



Networking Series Part II: Networking Through Nursing Organizations

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Nurses join professional organizations for a multitude of reasons. For some, professional organizations offer unique services to members that foster and promote their career growth. For others, belonging to a professional organization is a way of gaining knowledge within a nursing specialty such as critical care or nursing leadership.

One of the most important benefits for belonging to a nursing organization is the ability to network with nursing colleagues. Donna Cardillo, RN, is the author of “Dear Donna,” a monthly column for Nursing Spectrum and Nurse Week magazines, in which she gives career advice for nurses. She states that joining an organization is a great place to network with like-minded individuals while getting a competitive edge in the workplace. Cardillo believes that networking with professional organizations can help to develop your leadership, speaking and writing abilities while having a voice in issues that affect nursing practice.

Go to a Meeting

Donna Cardillo suggests that if you are considering joining an organization, contact the local chapter and make arrangements to go as a guest to their meetings. Local chapters of state nurses associations or specialty organizations welcome guests and are often willing to go out of their way to accommodate requests for non-member attendance.

She emphasizes that nurses should set a goal of meeting at least one new person at every event. While going to a meeting with a friend is acceptable, you should make a point not to be with that person continuously and to make every effort to branch out to meet new contacts.

Volunteer

People who are skilled at networking understand that joining an organization is important, but taking advantage of networking opportunities after you have joined is vital. One significant way to dramatically increase the opportunities for substantive networking is to volunteer for projects and committees within the organization.

Committee membership is an excellent way to connect with nurses from around the country while making a difference in the nursing profession. Professional organizations are an excellent conduit whether you are a new nurse looking to build relationships as a pathway to start a career or a retired nurse looking to find ways to utilize your experiences for a positive legacy.

While many nurses are busy fulfilling their multifaceted personal and professional obligations, organizations offer many opportunities to volunteer that do not require long-term or significant time obligations. Begin by contacting the organization by phone or email to let them know you are interested in becoming more involved and consider sharing potential ideas and talents that you may bring to the organization to assist them in their mission.

The Center for American Nurses is a professional association whose mission is to create a community of nursing organizations that serve individual, non-union nurses by providing programs, tools and policies that address challenges and opportunities in their practice environments.

Conferences and Networking

One of the most significant benefits of joining a professional organization is the opportunity to attend national and local educational offerings and conventions. Listed below are some tips to help you maximize networking opportunities while attending a conference:

- **Practice your introduction-** Before going to large events, mentally prepare a few questions to help break the ice with a new person. It is usually good to formulate a few questions, such as “Where are you from?” or “What is your nursing specialty?” that promote further dialogue.
- **Keeping tract of new colleagues-** If possible, get a list of the attendees to help you keep tract of people you meet at the conference. After the conference has ended, follow up the meeting with an email or phone call to help further establish a rapport with your new colleague.
- **Business cards-** Take business cards with long-term contact information. Be sure to obtain a business card from each new person you meet. If someone you speak with does not have a card, develop an organized manner in which to record their contact information for future use.
- **Use exhibit halls as an opportunity-** Use the vendor and exhibit halls to make connections with the representatives at each booth. Many vendors utilize conferences to seek out potential employees for their companies and welcome networking opportunities among conference attendees.
- **Attend every social event-** Take advantage of all social events the conference has to offer. Whether it is a fun walk in the morning or an evening gala, every moment that you have to talk, meet and connect with others could be career changing.
- **Volunteer at the event-** What better way to meet colleagues than at the registration table? Many organizations welcome volunteers to help with activities and events, especially for local chapters at national events.
- **Name badges-** Wear your name badge so that it is visible and not hidden among multiple stickers, pins and layers of clothes.
- **Dress professionally-** No matter what the dress code for the event, be sure that what you are wearing reflects how you want to represent yourself to future colleagues.

Regardless of where you are in your career path, joining a professional organization is a tremendous way to enhance a stellar career or begin a journey to career satisfaction. For more information on how the Center for American Nurses can assist you, please contact www.centerforamericannurses.org.

References

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