DC (Young Nonprofits Professional Networking — DC Chapter). This marks the beginning of my twitter journey (and it’s been a great one). At this social media conference I learned how people use twitter to create conversations, live tweet a conference, and create opportunities for human connections. I started following people on twitter and kept seeing this hashtag, #dctweetup. I eventually learned it was a happy hour organized through twitter. The great thing about tweetups is when you sign up; you include your twitter name. This makes it easier to connect before and after the tweet up. A step that had been missing at all my other events and failed efforts. Isn’t it always easier to talk to a room of people you already know? Twitter and other public online social spaces are basically the world’s biggest happy hour.
How does this twitter thing work? Think about the conversations you’ve had at happy hours. You start talking to one person, someone else adds his or her opinion, and the conversation grows in a viral manner. Ideally, through twitter and online social spaces, this leads to following new people and making new connections. The real power isn’t just in connecting to people on twitter. That’s like collecting business cards at an event and shoving them in a drawer. The real power is when you take it offline and gather with online friends, start meeting new contacts, and have a few drinks in the process. I kept meeting amazing people through twitter. People who follow the same sports teams. People who went to my college. People I would eventually call roommates. Using twitter and other online social spaces to take some of the awkwardness out of meeting people is great. Eventually, you have to take these interactions offline and turn them into meaningful professional relationships.

Lesson: Using twitter and other online networks makes it easier to start, continue, and develop the conversations you begin (or continue) in person. Use it as a supplement for in-person encounters, not a replacement.

Conferences and events
I’ve been extremely fortunate in the people whom I’ve met at conferences. It seems like I always walk away with a handful of really good friends and an amazing amount of professional connections. There are two people that stick out in particular. My very first ASAE conference was Great Ideas 2011. During one of the receptions I finally ran into Holly Duckworth whom I’d been tweeting with at the conference. We continued to run into each other throughout the conference and made an effort to keep in touch after the conference. Very quickly she turned into one of my mentors to whom I still reach out to on a regular basis. The second was after ASAE’s 2011 Annual Meeting in St. Louis, this also happened to be the first time I ever presented at a professional conference. My Ignite presentation garnered enough interest that a few people came up afterwards to congratulate me and talk for a few minutes - one of these people was Natasha Rankin. Unlike Holly, I didn’t see her again the rest of the conference. Suddenly, the conference ended and it was time to head back to Washington, DC. Lucky for me Natasha was on the same flight as me and we ended up talking for a solid hour before our flight took off. This has continued to be a regular monthly occurrence for the two of us. And so enters mentor number two in my life. I share these two experiences with you to show the power of networking and making human connections at a conference. Whether it is through chance encounters or participation in an online social space, you never know what will result from any of your interactions. Most of the time you will never see or talk to them again. Other times you may be lucky enough to meet up for a drink here and there. Sometimes, just sometimes, an immensely valuable relationship will come to fruition that will play an important role in your life.

Networking at a conference is easier than you think, even if you are shy or don’t enjoy participating in networking. Here are some tips for networking at a conference:

• Start networking before you get to the conference and look up people who will be presenting at conferences or who will be attending (if an attendee list is available).

• At the beginning of every session you will have a few minutes to talk to the people at your table (do not sit by yourself when you get to a session and do not sit with people you already know). Take these few minutes to introduce yourself to your tablemates, trade business cards, and ask them questions (what do you do, where do you work, what about this session interests you).

• Attending non-educational events such as vendor parties, happy hours, or lunches provides a great opportunity to meet fellow conference attendees. Attend these rather than staying in your hotel room.

• Many conferences these days have hashtags for their events, use this as a starting point to make your initial contacts with other attendees - then make a plan to meet up or attend the same event during the conference.

• Follow-Through. One of the most important aspects of networking, in fact it’s important enough that it warrants its own section.

Lesson: Conferences and professional development events provide the greatest opportunities for your growth. At these events you not only get to grow professionally but you can expand your network while doing so.
Follow-through
As busy as Natasha and I are (as most people are), we made an effort to get together once a month and catch up and talk about life and work issues affecting our lives. I realize not everyone can make this kind of time for everyone they meet, and I’m not saying that you should or need to. What I am saying is continue developing the relationship after you have met. If you go to an event and meet a dozen amazing people and collect their business card but never talk to them again, why waste your time attending at all? While not everyone you meet will be a good candidate, or even interested in a follow-up conversation, many of them will be and you have to execute on those opportunities. Here are some low-risk steps to extending those conversations:

- **Initiate contact.** Most people who ask for a business card never do anything. Of those who do they simply follow up with a “It was nice to meet you. Maybe I’ll run into you some other time.” The great networkers make a direct action for a future follow-up.

