

Hey Hoosiers and welcome to the All Careers Considered podcast where we explore the amazing things you can do during and after college with your liberal arts degree. I'm your host Maria Cambone a career coach for undergraduate and graduate students attending Indiana University's College of Arts and Sciences. I'm here today with Toni Neely the director of member relations at the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce. Toni is an IU alumna from the class of 1990 and she is an all-around networking master. It is so good to have you with us Toni.

Toni: Thank You Maria, it is a great pleasure to be here with you and your audience thanks for having me.

Maria: Oh my gosh, I'm just so excited to get to talk to you. I've had so many coaching conversations lately with college students who are saying, "oh, I know I need to be networking but I don't know where to start and I don't know what to do or who wants to help me and it all feels fake", so I'm so excited to get into brasstacks with you and and try to figure this out for some folks.

T: Oh I would love to help because I'm a big believer in networking I have been for years and years and years and there are many benefits, we'll explore those as we talk today but the first thing is just to help folks take that first step.

M: Yeah, that's what we're here to do so yeah absolutely anyway so much so hey, well, let's just jump right into our contest then. Imagine that I'm a college student and I've never done any networking before. This whole idea doesn't sound very great, thanks! Can you tell me what networking can do or what's the purpose of networking?

T: Yes, I sure can. So the whole purpose of networking is to bring businesses together. I mean that's the platform that the Chamber (or any chamber) will offer so maybe I'll take a step back real fast. Chambers of Commerce... they exist; they're an association to help bring businesses together, to help businesses grow. "hey you're an IT company and hey I'm a new startup. I need a web designer. I need a website I need... oh my gosh I'm so glad we met, let's go here together and do this right".

M: So are chambers of commerce in most cities? Where do those organizations exist?

T: They do exist in most towns. There's actually... so for example in Indiana we have three tiers there's the Indiana State Chamber, they are statewide they focused mostly on policy although they do have some networking events then there's us, the Indianapolis Chamber, we're actually the Indy Chamber of Commerce that's our rebranded name from 2012. We are Marion County and the eight surrounding counties so we're your Regional Chamber and then there are local chambers so each city typically has its own chamber to Greenwood has a chamber the Fisher's in Noblesville have one they combine a couple years ago called one's own etc etc. So three tiers you can get involved in, all three you can join, one you can join 27 they're all membership

related so it really depends on your need as the business and what that chamber has to offer as far as helping you grow.

M: Okay so networking can bring businesses together. What role do students play in bringing businesses together, how does this... how does a student get involved in that?

T: How would that even work? Right, so let's say so we have a variety of networking events that might cover. What they do, they don't, might they do cover different topics and so maybe you're interested in learning more about this new company and as IT based and they're growing and they're being featured at this event so you might go to learn about that company because you're an IT person and you want to learn where they're headed what jobs might be available where your skill set might plug in. Oh then in the meantime, you're gonna meet people because you gather before the event and you get to know each other too so yes... well back to your original question, sometimes the idea of this whole thing feels like "oh my gosh I gotta go you know make conversation. I don't know what to say. I'm a recent grad, I have nothing to offer yet, I'm not even in the business field." Don't let that stop you because we the business community want you to be a part of the business community. I mean you're headed in our direction so you know, don't think it's the chicken and the egg thing you know, just jump in and start introducing yourself and start getting to know other people, what other businesses do, etc. Okay, you don't have to already have a job. You don't even necessarily need to know where you're going. What you do need to do as far as how do I present myself is have some basics down know who you are know what your strengths are and and know maybe some of the environment the culture that you're looking for and maybe you're more specific than that and that's great too but have a feel for yourself, of yourself. Your handshake matters. Your handshake needs to be firm, it's gonna be the first thing that people notice about you. Your handshake, firm eye contact, tone of voice these types of things but really, really then you just get in and start asking really good questions and make it about the other person and learn and listen that's the whole trick to networking. It's just "I'm here to learn. I came to hear the speaker, I wanted to meet some new people, I'm interested in building a network. I want to move to Indianapolis. I want to move to Bloomington, I want to move to Denver. So I'm here making connections to help others and hopefully help myself along the way.

