**How To Get the Most Out of a Professional Conference**

**Pre-Conference:**

* Actively consider your goals for the conference: what do you want to get out of this experience?
* Research the conference
	+ Know where you’re going
	+ Understand the dress code; plan your outfits
		- If you’re unsure about the dress code, look at pictures from previous years of the conference or contact the organizers.
	+ Pack a “conference survival pack”
		- A professional conference is mainly about two things learning and networking. So, bring a notebook, a few writing implements, and some business cards. You may also want to make sure to have a reusable water bottle, your phone charger, and some small, *quiet* snacks.
* If session information is available before the conference, plan which sessions you want to go to.
	+ Choose sessions that sound interesting but that are on topics you don’t know a lot about
	+ Have back-up choices ready for each session block just in case your first choice is full or is unexpectedly cancelled

**Check-In:**

* If you can, arrive at the check-in location 5-10 minutes early to avoid the rush.
* Make sure to have any registration confirmation information readily available, especially for paid conferences.
* Be respectful of the staff and other attendees’ time, stay off your phone to avoid distractions that can slow the check-in process down. The exception: accessing your registration information.

**Presentations and Session:**

* As mentioned in the check-in section above, if you have session block where you must choose one session out of many, pick a session that has a topic you’re interested in but don’t know a lot about.
* Meet your presenters and speakers
	+ Take a moment at the end of the session to thank your speaker
	+ If you enjoyed a particular session and want to learn more or get to know the speaker better in a professional capacity, ask for their contact information at the end of the session
* **Be respectful to your presenters**
	+ Do not use your phone during the session unless the speaker asks you to do so
	+ Do not hold extended conversations with your fellow participants while a presenter is speaking
	+ Do not record the session unless the presenter has explicitly given permission to do so; this also applies to taking pictures of slides. If in doubt, ask!
	+ DO take notes during the session
	+ DO ask questions when you have them. The presenter will let you know if you can ask questions in the moment or if they prefer that you hold your questions until the end
	+ DO be an active participant when the presenter asks for audience engagement
* **Networking:**
	+ Be intentional about meeting new people; avoid the temptation to spend all your time with co-workers and/or people you already know
	+ If you arrive early for a session, use that time to get to know the people in the room with you; avoid the temptation of social media
	+ The conference itself gives you the perfect opening to start a conversation; ask people what brought them to the conference, why they chose a specific session, or what they hope to learn from the conference
* **Social Media:**
	+ DO use it in quick bursts to share pictures and insights from the conference
	+ DO NOT use it to avoid engaging with other participants; one of the greatest things about a conference is the opportunity to get to know like-minded people
* **Post-Conference:**
	+ Follow-up with the people you clicked with
		- Connect with people you met at the conference on LinkedIn and other social media platforms
	+ Keep your program
		- The program is literally a directory of expert level knowledge that can be used in a lot of different ways after the conference