Texas Exes Networking Notebook

Introduction
Business networking events can be a great addition to any chapter or network’s offering. While social events can be a great place to meet new people, alumni are often looking for new career opportunities as well as the chance to find other Longhorns to create business relationships with. It may even be helpful to create a chair position or committee dedicated to planning business enrichment/networking events.

The Texas Exes have many resources that can be provided for networking events, particularly throughout career services department. This notebook serves to provide tips, outlines, and resource options to help with any kind of networking event.

Reasons to Host a Networking Event
One of the top priorities for The Texas Exes is alumni engagement and part of this is serious minded content. Business networking is a great way to bring serious minded content into your regular chapter schedule.

Additionally, it is highly likely that many of the alumni in your area are looking for jobs. Plus, with an event like “business networking” it is likely people are able to leave work earlier to attend. A professional environment will provide a great opportunity to recruit volunteers as well as new chapter/network members.

Planning the event
Decide the format for the event – deciding the format first makes it easier to choose location, caterers, speakers, etc. The format for the event can include a speaker and time to mingle or just be a function specifically for business discussions/mingling. A few things to consider:

- Do you want a speaker? If so, decide on the topic and length of presentation; If having a speaker, make sure to still leave plenty of time for networking either before or after the presentation. The Texas Exes Chapter staff would be happy to provide speakers bureau lists to provide suggestions, feel free to email Courtney or Sally for this information. When looking for a speaker here are a few things to consider:
• A speaker who is not from your area may be more likely to agree to speak if they already have travel plans to the area – inquire when you first contact them about a time/day that might be best for them

• Be sure to provide the speaker with information about the event

• Ask your chapter members for suggestions via email or at another event – you never know who may know someone high up in a company, etc.

  o Keep the presentation to 30 or 45 minutes
    • Alumni attend a networking event to network even if there is a speaker – give them time to mingle!

• Make sure the location has the appropriate audio/visual capabilities

  o Do you want an event with networking only? If so, you will still want to have someone welcome the attendees to the program and give a brief overview of the chapter/network. This should be brief – 15 minutes maximum. While this may seem like a happy hour but with business cards, this too can be beneficial. It gives attendees truly a chance to network and mingle without feeling awkward about bringing up work, etc.

**Scheduling the event**

Make sure the event doesn’t conflict with any other large events in the area. We have found that Tuesdays and Wednesdays work best for networking events, always avoid the weekends. Be sure to choose a time that suits the needs of your city – If traffic is an issue in your city or mass transit is popular you may need to adjust back half an hour to allow people time to get there.

Location is a very import detail to be sure to give enough thought. It will need to fit the needs and purpose of your event, which will change depending upon the format of your event. Here are some location ideas:

  o Bar or restaurant with a private room

    • Especially good for more informal, casual networking events

    • Make sure the room is private and that you can control the noise level if there is any overhead music
Office building

- This is better for smaller, more formal networking events
- Can be less expensive if an alum can offer the use of their business space

Hotel conference room or ballroom

- This can be useful for a larger, more formal networking event

Things to keep in mind when choosing a location:

- Is it conveniently located?
  - If you live in a city with lots of mass transit, is it near a train station?

- Is there adequate space for the group you are expecting?
  - Have a realistic idea of how many to expect and choose a space accordingly
  - Don’t choose a venue that holds 100 for an event for 40 – the group gets lost in the space

- Do they have the right set up for our needs?
  - If you are looking for a more informal setting, a place with tall cocktail tables is better than seated rounds, for example
  - If you are having a speaker, if there the appropriate audio/visual equipment and is there a place for them to present

- What are the catering options?
  - Decide on a cash bar or open bar

- Is there adequate parking?

**Promoting the event**

Be specific with the purpose of the event. Let attendees know what they can expect and what benefit they will receive out of attending, even using a title such as “Longhorns networking with Longhorns!” can be helpful. As with all events, you’ll want to begin promoting the event with
enough advance notice. Other than chapter emails and social media here are a few great places to post about the event:

- Promote through local business journals or other business publications
- Promote on LinkedIn – we have a Texas Exes presence on LinkedIn that chapters and networks can take advantage of

In the promotions, encourage attendees to bring business cards.

At the event

Make sure to have nametags and pens! Depending on the type of event, have them include their company name or industry they work in on their nametag. Before the event begins, make sure the room is set up to accommodate networking. Areas with Tall cocktail tables encourage networking, even if you have a speaker, have a section of the room with cocktail tables only near the food or bar. This encourages attendees to mingle in this area before or after the speaker. It is good to have greeters from the chapter or network at the door to welcome attendees, you can also act as facilitators later in the evening to help alumni connect with each other.

