How to prepare for a networking event (including what not to do)

You may already know that networking events are one of the best ways to find job leads and expand your network, but attending events is only half the battle. You also need to know how to behave at them. If you talk too much, say too little or arrive unprepared, you can ruin your chances to leave with new connections or a job lead.

This Isn't a Party
- Remember why you're at the networking event.
- The purpose of a networking event is to help you advance professionally. It's a social event -- but a professional one.
- The cardinal rule of networking events: Never get drunk. Have fun and enjoy yourself, but remember - two drink maximum.
- You want the people you meet to remember you as capable, competent and polished -- not as the guy or gal who was wearing a lampshade on their head at the end of the evening.
- Dress appropriately. Err on the side of conservative and choose an outfit you could wear to a job interview. Your attire should say, "I'm a professional" (Please note: all Haas Alumni event invitations include attire recommendations).

Do Your Homework
- Don't arrive at a networking event without a plan to connect with appropriate attendees.
- Is there a list of speakers, presenters or any special guests in attendance? Make a list of people you expect to be there and want to meet.
- Do a little research on each of them. A little knowledge goes a long way. If you know something about the people you approach, it's much easier to start a conversation -- and keep it going.

Pitch In
- Don't forget to prepare your elevator pitch- you'll need it to introduce yourself to people at a networking event.
- An elevator pitch is brief - brief enough to share during an elevator ride. In your pitch, give a three-minute summary of who you are, your experience and abilities - and what job/role you are interested in learning more about.
- Practice your pitch before the networking event so that it'll sound natural. Be confident, but not pushy. Remember, a networking event isn't a formal interview; it's an opportunity to start meaningful and educational conversations.

Quality, Not Quantity
- Focus on the quality, not quantity, of your connections at networking events. You'll get better results by making a few good connections than by handing out dozens of business cards indiscriminately.
- First impressions matter.
- Always stay focused on the person you are talking to and maintain eye contact. Don't scan the room trying to decide whom you'll talk to next.
• Also, show interest in the people you meet. You can make a great impression by asking a few thoughtful questions. Above all, be genuine and sincere.
• A strong professional network is based on relationships, and it takes time to build a relationship.