More Tips for Participants

Be prepared for your Connection sessions. Be professional by being prompt, prepared, and maintaining a professional attitude. Preparation means coming to the conversation with a plan to include items you would like to focus on. Be punctual, well organized, and ready to give a brief update on your recent progress and developments and to propose an agenda for the conversation. You might email the topics to your Advisor ahead of time, if you think the Advisor would appreciate it.

Establish a mutually agreeable plan for Connection sessions. Schedule sessions including length of time each of you will need and plan adequate time to prepare. Your Advisor is a volunteer whose extra time is scarce. By establishing a time commitment and ensuring that conversations start and end on time, you will demonstrate respect and responsibility to your Advisor.

Let your Advisor know who you are. Share your hopes, fears, ideas and goals openly, even if your Advisor has quite a different background or style. Share your professional experience and goals. Your Advisor will then be able to put your situation in perspective.

Focus on the relationship. Your Advisor's role is not to get another job for you. Be realistic in your expectations and focus on building a relationship.

Ask direct questions about what you most want to know. Since the Participant is the one who establishes the agenda for the conversation, you are in a position to set up the conversation in a way that provides the most relevance and value for you. Let your Advisor know what is most on your mind and what would be most helpful to you to talk about. If the conversation strays, just prompt the Advisor to return to the original topic. You are responsible for ensuring that the conversation meets your needs.

Practice learning from anyone. In the past, people believed that a strong personal connection was essential to a Connection relationship. However, Connection serves many purposes and most don't require a deep personal connection. Connection may be short term, specific to a situation, focused on a particular area of development, or Connection may turn out to be a life-long conversation. By recognizing that you can benefit from a variety of perspectives and styles – even those quite different from your own – you will open yourself up to new ideas, valuable information, and a wide range of perspectives. You and your Advisor don't have to have everything in common to have a productive exchange.

Listen with an open mind. Often, we turn off our listening when we believe that the perspective being offered isn't pertinent or that the person speaking is "different" from us. Your Advisor's experience – however distant in time or industry-specific it may be – will carry a nugget of learning for you. Challenge yourself to find the connection, rather

than rule out the advice or perspective that you are hearing. Be ready to learn something new as a result of the conversation.
Ask curious questions. The most enjoyable Connection sessions flow with a natural back and forth dialogue. Relax and enjoy getting to know another person. Don't be shy about asking curious questions, such as, "What was that like for you?" or "How did you feel at the time?" Ask a question or two at the start of each session to get to know your Advisor's experiences, such as, "I'd love to learn about your career path…" or "What do you know in hindsight that you could share with me about how you achieved professional success?"

Take notes. It's difficult to remember key points and commitments after the meeting. Keep a notebook and jot down ideas and insights during the session, and in between sessions. Do capture the commitments that you and your Advisor make to each other so that you are able to follow up appropriately.

Provide context and brief updates to help your Advisor to understand you. While the Advisor doesn't need to know every single thing about you, it's helpful to both of you if you use the first session to get to know each other. At the beginning of each session, provide a brief update on progress since the last conversation.

Respect your Advisor's boundaries. The Advisor's role is to support your development through regular conversation. Outside of the session, most Advisors have very limited time to engage with Participants. Communicate respectfully with the Advisor. Be careful not to inundate the Advisor with emails or phone calls outside of the session. Respect the time boundaries of the session and do all you can to end at the agreed upon time.

Follow up on agreements. If you've committed to take a step as a result of the Connection session, make sure you do so. It is discouraging for the Advisor if you have made commitments that you don't act upon. You can also help the Advisor to keep his commitments by sending a brief thank you note after a session that also lists any agreed upon actions from either of you.

Say "thank you!" Remember to thank your Advisor after each session and give appreciation for specific insights or examples that helped you. This information will let your Advisor know more about what you value and how he is making a difference for you.