M: Okay, okay that actually sounds a little bit more approachable as we think about it and as we break it down. I even think of on-campus events like labeling events where a company will come to talk to students to tell them about what their organization does to tell them about internships and jobs that they have available to tell them about why their product or their services matter to a different community of people and and why a student should be interested in these kinds of things those labeling events sound perhaps a little bit similar to what you're describing the events that the Chamber of Commerce hosts is that do you think that's a loose connection there?

T: I think it's a great connection and you know what that's a great place to start and do yourselves a favor and don't just go in and sit down and put your head down or get on your

phone. Introduce yourself to the people around you, put your hand out, tell them your name, what school you're graduating from, why you're there. Ask about them... I mean get in the habit of extending your hand and introducing yourself. You get more comfortable with that because it will require that you do that whether you're 55 years old or 20 years old. It doesn't matter when you walk into a room but one of the main things you're gonna mean to find comfort around us is inserting yourself and then making those connections and then you just make conversation you just ask your questions and it's easy believe it or not and fun and rewarding on many levels.

M: I have one question I'm particularly thinking about here, yeah um so we're as we're talking about you know, how to introduce yourself how your handshake matters, your eye contact your tone of voice, being able to ask good questions that make it about the other person, well gosh holy cow, that to me points me toward this whole conversation about what does professional mean for a college student right? So I know that when I talk to college students they say two main things like, they don't know how to act professional enough to get someone's help, they don't know what it means to be a young professional, I'm doing air quotes you know, a young professional but when you're still just a college student, maybe you dress in you know, jeans and shoes and t-shirts every day and that's all you have in your closet and you know this idea of even being able to know what to ask like what makes it a good question that doesn't sound kind of canned. All of these things are things that students struggle with so you know how could how could a current student, let's imagine a freshman or a sophomore, introduce themselves and make a professional first impression upon somebody who's in the business world even though there's still a college student? What should they be thinking about here? What would that mean or look like for somebody who's 18 or 19?

T: Yeah that's a great question. So really, I understand, it's a good question because I can picture myself back then and what and would I had the wherewithal to be and do all that right. So my older self and looking back you know, I think it's really being letting yourself come through letting your integrity come through, letting your excitement, your enthusiasm, come through if you can bring some energy to the conversation, some excitement, some "I'm really glad I'm here and I'm excited to learn and maybe I'm gonna stub my toe a little bit" but you know what, people are looking forward, they're looking for energy, excitement, your eye contact, a handshake and just um, I would appreciate anybody who's just enthusiastic to be there and in a place of I don't even know what to expect, I don't know what I'm doing but I'm here because I know this matters and this might lead me to the next great step. Oh, by the way, I'm interested in the topic, and that's what originally brought me here or you know or not it not have another topic but if it is mention that you know, and then you just start a conversation like "hey, hi, let me... can I introduce myself? my name is Toni Neely, um I thought I'd walk over and say hello and I want to start building my network". I mean this is totally honest about with it... like this is my very first networking event and I am coming over to talk to you, yeah just be real, a little vulnerable and be honest at the same time, then of course if you walk up to me of course if you're welcome to me anyway I'm going to talk to you because I love networking and it's my job and my pleasure to be all this but even if I weren't in this role, if you walked up to me and just said "hi my name's Sam Smith I'm a sophomore at IU. I'm getting out in the world trying to

network this is new to me and I just thought I'd come over to introduce myself". If you just do that the other person's gonna help you. Look, "great Sam, what are you studying?" You know, I don't know, you just have to take that step and extend your hand and be professional. It means share the conversation don't make it all about you, don't ask for things before you have a relationship with somebody, all right, don't say "hey can you um get my resume over here hey will you be my mentor", those are things that you've got to build up. You've got to build a relationship to establish that trust to then make those kinds of asks, but in the meantime you're just getting acquainted. It's like dating right? Let's... let's go for that lunch and have a conversation and see if we have some energy and some synergy that would keep us connected from here. If not, great, if not, if the answer's no; always, always, always the professional thing to do is get their business card and send them a thank-you email and then follow that up with a thank-you handwritten note. Always like, "hey I really you know, I really enjoyed meeting you at the networking event I know we only talked for a few minutes but you were so kind yeah learned a few things about your industry and maybe it was insurance. I learned a few things about insurance I didn't know before. I really appreciate you taking the time, thank you" and getting in the habit of establishing the follow-up 24 to 48 hours after meeting somebody is an excellent way to set yourself apart from somebody else you may never see them again but they will remember that you took the time.

