How to Network, Even through a Pandemic!

Siobahn Day Grady, North Carolina Central University
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With thanks to prior speakers:
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About Siobahn

• **Education**
  - B.S. Computer Science, Winston-Salem State University (2005)
  - M.S. Information Science, North Carolina Central University (2009)
  - M.S. Computer Science, North Carolina A&T State University (2018)
  - Ph.D. Computer Science, North Carolina A&T State University (2018)

• **Research – Artificial Intelligence/Machine Learning**

• **Professional**
  - Industry – Information Technology Departments in Higher Ed.
  - Academia
    - Elon University, Adjunct Professor
    - University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Lecturer
    - Assistant Professor at North Carolina Central University

• **Personal**
  - Love traveling, cooking, and reading!
Points of Pride

• 2020 NSF Awardee (Autonomous Vehicles- Fault Detection)
• AAAS IF/THEN Mini Grant Awardee (STEM-It-Yourself)
• SPARK Grant Awardee (SOH Time)
• 2021 Caroline L. Lattimore Excellence in Education Awardee
• 2019 AAAS IF/THEN Ambassador
• 2019 BlackComputerHER Fellow and Awardee
• Black Girls Code RDU Core Member

Advocate
Entrepreneur
Researcher
Teacher
Daughter
Friend
Sorority Sister
Volunteer

1st woman to earn a PhD in Computer Science from North Carolina A&T State University

#2021isGlorious
About Rita

ME, American University of Beirut
  • Computer & Communications Engineering.
    Thesis Neural Networks & Signal Processing

Worked for a start-up (1996-2001)
  • Different engineering and management positions

PhD, Columbia University
  • Electrical Engineering.
    Thesis work in Distributed Networking

Research Scientist, Intel Corporation, Intel Labs

Senior AI Principal Engineer, Intel Corporation, Internet of Things Group
What Does Rita Do?

most prolific woman inventor at Intel (over 300 patents)

Transforming factories with AI
The path to success

It takes a community to help you succeed and reach your full potential.

It is both WHAT you do and know, and WHO you know!
Networking

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| Interacting with other people to exchange information and develop contacts especially to further your career. | • A substitute for quality work  
• Just socializing or idle chit-chat  
• Using people, name-dropping |
Why Network?

- Building and publicizing your brand/reputation
- Becoming aware of new opportunities
- Identifying collaborators
- Learning about new ideas and approaches
- Getting invited to program committees, review panels, keynotes, journal editorship, etc.
Networking: How, Where, Who?
Where to Network?
(Answer: Everywhere!)

• School
• Work
• Conferences and workshops
• Technical talks/seminars
• Industry Meet-ups
• Summer internships
• Sabbaticals
• Program Committee Meetings
• NSF Panel and other review meetings
• Social settings
• ...
Who: Make a targeted list

Know **why and who** you want to add to your network (e.g., before an event). And know **what** you want from your network! And not just people from your own discipline!

- Established Researchers in academia and industry in diverse disciplines
- Contemporaries/peers – both junior and senior
- People who have open job positions or internships
- Industry technologists and leaders
- Technical advisors and experts
- Alumni
- NSF Program managers
- Venture capitalists
- Friends and neighbors
Networking Opportunities

- **Conferences/Workshops**
  - Volunteer
  - Find someone alone and start a conversation
  - Keep a short introduction/pitch ready – practice!!

- **Talks/Seminars**
  - Ask a question
  - Read the paper beforehand

- **School/work**
  - Informal and formal meetings with your colleagues, students
  - Meet with visitors coming to campus
  - Participate in committees

- **Industry internships/sabbaticals**
  - Get to know interns from other schools/disciplines
  - Get to know folks other than your mentors.

- **Non-professional venues**
Networking: build a plan

Give yourself a goal for an event
- Example: meet 2 new people, talk with 1 research leader, etc.

Find group networking opportunities
- Example: meals, conference outing, reception, student dinners
- Join a group that is casually talking and introduce yourself.
  (Don’t barge into private conversations)
- Sit down with people you don’t know at tables.

Prepare:
- Example: Read papers ahead and write down questions you want to ask.

