

“Networking supports your well-being and your career”

– Interview with Dr. Joann Halpern

Dear Dr. Halpern, thank you for the interesting talk at our university. Could you, once again, bring it all together?

Why is networking so important for an international career?

Having a network of people with different backgrounds can help you understand another culture better, when you are planning to work abroad or in an international context. You can practice working and communicating with an unknown (working/business) culture. Having private contacts can also help you prepare practical things before your stay abroad, as they can give you great tips or support you with specific concerns. They can help you come up with first ideas on how to make new friends or even connect you with their local contacts. If you aim for new contacts in your region, people of your network can introduce you to relevant contacts of theirs. For this, it's important to always have your purpose or goal in mind.

That means, it is important who I choose to include in my network?

We have a limited amount of time, so you want to build a network that helps you follow your purpose, so in a sense there is a need for strategic thinking. However, of course, not exclusively: a heterogeneous network, with people from

different areas and backgrounds, can bring up new perspectives and open new horizons. At its core, it's all about building good relationships, who you're building them with is rather of secondary importance.

As a student or recent graduate, how can I start building my career-related international network? What could be my first networking activities?

My first tip would be: Get to know your professors! Do they know any important organizations that they can introduce you to or events that are worth participating? Then, keep your eyes open for events like meet-ups, conferences or smaller initiatives in Göttingen and the region, which might be interesting for your field. You should also ask alumni, your peers, seniors or colleagues. Try to attend some of these events and talk to fellows or the speakers afterwards.

When there are no such possibilities here in Göttingen, you could join virtual events, like international conferences or free online courses that are interesting for you, e.g. MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses). They do not necessarily need to be in your field but could be about any topic you are interested to learn more about. In this way, you may get in contact not only with fellow learners but also with more experienced experts from all over the world.

When you travel or go abroad for your studies or an internship, ask people you know in advance if they could connect you with local experts to prepare your stay in the best possible way. In this case, it's important to act early enough to give people enough time in advance. It shows them that they are important for you.

What can I do if I am a little shy?

Even single aspects of a topic can serve as a conversation starter. People like to talk about "their" subjects, so this is how you give them an opportunity to keep the conversation going. You can even do research about their work and projects and use this to start the conversation. If you are shy in face-to-face, you could also start conversations via online networks, such as LinkedIn.

What are your recommendations on how to use LinkedIn for networking wisely?

Being active on the platform is a great chance to increase your network and meet inspiring people. For example, you can raise your visibility through sharing your own articles and become kind of a thought leader in your field. If you are not a writer, maybe you want to repost interesting articles by others and relate in your post to what you are doing. You could make comments to start a conversation below posts, to make people remember you and at the same time support their effort. Also by posting content of a certain subject on a regular basis, people

start associating you with this specific field or topic. Again, make sure it all aligns with your own purpose and interests.

Are there any downsides of networking?

Well, it is always a good idea to keep the balance. Sometimes, hard efforts can also backfire. If you are unsure, who to trust, take little steps or ask mutual contacts for their opinion.

A broad and strong network needs to be sustained, so don't forget to take care of your connections and keep in touch (and mind) by, for example, forwarding them things like interesting articles, inviting them to events or – the tiniest effort - liking their virtual activities.

By the way, setting priorities and making them visible is always a sign of appreciation and you should pay attention on how you communicate and act in your networking activities – in this way or another, it will be seen.

Sometimes it happens that you don't have a lot of energy and time to invest into networking activity. In this case, I recommend setting priorities and taking little steps as well.

And keep in mind: You cannot make everyone happy. It can be challenging when your circle of friends and/or community of interest grows. The more connections you have, the more they tend to become superficial. So choose carefully where to invest effort and set priorities.

(Interviewed by Stefanie Straßer, 19.11.21)