Hi friends!

Hope you all enjoyed Halloween and survived its sugar-crashed, sleep-deprived aftermath!

This month I want to share my tips for making the most of academic conferences. Whether you love the energy or dread the “networking,” conferences are inevitable. Here’s how to make them count.

**Before you go**:

**Sign up for mentoring**/ advising programs. If there’s a particular person you’d like as your mentor, request her!

**Pack your business cards**. Put some in your laptop bag, some in your wallet, and some in your jacket pocket. Seriously, make it impossible to leave your room without your business cards. You will thank me later.

**Plan one-on-one meetings**. Almost anyone will meet with you at a conference. They are away from their usual obligations and have much longer days. All the external recommenders (and referees) for my promotion were people I met at conferences. If you are thinking, “what do I talk to people about in these meetings,” I have an answer for you. *Talk to them about whatever keeps you awake at night, work-wise.*

***Pro tip***: ***the plane ride is part of the conference***! You will run into colleagues as soon as you get to the airport. Make sure your dress/luggage/etc are professional enough that you’d be delighted to see your department chair. (for me, that means my new yoga pants!)

**On your way (or sooner):**

**Define your goals.** Write down what you want to get out of this meeting, specifically. “I want to network” is not a helpful goal. Do you want specific people to get to know you? Are you looking for new collaborators? Do you want to practice your elevator pitch? If you know what you’re trying to do, you can decide what to do based on your goals and free yourself from FOMO and/ or give yourself a breather.

**Read the agenda**. It is possible to do this and not get overwhelmed! Find one thing each day that you must do. That’s all. Then allow yourself to browse in a casual way, circling posters you’d like to visit or sessions that sound interesting.

***Pro tip: download the conference app***. I have particularly appreciated receiving updated room locations/ last minute changes to the program.

**While you are there:**

**First things first.** Prepare for your poster or talk, and knock it out of the park. Get some friends to congregate by your poster or ask some well-chosen questions at your talk. I don’t have to tell you the entire conference will go better if you feel good about your own work.

**Schmoozing is optional**.You don’t have to stop and chat in the hotel lobby- ever. (Unless you see me! You know you can’t get past me without sharing all your news and, if applicable, showing me photos of your kids.) If you hate small talk, don’t do it. Choose to speak with people at talks, poster sessions, or interest groups. Quality, not quantity, is key in informal interactions.

**Social media can be a great icebreaker**. Conference organizers retweet most posts with the conference hashtag, and I have gained many followers and friends by commenting on talks or sessions.

**Don’t forget the fun!** You get to define “fun” here. Go to the gym, get a massage, read a novel, watch reality TV, whatever you wish you could do more of! I have planned a strictly social dinner with my work friends at our annual meetings every year, and it’s become a beloved tradition.

***Pro tip: engage with a speaker before her talk.*** Many interesting speakers are mobbed after their talks, but few people show up early. I’ve had the chance to talk to presenters after they’ve checked their slides, and it has led to great follow-up. It’s much easier to remember the one person who arrived early than the many saying “great talk!” afterwards.

**After the conference:**

**Scan business cards.** There are a lot of apps for this- I have a free one called ScanBizCards that does the job fine.

**Follow-up with people**. If they said, “you should write about that,” send them a few sentences in an email and invite them to write about it with you. (This is how someone on this list ended up as my mentee!) If they saw your poster and said, “I’d love to see your paper,” send them the e-pub link!

***Pro tip: plan for next year***. The ideal time to decide how to do the conference next year is to plan it out on the way home, while the experience is fresh in your mind. I write some bullets in my notebook and/ or put it into my outlook calendar.

Please drop me a line when you have a chance. If you have a paper coming out or some other professional development, send me the link. I love to brag about my (current and former) mentees and colleagues on social media, as many of you know.

As always, thank you for reading!

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