M: Mm-hmm and I think that's really what it's all about is just making that really dazzling first impression. I know students say you know, of course I'm gonna send a thank you in follow-up thank-you email but do I really need to send a card? Do people really do that? Well, when I tell people in coaching appointments is that a lot of people don't, so even if you're not sure how this is person is ever gonna walk into your life again well you don't know and if you really want to be the gold star ace top of the pack, send that thank you note.

T: I love that, yes, yeah absolutely absolutely.

M: So as I'm listening to you, I thought of... you're just giving so many good ideas here... thought of another one I hear you on you know just walking up to a professional at your first networking event sticking out your hand and saying to them "Hi I'm Maria Cambone, I'm a sophomore at Indiana University this is my first networking event. it's nice to meet you" but so and you know this is my, you know, I've been in the working world for a little longer than our students have, so that sounds okay to me, but I know that in coaching appointments students share with me that they're worried they're gonna be annoying or they're gonna be bothering someone or you know like I love that you suggest sharing that enthusiasm and bringing that energy to the conversation but I know students worry like "oh if I'm if I'm too energetic then I'm just gonna be annoying or what-have-you". Can you offer some insight for these students who might be worried about that?

T: Yes and you just reminded me of another good point too because at the chamber I do the orientation meetings we have once a month and so they'll be like 30 businesses in the room and I will go through the networking 101 presentation that I typed up which I'm happy to share with

you in case anybody in your audience wants to yeah but I always say you know, set your intention to meet three people that you have not met before and find out what they're up to and see how you can help that's what networking is. Okay but then I was reminded from my more introverted friends that not everyone's an extrovert like I am really, really, really uncomfortable for most of the people walking the planet and so what do you do then? So then I say let's scale it down, let's scale it down and let's just start by getting you to an event okay so maybe it's one of the did you call it a table event earlier? Maybe you've been afraid to even walk in the room and your first step is just going to the event and not talking to anybody and that's cool, just get yourself there if that's the first big step and that took everything you had and I get it then start there okay that wasn't so bad, and then go again and this time say now I'm gonna introduce myself to one person. The one person sitting next to me on either side or maybe both if you're up for it but just pick one just like that this time I'm going to introduce myself to one person and introduce yourself and ask some questions, what are you studying, where do you live, how long you've been, you know, like that kinda thing and then next time, you know, introduce yourself to two people and so the more you can build on it, the more comfortable you're gonna get and that whole notion of confidence breeds confidence, that's what you're building right and just building your confidence in this you can do it it is daunting it is scary at first but once you get in the swing of things not only is it rewarding but it's also fun and you're gonna find that it's not phony at all because everyone's there for the same reason and oh you will meet people as genuine as you are or genuine you are, the more you're gonna attract genuine to you and the more friends you're gonna make. I have, I have an amazing pocket and different posses of friends that I have met along the way because I've been networking for so long now I've got a group over here that still stays together, I have a group here that stays together, I have a group here and we all have different interests but we have those together and yeah and you have friends, these are friends yeah, not just networking people that you met along the way.

M: Yeah, yeah, yeah that's so beautiful, that reminds me of you know, a common early college graduate student problem that I hear is, how do I make friends after school and and my sneaky guru coach answer to that is try going to events and talking to people when you have interests in common with one another and this can be a great example of an event that you can go to where you can meet people who share your common interests.

T: Absolutely, absolutely.

M: Yeah I have I have at least one more question for you, maybe two more questions but we're almost at almost at our end here. Oh sorry, I heard you mentioned thinking about the, you know, the thank you email that you send 24 to 48 hours after you meet someone in person and then since you have their business card, you've got their mailing address at their office and you can send them a handwritten thank-you card, after that, well how else could a student or a recent graduate follow up with someone to maintain a relationship after they've maybe had a video call or a phone call or if they've been to an event? Um, how often is too often to follow up and and what could a student say if their initial outreach was to say "hey you know I'm I'm looking for a job, I'm looking for an internship, what are your thoughts?" What are the things I could do with

this, they're still in a position, let's say six months after that call they're still in a position where they're looking for a job or looking for an internship? I've just thrown a whole cloud of ideas at you but let's think about that follow-up, how do we continue that follow-up beyond that first thank you engagement?

