Shake Hands with Your Future
Networking Key to Career Advancement

Stephanie Stephens

For Jeffery Kabachinski, the AAMI 2011 Conference & Expo turned out to be much more than an opportunity to learn about the latest developments in healthcare technology. It also helped him land a job and provided a valuable lesson in the power of networking.

“I stepped into the hotel bar at the end of the day to see who was around, and it was jammed with attendees who have influence,” Kabachinski, a member of the BI&T Editorial Board, recalled. In minutes, he began talking to a fellow professional who told him about possible opportunities at ARAMARK. “One thing led to another, and I got hired.” He’s now director of technical development for ARAMARK Healthcare Technologies in Charlotte, NC.

Charles Gardner attended AAMI’s 2012 conference in June, shortly after graduating with his associate’s degree in biomedical equipment technology from Stanly Community College in Albemarle, NC. During a session featuring an update from The Joint Commission, Gardner began chatting with a fellow attendee, who asked him why he was at the conference.

“I’m here to connect and possibly find a job,” Gardner recalled saying. His new acquaintance inquired about Gardner’s degree, but was particularly interested in his internship at Cone Health in Greensboro, NC. Before the day was over, Gardner had met the regional director and national clinical engineering director of Trinity Health’s systemwide in-house clinical engineering group. By August, he had a new job as a biomedical equipment technician I.

“Actually, it was kind of funny the way things worked out so well,” said Gardner. In hindsight, his willingness to share openly about his goals was the ticket to finding a job. He may not have known it, but by talking enthusiastically about his plans, Gardner was networking.

Working the Room
Networking is often defined as the ability to develop and use business contacts for purposes beyond the reason for the initial contact. That’s a formal way of saying, “Talk about your professional interests with others, and emphasize what you can do for them.”

Some people may view “networking” as a formal, even intimidating, business protocol to follow. Far from it. The most effective network, experts say, happens when you’re just being yourself, relaxing in the moment, and trying to make a few friends—without feeling pressured to accomplish a specific...
goal or stick to a script. Everyone you meet doesn’t have to be a professional contact for life or offer you a job. But expanding your professional network only increases your chances of realizing career dividends later.

Consider just being at a conference or professional meeting time well spent, suggested J. Scot Mackeil, a certified biomedical equipment technician, from Plymouth, MA. “I enjoy the business I am in, and I enjoy the company of similar-minded people,” he said. “I participate in forums. I go to society meetings and symposiums and I purposely sit down at a table with people I have never met before and strike up conversations. I like to talk about biomed stuff with other biomeds. It’s that simple.”

Then there’s the “career part” of networking. “If you ever find yourself in need of a new job, you have ‘friends’ in the industry to turn to,” Mackeil said. “You are not completely at the mercy of the dreaded human resources professionals. A lot of the really talented people I have met in our industry over the years are not the type of people who fit into neat human resources profiles. Some of us have great skills with technology and caregivers, but we don’t have the corporate shine.”

MacKeil urged taking the time to lay the groundwork. “Don’t wait until you need a job to start being outgoing. It takes years to build a network of friends in the business, and one must maintain those relationships with phone calls, e-mails, or chit-chat. Networking is fun, rewarding, and good insurance for the security of your career in your lifetime.”

Time Well Spent
Another of his peers, Michael Enquist, couldn’t agree more. He was moved to respond to a graduating student last August, who had reached out on the online AAMI Student Discussion Group, asking for advice on finding a job.

“The one thing that will practically guarantee that you get a job that you want is networking,” wrote Enquist, a senior laboratory engineer for Modern Medical Systems.

“If your biomedical equipment technician program (BMET) offers you the opportunity to do internships, take full advantage of it,” Enquist continued. “If not, then seek out volunteer positions in biomed shops around your area. If you haven’t joined your local BMET organization, I encourage you do to so ASAP.”

While living in Washington State, Enquist joined the Washington State Biomedical Association (WSBA) in 2011 and said he made connections that helped four friends find jobs.

Networking led to his own job, Enquist says, thanks to a conversation he had with the coordinator of the BMET program at North Seattle Community College, which he attended.

He and others emphasized that networking is more than a matter of making in-person connections. Social media can be a huge help, they said, especially LinkedIn, the professional networking site.
In This Together
Networking isn’t all about taking. It’s also an opportunity to give back, says Demetrius Dillard, an equipment interface specialist for Community Health Network in Indianapolis, IN. Dillard says he’s glad to help fellow professionals advance their careers, remembering well the support he’s gotten from leaders in the field. In 2012, Dillard was named the AAMI/GE Healthcare BMET of the Year.

“Without networking I would not be able to seek the encouragement of these champions of healthcare technology management,” he said, naming Karen Waninger, of Community Health Network, Dustin Telford, of Intermountain Healthcare Northern Region, and Paul Kelley, of Washington Hospital in Fremont, CA, as among the leaders who have inspired him.

It’s not necessary to travel somewhere to network, he notes. “Online forums and listservs are great places for fellow professionals to share information and create a network of trusted professionals.”

A spirit of cohesiveness may prove even more important due to impending changes in healthcare policies and technology advances, Dillard believes. “With a great support system, we can all benefit from working together.”

© Copyright AAMI 2013. Single user license only. Copying, networking, and distribution prohibited.