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#### Note

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## Networking as a Tool for Career Advancement Among Academic Psychologists

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*The central thesis of this article is that a successful academic career, which is based largely on the quality or importance of one's scholarly work and teaching skill, can be enhanced by effective networking. Networking is defined as the set of strategies academic psychologists use to increase their visibility among and interactions with other professionals. We point to the recent focus on networking skills in the fields of business and career development and argue that little attention is given to such skills in the graduate training of psychologists. To remedy this, we describe several networking strategies that may be helpful for the budding academic psychologist.*

The concept of networking has enjoyed increasing attention in the fields of business (e.g., Azrin & Besalel, 1986)

and career development (e.g., Welch, 1980). Although definitions vary, these disciplines generally have conceptualized networking as a set of strategies used to enhance one's professional visibility. Visibility, in addition to attained skills, may play an important role in enhancing one's marketability and, ultimately, in promoting one's career advancement. We believe that training in networking skills is: (a) a neglected area in the training of future academic psychologists, (b) an important set of skills to the young academician seeking career advancement, and (c) an integral part of the research and information dissemination process. We adopt a definition of networking that includes all of those strategies or skills that academic psychologists use to increase their visibility among and interactions with other professionals. Although our discussion focuses on academic psychologists, we believe that many of the issues we raise and the strategies we describe apply equally to psychologists seeking applied careers.

Graduate training in theory building, research methodology, data analysis, and report writing is extensive; however, most students receive little instruction in the informal aspects of developing professional contacts and disseminating research findings through less formal means, such as conventions and correspondence with colleagues. With few exceptions (e.g., Graziano & Raulin, 1989), undergraduate and graduate research methods texts focus on how to do research and ignore the social part of disseminating research findings that is very much a part of science. Observing one's mentor may provide a graduate student with some networking skills; unfortunately, only slightly more than 50% of a sample of trainees drawn from all subfields of psychology reported having a mentor (Cronan-Hillix, Gensheimer, Cronan-Hillix, & Davidson, 1986). Moreover, many mentors may not possess or outwardly display appropriate networking skills.

Our position is consistent with a symposium focusing on techniques for increasing professional involvement (Eison, 1986a). For example, Palladino (1986) described advantages of conference participation. Similarly, Eison (1986b) and Brewer (1986) discussed committee membership and volunteering to help with the editorial process of *Teaching of Psychology*, respectively, as ways of expanding one's involvement.

What follows is a brief description of some networking strategies. Although we make no claim that our discussion includes an exhaustive list, we hope to provide a systematic summary of several techniques useful to people interested in increasing their networking skills. Such a synopsis might also be useful in the orientation of beginning graduate students.

### General Networking Techniques

It is a mistake to assume that excellent work alone will bring the professional recognition needed for career advancement. Just as people are more likely to read papers written by well-known authors, other professionals are more likely to read your work if they know you.

#### Attending Conventions

One way to become known professionally is to present your research at conventions. Presenting good papers or

posters at conventions is only the first step. Be sure to introduce yourself to others in attendance and discuss your ideas with them; poster sessions are an ideal way to start informed discussions. Unfortunately, many individuals do not take advantage of this format; they can be seen simply collecting paper reprints without introducing themselves to participants (Bales, 1988; Knight, 1987). When attending a paper session or symposium, introduce yourself to the speakers, describe your interest in their work, and discuss how it relates to your own ideas or work. When appropriate, ask for a copy of their paper and offer to reciprocate by sending them copies of your own related work.

One need not be shy about offering to send copies of your work to people, even if they do not ask directly. Moreover, when you receive reprint requests, respond to them promptly. According to one survey (Knight, 1987), a high proportion of reprint requests never get answered. Sending several papers to people who request a single paper is also reasonable. Include a note indicating that you thought they might be interested in some of your related work. Although it is convenient to pick up papers at poster sessions, there is an advantage to having the authors send you the paper. By having your name and address, the authors will know of your specific interest in their work and may be more likely to read some of your research when they come across it.

At the risk of sounding cliché, the best way to interest people in your work is to be interested in their work. Plan for a convention by identifying persons you would like to meet and by familiarizing yourself with their recent work. It is much easier to approach strangers if you can honestly state that you have read and were very interested in their recent article. Most people will reciprocate by expressing an interest in your work.

Social hours at conventions and other group meetings are also good places to meet other professionals. Introducing yourself to a well-known senior person in the field who can introduce you to others can be a particularly useful networking technique. Many people find it difficult to introduce themselves to people they have never met. Be advised that it gets easier with practice; it is easier if you do your homework ahead of time. Using the resources of a convention effectively is hard work, but the professional rewards can be substantial.

There are numerous kinds of conferences one can attend. Aside from the national convention and the major regionals (e.g., eastern, southeastern, midwestern, etc.), there are many opportunities to attend conventions with more focal themes. The APA's divisional conventions are good examples of the latter.

As Smith (1988) pointed out, networking by way of conventions may be especially important for academics at smaller institutions who may be at greater risk of being professionally isolated. He provided evidence that even undergraduate research conferences, typically thought to be for the benefit of students only, have the hidden benefit of providing a medium for faculty networking. Thus, a variety of professional meetings offer many opportunities for establishing professional contacts.