Some Tips:
- Ask for help – introductions from your advisor, senior colleagues and mentors
- Volunteer: PCs, Panels, Conference organization jobs
- Follow up by email. Send your latest paper.
- Call the NSF/DARPA/other funding program managers.
- Don’t be discouraged if people don’t remember you. Reintroduce yourself.
At conferences: DO’s

Be yourself, Be active, Be confident
Wear your badge visibly
Speak! (don’t just stand there)
Use the dreaded microphone
Talk to speakers after their presentations
Talk to the person next to you
Look people in the eyes
Make lunch/dinner plans
Attend social activities
Get your friends/advisor to introduce you
Make plans for follow up (write it down!)
Re-connect with people you’ve met before
At Conferences, DON’T

DON’T hang around with your friends
DON’T interrupt private conversations
DON’T be overly negative/critical
DON’T hang on to a conversation too long
DON’T put too much stock in a single, short conversation
DON’T get discouraged
DON’T hide in your room
Pandemic Style Networking
Networking Pandemic Style

• Consider dropping into the DMs
• Always add a personalized message when connecting via social media
• Be specific with your request/ask
• Have a website or reference material available
Finding Sponsors

Advocates are sometimes called sponsors, so will use that term.
Mentors vs. Sponsors

**Mentors** talk to you about you

**Sponsors** talk to others about you

*even when you are not in the room*
Mentors vs. Sponsors

**Mentor**

- Mentors participate in formal/informal discussions on building skills, knowledge, and confidence for career advancements.
- Mentors helps mentee craft a career vision.
- Mentors suggest how to expand mentee’s network.

**Sponsor**

- Sponsors promote protégés directly, connecting them to high-profile assignments, people, pay increase, or promotions.
- Sponsors help drive protégé’s career vision.
- Sponsors give protégés their active network connections and makes new connections for them.
Mentors vs. Sponsors

**Mentor**
- Mentors offer insight into increasing visibility through finding projects/people.
- Mentors share passively “unwritten rules” for advancement in their organization.

**Sponsor**
- Sponsors champion their protégé’s visibility, using their own platforms and reputation as a medium of exposure.
- Sponsors actively involve protégés in experiences that enable advancement.
Mentors are good
Sponsors are different sorts of people

• Mentors may be very well intentioned, like you a lot, respect your work and be deeply invested in your success.

• But mentors may not speak up on your behalf. It’s not from any ill intention.

• **Sponsorship requires proactive energy.**

• Some mentors will act as sponsors, but you cannot bank on mentors to sponsor you.
Why seek a sponsor?

Women are over-mentored and under-sponsored relative to their male peers (Ibarra, Carter, & Silva, 2010).

- Men are 45% more likely to have a sponsor than women across industry sectors (CTI, 2015).

**Better Pay**
- 38% of sponsored women vs. 30% of unsponsored women will ask for a raise — sponsored women are likely to get it.

**Improve Advancement**
- 68% of sponsored women vs. 57% of unsponsored women report satisfactory pace in promotions.

**More High Profile Assignments**
- 44% of sponsored women vs. 36% of unsponsored women will ask for high-visibility work.

**Increase Retention**
- 85% of mothers who are sponsored stay employed vs. only 58% without sponsors.

https://www.ncwit.org/resources/sponsors-vs-mentors-whats-difference-infographic
Choose your Sponsor Wisely

Observe personalities of people in your network

- Who speaks up (carefully)
- Who has the ability to change the direction of a conversation
- Who is well respected
- Who won’t hesitate to interject when need be (and are highly effective when doing so)

Avoid sponsorship from someone whose endorsement creates negative interactions
When Considering a Sponsor

What can they offer you?
• Who makes pay, promotion or project/committee assignments that may affect you?
• Which senior leader has a network or platform most equipped to help you advance in your career?

What can you offer them?
• Which senior leader would benefit from you/your career advancement or building a relationship with you?
Building Sponsor-Protégé Relationship

Rinse and repeat:

1. Create opportunities for research/education/business-focused conversations
2. Seek advice and take it
3. Follow up

Do not ask directly for a sponsorship. Sponsors happen organically when a senior person decides to take that role or active retention efforts from an organization.

https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2015/06/03/essay-difference-between-mentors-and-sponsors-academe
Takeaway

Developing powerful relationships through networking and finding advocates is too important to leave it up to chance

It all starts with you taking steps to build your network and to find your sponsors
Thank you!