

# WOW NETWORKING SESSION PLANNING TIPS

## SOME THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN PLANNING THE SESSION:

The venue for the networking session should be a space that is open and big enough to hold the number of people attending. It also needs to be well lit and clear of unnecessary furniture or any other obstacles. Participants should be able to move freely around the space.

Ensure that students who have been allocated the task of helping to set up the space know when they are expected to be there to help.

Teach an icebreaker game to the students before the session to ensure everything runs smoothly with the visitors. Icebreakers are an excellent way to help everyone (including adults) feel more at ease. Each group of student should nominate one person to lead an icebreaker game on the day (i.e. go first).

Organise for visitors to be briefed before they enter the session. You could do this via a phone conversation, or if you have a number of staff members from the school helping with the session, someone could step out to brief the visitors once they arrive.

A letter and information pack can be found at the end of this factsheet. An editable version is hyperlinked in the resources section of this lesson.

If you plan to provide light refreshments, plan for a food and drink table that is easily accessible for all participants, including students. Bins are also a great addition to the space to avoid the clutter of used serviettes/paper plates/cups!

## SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE SESSION:

### SETTING UP

Move all tables to the side of the room and set up groups of chairs into circles around the room before the session begins. Distribute students and visitors evenly. Try to avoid any more than eight students to every two visitors. You could put a sign with a number in the centre of each circle so that students know where to sit.

### ORGANISING STUDENTS

Once students have arrived, ask them to sit in their allocated groups. Remind students about the purpose of the session and what they need to do throughout before the visitors arrive. They may need a bit of a pep talk about being courageous and using their communication skills to ask their pre-planned questions. Encourage students to remember the purpose and benefits of networking.

Then, you'll be ready to invite the visitors to the front of the room. Ask each of them to very briefly introduce themselves- they really only need to say their name and their profession. Once they have done so, ask them to distribute themselves amongst the seated groups of students.

### ICEBREAKER GAME

Once the visitors have joined a group of students, ask all participants to get to their feet so that they are standing together in their small circles. Briefly explain the rules of the icebreaker game to the whole group, and then allow the nominated student to take the lead within the smaller groups.

### WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO SUCCEED IN LIFE AND WORK?

Once the icebreaker activity has concluded, ask all participants to take their seats and explain that the purpose of today's networking session is to create networking opportunities in the local community, and for students to find out more about what it takes to succeed in life and work from successful people. Inform everyone that the session will be split into equal amounts of time, and that visitors will be rotating around to each group so that students will get a chance to speak with as many different people as possible. Acknowledge and thank the visitors for being there.

You could then create an entry point for groups to start chatting by acknowledging that 'one of the most difficult things to do when meeting new people in a formal networking situation is the initial introduction'. This might give visitors and students something to talk about before asking their pre-prepared questions.

Allow the first rotation of the session to run (usually 7-8 minutes for the first rotation is a good amount of time- some shyness may still be lingering...the next couple of rotations can go for longer, as students will start getting used to what they need to do, and the visitors will have loosened up a bit). Then indicate that the rotation has ended and that visitors should move to the next group of students. You may want to use a small bell or something similar to indicate the end of the rotation (rather than yelling out over the top of what will likely be a really noisy room).

As the session is running, circulate around groups to monitor student engagement. Quite often students will need extra encouragement to start conversations or ask questions, so a little subtle encouragement may be required. (This is also a really good way to ensure that the visitors understand that the premise of the session is to have a **conversation** rather than be expected to formally present.)

The session should end with a spoken debrief so that students can reflect on their learning throughout the session and visitors can acknowledge the achievements of the students. Gather the group in a circle for five to ten minutes in order for the students and adults to reflect on the experience. Encourage the visiting adults to acknowledge that they will take something away from the session and the students to say something about their learning from the session.

You could ask students:

- How did you feel during the session?
- What was the most difficult thing you had to do during the session?
- Did it get easier or harder to talk to people? Why?
- What was the best answer you heard during the session?
- Were there any answers that surprised you?
- What will you take away from this experience?
- Does someone here have a job that you weren't aware existed? Tell me more...

Ask the visitors:

- What was difficult about the session today?
- What did you most enjoy about the session?
- Can you describe why networking skills are important in business? Can you give an example of a time it was important for you?
- What skills have the students demonstrated today that you think would lead to success in the workplace?

After debriefing the activity, ask pre-organised students to thank the attendees for coming and if you have them, present certificates of gratitude.

Once visitors have departed, conclude the session by congratulating students on their involvement, and foreshadow the reflection activity that students will complete in the next class.

Dear .....

**Thanks for agreeing to take part in our Worlds of Work (WOW) Networking Session!**

**What:** The WOW networking session is the one of the first opportunities for students to formally engage with people outside of their daily lives in order to chat about work.

Students are practicing their communication skills and are also looking to consolidate their understanding about enterprise skills and how they can be applied across their lives, including their future working life.

They are learning from you and building rapport as they ask about your life and work. This is a great confidence building exercise for the students. They have been told to practice their networking and communication skills by speaking with community members, introducing themselves and asking pre-prepared and improvised questions.

**When:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Where:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Who:** WOW Program participants at \_\_\_\_\_

**Requirements:** An hour and a half of your day, and a willingness to engage in conversations about life and work with our students.

**Your role on the day:** Bring yourself and your stories about how your life and work interplay.

**Session breakdown:**

10 minute introduction: The host of the session will briefly explain what will happen throughout the session, and lead an ice-breaker game.

50 minute mingle: Meet/chat informally with the students- enjoy the light refreshments and model business networking for students.

10 minute wrap up: Group photo, thank you and farewells.

**What do I talk about?**

One of the main focuses for these sessions is to help students understand what it is like to work in your industry and in your organisation. This is about a lot more than just what your organisation does. What is the work culture like? What opportunities are unique to this industry? Keep your language simple and free of jargon.

The WOW students also want to learn about your life away from work. This is an opportunity for these young people to have a meaningful conversation with an adult who is not their parent or teacher. Remember to have fun and be yourself!

Some students may be nervous and quiet at first. Don't be afraid of a little silence. If you give them time, they will open up.

**Some of the things the students might ask you:**

- What is success?
- Tell us about your career path. What do you like about your work? What are the challenges?
- If you had to take a picture of success, what would it look like?
- How do you define and measure your success? And the success of others – is it different?
- How do you think that other people see you – both those that are close to you, as well those from afar?
- What are the most important things to you?
- What attributes do you think make a person successful?
- What are your strengths? Are these skills you have always had or did you develop them over time?
- How do you use your strengths in your personal and professional life?
- Did you know what you wanted to do with your life when you were 14-15 years old?
- How did you get to where you are today? How did you choose your current career path?
- Do you enjoy your current job? Why?
- If you could do it all again, would you make the same decisions? If not, what might you change?
- Who has been the most influential person in your life and why?
- Who do you currently admire most and why?

**Questions you could ask students**

- What do you think success is?
- What are your hobbies and interests?
- What do you think are the biggest misconceptions about your generation?
- What are your strengths?
- What are some of the ways you are thinking about applying these strengths in the future?
- What are your favourite courses at school?
- What other things would you like to learn?
- What has been the most interesting thing throughout the WOW Program?

Thank you for your participation. We hope you enjoy the Worlds of Work networking session!