Many of the foregoing suggestions presuppose some knowledge of how conventions work. For the interested reader who has never attended a professional convention,

Zalk (1985) offered a detailed summary of how a typical convention is run, using the APA national convention as an example. She provided numerous bits of advice that should prove useful in orienting the convention neophyte. As a bare minimum, we recommend that you study the convention program and plan your daily schedules long before the meeting.

### *Other Communications With Colleagues*

If you talk with someone at a convention, a personal letter with some accompanying reprints can be a good follow-up. A similar technique can be used with people you have not met. You might send a letter requesting a reprint and copies of related papers to someone who has recently published in your area of interest. In this age of copy machines, reprint requests can introduce your interest to the author, rather than merely providing a copy of the paper.

You can reverse the reprint request strategy by sending your papers to others who might be interested in your work (e.g., authors cited in your papers and well-known people in the field). If you supply requested reprints to other researchers, express interest in obtaining copies of related work they have in progress. This is a good way to initiate correspondence with researchers whose interests are similar to yours.

### *Effective Use of Collaboration*

Many young psychologists avoid collaboration for fear that, at tenure decision time, their collaborative efforts will be discounted because they do not represent independent scholarship. Although this is a legitimate concern, avoiding collaboration completely can limit one's opportunities to become known in the community of scholars. Some collaborative efforts, such as organizing and participating in convention symposia, involve relatively little expenditure of time and can pay large dividends. Collaborative efforts with scholars from other universities may be viewed as more independent contributions than collaboration with others from one's home institution. Collaboration with well-known senior faculty can expand your research network greatly, because you often will meet or work with many associates of your senior collaborator. Collaborating successfully on postdoctoral research with several different people will diminish the perception that you are being carried by your collaborators. Although independent scholarship is still critically important to your long-term career goals, working with other scholars can have significant advantages.

### *Conclusions*

In this article, several strategies young academics might undertake to enhance their professional visibility have been identified. These are seldom taught in graduate school, and only an occasional mentor will present them systematically to students. Our list is not exhaustive, but we hope that it will stimulate beginning academics to think about the advantages of effective networking. Further-

more, we do not mean to suggest that a good professional network will instantaneously emerge through using some of our suggestions. As one reviewer of our article noted, a meaningful network may take years to establish and requires continued attention. Our purpose here is merely to provide some ideas on how to get started.

Although the goal of effective networking is to expand one's professional contacts, there is a fine line between appropriate promotion of one's own work and that which is purely self-serving. Many of our suggestions may seem overly forward and self-serving. They do require individuals to initiate contacts and to take the risk of putting their work before the scrutiny of others. However, we are not suggesting that we should create illusions of interest in others' work so that they will find our work more interesting. Establishing a network should be based on genuine interest in the work of those with whom contacts are made. Such contacts will more likely lead to enduring and meaningful professional relationships.

Ultimately, of course, one's professional reputation will rest on the quality of one's work. The best networking techniques will not compensate for poor work. It may be useful to view one's work as a product to be sold. Advertising might get people to try a product, but they won't stay with the product unless it works. In a competitive environment, however, a good product can sometimes be outsold by an inferior one that is marketed more effectively.

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#### Notes

1. This article was conceived while the authors were networking at the 1986 annual convention of the American Psychological Association in Washington, DC.
2. We gratefully acknowledge the pointed comments and suggestions of the editor and three anonymous reviewers on an earlier draft of this article.
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### Attending to Parapsychology

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*Although belief in parapsychology seems to be widespread, most introductory psychology textbooks ignore it. The use of relevant literature and exercises in teaching is discussed.*

Belief in parapsychology seems to be widespread. Newspapers include daily horoscopes, astrologers appear on TV and provide advice to the First Lady, and "mentalists" tour the college circuit. A section in *Psychological Abstracts* is devoted to parapsychology, and the Parapsychological Association is an affiliate of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Singer and Benassi (1981) cited evidence that 80% to 90% of our population consistently is found to have a moderate or strong belief in extrasensory perception (ESP). Others have found a belief in ESP among students (Kerber, 1983; Moss & Butler, 1978), acceptance of astrologically based personality assessments (Snyder, Larsen, & Bloom, 1976), and acceptance of psychic phenomena (Irwin, 1985; Steininger & Voegtlin, 1976). Frazier (1987) compared the results of Gallup polls of teenagers' paranormal beliefs in 1978, 1984, and 1986. The 1986 poll yielded lower levels of belief in paranormal phenomena than the 1984 poll; even so, the 1986 poll found that 52% of the respondents believed in astrology and 46% in ESP. Belief in astrology was greater in the 1986 than in the 1978 poll.

What one can make of these results is perhaps best put by T. H. Leahey and G. E. Leahey (1983):

People have strong and tenaciously held ideas about human nature, which psychology has not dislodged. Many of these ideas are systematized and taught by occult movements from astrology to scientology, and these movements often have more popular appeal than orthodox psychology. (p. 14)

In view of such prevalent beliefs, it is surprising that parapsychology is ignored by most authors of introductory psychology textbooks. I surveyed 28 introductory textbooks published between 1984 and 1988 and found that only 8 included some coverage of parapsychology and that only 4 included more than one page about the subject.

There appears to be a widespread disinclination among psychologists to deal with parapsychology. Various reasons are offered for this lack of attention. One is that an