Experience Building – How to Get the Most out of a Career Conversation

A career conversation is a great opportunity to explore a new career pathway, expand your network and learn more about an organization or academic institution. It is also a useful session to get more insight of the field. Here are some tips:

BEFORE
• **Plan open-ended questions.** Some example questions:
  - What is a typical day (or week) like for you?
  - What do you like most about your work?
  - What kinds of accomplishments tend to be valued and rewarded in this field?
  - How do most people get into this field? What are common entry-level jobs?
  - What is the profile of the person most recently hired at my level?
• **Prepare a brief introduction.** Try not to spend a big chunk of the conversation introducing yourself and your job search.
• **Rehearse.** Do this with friends, in front of a mirror or record yourself so that the first time you do it, is not your first time.

DURING
• **Set the tone.** Once the chat starts, set the tone. Leave people with a positive impression and just enough insightful information about yourself so the employer could recommend you to others.
• **Think like a journalist.** “Gently prob through curiosity, then listen.” says John Lees, a UK-based career strategist. Don’t be shy to ask about the downsides of the job and industry because this is your chance to get information, especially to see if this field of work is suitable for you. You can ask:
  - What are the worse parts of your job?
  - What didn’t you know before you got into this industry that you wish someone had told you?
• **Take notes.** Jot down as much information as possible during the meeting and write down any extra thoughts right after the chat.

AFTER
• **Follow up with gratitude, not demands.** Make sure to thank them via email or, an above and beyond gesture could be, writing them a handwritten note. It will help you be remembered! Also, note to not immediately ask for favour. Wait a few weeks, see a job opening then ask for thoughts and feedback.
• **Keep in touch.** A career conversation is a great way to build relationships and develop future allies and supporters. So think about ways to cultivate your new professional connection!