T: That's a great question. So if you have the opportunity like, let's say you really hit it off with somebody and you guys have been chatting and now the the presenter is gonna start, you need to take your seats you've exchanged cards and you reach out you reach back one more time you just say "would you mind if I reached out to you on email" or if you didn't get the card "would you mind if I reach out to you on LinkedIn and connected with you" and maybe just stay in touch here and there and you know it's gonna be quick and and and the person will say it "sure absolutely" okay so you do that but then once you do that on LinkedIn "hi was so great to meet you at that events remember me, I'm Trish or I'm Sam, you and I talked about that too, that I was hoping we could stay connected. Would you be open to me checking in with you perhaps maybe once every four weeks, you know there's no set time because everyone's gonna be different and so the more you can get up front and just get an up front kind of agreement around this and it's gonna be fluid you know, so I think asking for every two weeks might be a little much because a lot of people are busy it's a busy world we all know that students are busy business professionals are busy but hey would you mind if I reached out once a month and just said hello and maybe bounced an idea or something off you? Maybe I have a question about your industry or something, would that be okay if I did that? Just ask for permission and get agreement around it, it's that simple and most people will agree. Yeah that's kind of the way to start building that relationship and offer something back like um hey you are so kind to answer that question you know I know I'm still a student I know I just got out of I know I'm looking for a job but you know if I ever can be of service, please you know reach out to me I'd be happy to help. Just saying that back because the number one rule about networking it is being the giver and the bridge builder first being the person who wants to help show up with the spirit of I want to learn it I want to help. I want to help you get to where you are gonna go and so but don't let that stop you from jumping in because you're like, I just graduated I don't have anything to offer. Yes you do. Yes you do and you already have a network or maybe this person has children that are your age and you're involved with the volunteer group and this person has the same passion, "Hey can I introduce my son to you... um he wanted to volunteer for that organization, would you be willing to have a talk?" You know, so offer your service, offer yourself back, that's the true spirit.

M: Yeah, yeah, yeah, that sounds like really good advice. It sounds like the first step is just getting that upfront agreement whether that's every four weeks, whether that's every six weeks, whatever you both decide, right, and then following up on that, and actually you know if you say you're gonna send them an email in four weeks, some of the most, an email in four weeks even if it's just to say "oh hello I'm you know, I'm sending you an email just to stay in the loop, I can't think of any questions right now but gosh if you think of me and there's anything I can do to help you out, please let me know" Does that sound like that would be an okay approach?

T: Absolutely, yes, yes, yes, yes and then add something to that you've been at. "I just took, uh, I just took a sales course or I just volunteered at the YMCA and helped kids learn how to play soccer" you know and something that you've been up to and grow and expand so that person could you give them something to latch on to. "Yeah... oh yeah, I just talked to somebody who's volunteering at the Y, who was that? Oh yeah! The young person I met at that event" you know like, give them something, you know.

M: Yeah, yeah I like that, the little sound-bite, yeah, yeah and yep no I love that that's beautiful. Okay I have, I know we're... I'm trying to keep our podcast short but I'm just so excited about this conversation, one last one for you and that I promise I'm done.

T: It's all good!

M: So, so I think sometimes students rightly worry about people seeing their race or their disability their gender identity or you know physical markers of religious identities if they choose to wear them or just something else about them and and professionals judging them negatively or not opening the same doors for them that they would for other people because of who this individual student is. I really see this as a problem of the professionals, not of the students myself, well, so I wonder if there's a professional who listens to this podcast what could they do to make their networks more equitable and in the meantime because students still have to navigate this, you know, what what can students do to navigate these structural imbalances and biases that do exist in professional settings?