- **Jog their memory.** It’s a good idea to reference a few things you talked about when you met (it helps if you make a few notes on the back of their business card after they have walked away).

- **Connect the dots.** Tell them why it makes sense to continue the conversation and/or meet up again. Did they discuss something interesting you would like to follow up with them on? Is there something they said in which you can offer more advice or contribute somehow? Give them a reason for meeting up with you again.

- **Propose a low-barrier next step.** For me this usually means making plans for a drink, dinner, or an invite to some other event. Do what works and feels right for you.

- **Repeat steps 1 - 4** to turn the initial contact into a beneficial relationship for the two of you.

I realize that this can be a time consuming endeavor, but I think it’s absolutely worth the investment of time and energy. Or maybe the person you met doesn’t live in the same place as you, so what do you then? In the case of Holly (she lives on the west coast), we find opportunities to keep in touch. This means lots of emails, texts, phone calls, and the occasional video call if we have something very important to discuss. It also means that we keep each other in mind when traveling. The important thing to remember is that whatever follow-up actions you decide on, you have to do something. It’s not enough to keep the stack of business cards you collect and let them sit there until you need something from them.

**Lesson:** The more effort and time you put into networking and building a relationship, the more value that interaction will provide to you both personally and professionally.

**Roadblocks to success**
If networking is supposed to reap so many benefits for young association professionals — why is it so hard? Why would we rather skip an opportunity to network and expand our circle of influence and instead head straight home to get into those comfortable sweats or head to a happy hour with people we already know? There are a lot of reasons that keep us from reaching the full potential of our networks and circles of influence.

Don’t talk to strangers. Growing up as children we were all taught not to talk to strangers. As an adult, this is horrible advice to follow. Yet we often find ourselves standing in the door, paralyzed, and unable (or unwilling) to talk to any strangers in the room. We scan the room and look for a familiar face or choose a nice, quiet spot near the hors d’oeuvres tables and get busy with a drink praying that someone will come up and make initial contact with us. With limited time at events to meet new contacts, you can’t afford to waste any of it having a bad time.

Waiting to be introduced. One of the scariest things for someone to do is to walk up to someone, introduce themselves, and start a conversation from nothing. We often wait to be introduced, or wait for other people to introduce themselves. Imagine if the entire room was too afraid to introduce themselves to each other. You’d have a very quiet room full of strangers. You can’t count on being introduced to anyone, let alone wait for someone to introduce you to someone you want to meet. Take charge of your own networking experience.
Better safe than sorry. You’ve finally worked up the nerve to approach a stranger, or someone you’ve wanted to meet for a long time. You smile, say hello and introduce yourself. Then, you get the worse response possible - a disinterested stare that screams “WHAT DO YOU WANT?” and then they walk away. Unfortunately this is the risk when you put yourself out there. When you’re meeting new people; better safe than sorry isn’t an advantageous plan. If this ever happens to you (and it’s happened to me before), smile and walk away and move onto your next conversation. Chances are that person isn’t the type of person you want to connect with anyways.

Not searching for a job. Too often I hear as an excuse, “I don’t need to network, I’m not looking for a job.” My response to this is, “That’s the best time to network.” When you approach networking purely for the purpose of finding a job, you lose all of the potential benefits. Whether consciously or subconsciously all of your conversations turn into a plea for a job, or a lead on a job. When you aren’t on the hunt for a job is when you can really demonstrate your skills, abilities, and successes. Then when someone you’ve met is looking to fill a position they will already have you in mind. Think about it this way, If you’re hiring for a new position how much more likely are you to interview someone you know who has some history and background compared to a random stranger you met at a bar or event? It goes along with the same adage that the best time to find a new job is when you have one.

**Lesson:** Recognize the roadblocks in your life and overcome them.

**Conclusion**

Networking is more than a handshake and hello, it’s even more than a tell me about yourself and what do you do. Networking is a long-term relationship building process. It’s one of those life processes that never ends, but the more effort you put into it, the higher its rewards. A strong professional network extends professional opportunities beyond your direct contacts. It creates opportunities for you to connect with new professional peers, volunteers, and meet new non-professional friends.

For some of you reading this article, creating a network of contacts and peers that you regularly correspond with is natural. If that’s the case, use the advice in this article to supplement your natural talent. For many of us whom struggle with networking, I hope this article will serve as a starting point for you. The power of the human connection is far beyond anything that an individual person can achieve alone. I ask each and every one of you reading this article to create opportunities to meet new people and develop those relationships.