

Attendee Resources Guide for Networking

As a first-time attendee, you have a great opportunity to connect with peers and experts and expand your professional network. Many ATD conference attendees return year after year to reconnect and to grow their professional networks. While much networking is serendipitous, having a plan and being intentional about your networking will help you make the most of your opportunities at ATD26.

Prepare

Set yourself up for networking at ATD26:

1. **Update** your profile in the ATD26 virtual platform and mobile app.
2. **Decide** how you are going to share and collect contact information. Some options to consider include:
 - a. **LinkedIn.** Make sure to send a personal message when you connect, so you can give context to the connection.
 - b. **ATD Community Online.** ATD members have access to an [online community](#) where they can connect with other ATD members worldwide. Not a member? Sign up in ATD Commons.
 - c. **Paper Business Cards.** Make a note on the back of each card you receive to remind you of how you connected and what you connected around.
 - d. **Digital Business Card.** There are several app-based digital business card apps. Some let you tag contacts with details about where you met.
 - e. **Personal QR Code.** Prepare a QR code with a link to your LinkedIn or Website (save the QR code on your phone to share or print a few copies to carry with you).
 - f. **Conference App.** Connect in the ATD26 virtual platform and mobile app.

There is no one right way, but you should be prepared for how you want to share your information and collect from others.

3. **Prioritize networking** sessions and events in your schedule.
4. **Visit** ATD Exchange to participate in peer-to-peer roundtables, meetups, and more.
5. **Plan** for who you might want to meet.
 - a. Are you interested in meeting people who have similar challenges to you or who have solved similar challenges?
 - b. Are you interested in meeting people who have a similar position or people who have a role you would like to pursue?
 - c. Are you interested in meeting people with different expertise from you?
 - d. Are you looking for people to potentially partner with on projects?

Having a sense of what you are hoping to grow in your network can help you prepare for meeting new professional partners.

6. **Create** a short introduction to use when you meet someone. This is especially helpful if you find yourself unsure of meeting people. (This is also helpful for connecting sessions around group discussions or other forums.)
 - a. Develop a short elevator-type statement that introduces who you are, what you do, and what you are passionate about (or interested in).
 - b. Consider some questions that people might ask you and what you really want people to know about you.

A suggestion: Networking at a conference should be fun, authentic, and professional. Transactional connections won't last, so motivate your conversations with curiosity and authenticity. Networking is important to many people who attend large conferences like ATD26, so don't be shy about meeting new colleagues.

7. **Connect**
 - **Ask Questions:** So, you have an opportunity to connect with someone but aren't sure how to. It's good to have some prepared questions to break the ice and begin a conversation. Here are some suggestions: Have you been to any great sessions so far?
 - Are there any sessions you are looking forward to?
 - What kind of work do you do?
 - How did you get started in L&D?
 - What's a challenge you (or your team) are currently working through?
 - What are you hoping to learn about at ATD26?
 - Are there any L&D influencers who inspire you or whom you learn from?
 - What is your go-to resource when you need help with something?
 - What's a project you are really excited (or nervous) about?
 - What are you hoping to do next in your career?
 - What do you like best in your current role?
 - What do you wish you had time for?
8. **Be Open:** Connection goes both ways—be open to others who may be looking to connect with you.
9. If you meet someone in a group discussion or session that you want to connect with, follow up at the end of the session and begin a discussion. Notice when other people want to follow up with you after a session. Seek out roundtable and community conversations, with small-group discussions.
10. **Exit Strategy:** Not all conversations will be satisfying, so plan a polite exit strategy. Some exit strategies might include:
 - a. Noting the time and mentioning that there is a session you want to attend.
 - b. Thanking someone for the conversation and politely excusing yourself.

- c. Having a standard line, such as, “It has been nice talking with you. I need to step away for a few minutes to recharge and gather my thoughts.”

Note: Professional networking is not an obligation. You are free not to connect with others or share your contact information if you aren’t comfortable. If someone doesn’t want to exchange information with you or doesn’t seem interested in continuing the conversation, thank them for talking with you and moving on to your next scheduled session or activity.

Tips for Introverts

Connecting at a large conference with a busy schedule can be challenging if you are more introverted. However, if you motivate it with a quality connections mindset, you can have a great opportunity to grow your network.

- **Redefine** what you mean by networking. You don’t have to make dozens of connections. A few meaningful conversations can be energizing rather than draining. Quality is better than quantity.
- **Set** a reasonable goal. Make a goal of meeting 2–3 people per day, or however many seems reasonable to you for your comfort.
- **Plan** to pause. Preschedule quiet time throughout the day or take it spontaneously when you feel the need. Find a quiet spot, step outside, or take lunch or a break by yourself. Take a short walk outside or around the conference center with headphones, sit and journal, or take some time with a quiet activity that helps you relax.
- **Set** your own boundaries. Don’t feel obligated to talk with someone if you need some quiet. Be kind and note that crowds are a bit overwhelming for you and that you need a little quiet, or whatever you want to say.

Follow Up

Building a professional network is more than good conversations at a conference. While you might not want to follow up with everyone you met, there are some good ways to follow up with those you do. Focus on building reciprocal connections. If you end up with 2–3 solid new professional connections that become ongoing after the conference, you have grown your network!

Here are some suggestions for follow-up:

1. **Share** resources you discussed in your conversation: notes from a session, an article, resources, or the name of a book.
2. **A personal note** in LinkedIn, by email, or text expressing appreciation for the conversation. It is helpful to note the specific topic you discussed or other details of your conversation.
3. **Connect on LinkedIn** with a personalized note if you didn’t during the conference.
4. With permission, **acknowledge the people** you met in any social media posts with a “thank you” or a reflection on something you learned from them.
5. **Invite** a new connection for a (virtual) coffee chat about a specific topic you share an interest in.

6. **Connect** later and set reminders for yourself to follow up with people you meet to discuss shared interests.

In all your follow-up activities, give the person an easy way to respond, such as an open-ended question or an invitation.

Not everyone you talk to at a conference will become part of your growing professional network, but spending time cultivating those relationships through meaningful, authentic connections will lead to longer-term, reciprocal connections.