T: Yeah that's a big question, a valid question and it's not one... I wish I had the magic pill, yeah but here's here so I so I've had many lives as a professional and one of my past lives was, I actually still do this on the side as a matter of fact, I was a diversity and inclusion trainer... hmm and so you know, work around the unconscious bias and all of that and how to build a more inclusive culture. All that thing's very passionate about this so really the short answer because I know we're short on time but professionals need to ask more questions because here's the thing, our little minds work very quickly, and our minds notice, judge and make assumptions and decisions, based on perceptions and not the facts, right? All minds do this. My mind does this, your mind does that, people listening, their minds do that. Quickly, a study by New York University back in the day concluded that it's called the seven-eleven rule. The study concluded that within seven seconds of meeting someone new, you will make eleven judgments about that person. The seven eleven rule. So, you do it, I do it, others do it to us, it's just how our minds work and it's happening that fast and so number one is awareness that our minds are doing that, we have to interrupt that pattern and what professionals can do then is "okay I've had my notices, my judgments, my whatever you want to call them, let me ask some questions so I can understand who this person is now". Now that sounds easy but what we're all afraid to ask questions because the last thing we want to do is offend somebody right and so don't we all - I'll speak for myself, I have caught myself holding back on asking inquisitive questions just because I'm curious, I want to learn and grow but I don't want to ask in the wrong way and negatively impact that person because that's the last thing I want to do is hurt your feelings. No

it doesn't feel good to step in it, it sure does not and so what do we do as a human race we take a step back and don't ask the question and just say "okay well gosh I don't know what that person would have been like because I didn't have the courage to ask beyond the four tattoos I saw" Oh or the buzzed hair or the whatever, whatever the thing is, so we professionals need to ask better questions, more questions, more probing questions to get to know, who the person is, what the student or what the interviewee needs to do and you gotta just stay steadfast in this but you got to know who you are and you got to bring the confidence and you got to bring your skillsets and you got to bring all that forward and stand firm and and your energy and your brilliance and your cut your value will match the the culture of the company and even if even if you've got 10 or 12 misses, those are all be thankful for those, because you want to get into place that is going to accept you for you in your wholeness and your completeness and vice versa right? You don't want to have to be somebody that you're not. Now then... and I spent a lot of time doing that myself. I'm a gay individual who hid for the first 40 years of my life scared to death, so I understand what you're saying and what you're and what people can be up against because I know all the stereotypes, I was afraid I was gonna lose my job. Yep, if we had another half an hour, we can go on and on about it but I'll say this stand tall and who you are in your integrity also do yourself a favor, if you haven't done strengths finder by Clifton Clifton strengths finder 2.0, it'll give you your... it's a quick quiz, it cost maybe 20 bucks, you get the book, you take the quiz and it will crank out your top 5 strengths out of like 35 that are available, they'll help give you language to what your natural natural skill sets are and that will help you also with the networking thing and I just kind of covered a gamut and went around the hole and I'm sorry.

M: I love that, I love that, that's perfect and thank you. Thank you so much for sharing vulnerability with us too. I feel a special connection to you, to having another queer guest on our radio or in our podcast because that's something that I've shared previously on the podcast and I find that comes forward in in my networking and in my career as well, so it's... it's really cool to have that connection there. Thank you absolutely. Well so, I think that just about wraps us up Tony. Thank you so much for coming and for sharing all your great wisdom and all your great experience with our students. I just so appreciate it!

T: It's been my extreme pleasure and if any of you out there want to connect with me, you can find me on LinkedIn and I'll be happy to write back and be as helpful as I possibly can.

M: Fabulous, thank you and Tony, you're also on the Walter Center success Network for Indiana University students at the College of Arts and Sciences if your College of Arts and Sciences student and you want to connect with Tony either on LinkedIn or on the WCSN you are totally welcome to check that out so I'm gonna take us out with the little reminder that if you're a college student and you want individual help with networking or with developing your career, I really really encourage you to go talk to your career coaches or your career counselors at your college or university for help, Indiana University College of Arts and Sciences students can come to the Walter center success Network anytime Monday through Friday 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. We are totally here for you. You can check out the show notes on our website if you want

details on how to reach us or you can just google us at IU Walter Center. I'll put the links to the social media profiles that we've talked about today as well as some of the other resources that Tony mentioned that she'd share in the show notes and you can check it all out there. Thank you again Tony so much, I really appreciate it thanks and stay healthy Hoosiers, take care!