Have blank business cards on hand for those who forgot their business cards. We have Texas Exes branded blank business cards that we can provide for this purpose.

If there is a bar, make sure there is ample room around the bar, people tend to mingle near the bar!

Follow Up

After the event it may be a good idea to send an email to the attendees thanking them attending and reminding them of any upcoming chapter or network events.

Possible Career Events (in addition to regular ‘networking happy hours’)

Texas Exes Insight into Industries

- To connect alumni in the chapter area with fellow alumni that represents their career field or industry of interest. This will also give alumni the inside track of how a particular industry works. You can invite representatives from industries that are dominant in the area to discuss their experience in their particular field with interested alumni. See proposal/outline for this event in the appendix.
“Speed Networking: Using alumni connections to land a job”

- Has your job search gotten off track? Learn how effective your alumni connections can be in landing that next job. This networking seminar will give you the tools and resources necessary to jumpstart your job search, without having to “work the room”. Attendees are encouraged to bring a stack of personal business cards.

“Grad School: Is it right for you?”

- Trying to determine if an advanced degree is the right choice for you? Come hear what it takes to pursue an MBA, graduate, medical, or law degree from our panel of Texas Exes.

“Preparing for Behavioral Interviews”

- What are employers looking for in job candidates: Learn what it takes to articulate your skills and experiences in the interview process. Appropriate methods, techniques, and “practice time” will be provided so that attendees will leave better prepared for the job search.

“Finding Success in Your First Year on the Job”

- What does it take to succeed in a new job? This event will provide tips and resources for finding success on the job, and it will also address the importance of finding a mentor. Alumni panelists will provide attendees with “lessons learned” by sharing their insight and experiences from the world of work.

“An Etiquette Dinner: Preparing for Interviews and Client Lunch Meetings”

- Have you ever wondered which fork to use when attending a formal dinner? Do you pass the bread to the left or the right? What does it mean that the salt and pepper should always be married? These questions and many more will be answered in a multiple course dinner presentation.

Half Day Conference – “Preparing for the Job Search”

- Professional workshops offered on a variety of topics including Alumni Career Services, Resumes, Interviewing, ‘How To’ Networking, etc.

A Business Book Club

- A book club can provide an opportunity to improve their management and leadership skills. Choosing a book that is about business or related to career will stimulate conversation within the group. UT has alumni who have written books in the business scope, which could be an additional fun detail to encourage involvement. Ask Courtney or Sally if you would like assistance finding one of these books.
Appendix

Top 20 Tips to Hosting a Successful Networking Event

- Clearly define the goals & agenda of the event before advertising it
- Attract alumni who have never attended your events (or haven’t in decades)
- Schedule a local venue that is enticing, fun, and sophisticated (not all alumni like bars or office buildings)
- Negotiate with venue and catering for special rates and food
- Determine price point after securing venue, keeping registration fee low (the magic number seems to be somewhere between $10 and $20)
- Open bars are great, but break the bank! (try a cash bar)
- Free events result in a 50-75% no show rate, so charging a fee ensures a crowd
- Confirm local alumni leaders or industry representatives 2-3 months out
- Spotlighting leaders & representatives on all invitations and emails will spark interest
- Provide attendees with biographies on leaders and representatives
- Categorize bios by industry so attendees can determine how to network
- Bios should detail rep’s degree & year, current job title, employer name, & previous work history
- Pre-printed nametags for all registrants and hand-written ones at the door are a KEY to successful networking
- Buy-in and support from multiple chapter leaders is critical in identifying industry reps and local leaders
- Chapter leader contacts are diverse and impressive, creating phenomenal representatives for the event
- Keep the presentation portion of the program short so that attendees have plenty of time to network
- An open networking format allows attendees the flexibility to visit with multiple reps & industries and other attendees (& chapter organizers keep their sanity!)
- Begin planning 3-4 months in advance & open online registration 6-8 weeks out
- Encourage attendees to bring their own personal business cards or supply blank cards for those who forget theirs
- Outline the agenda on invitation & event program – people like to know what to expect
Texas Exes Insight into Industries

Purpose:
- To connect alumni in the chapter area with fellow alumni that represents their career field or industry of interest
- To allow alumni to network with each other
- To give alumni the inside track of how a particular industry works

Benefits to the Chapter:
- Hosting a different, unique event that will draw in a different crowd
- Offering a networking event to the alumni in the area

Date:
- We have found that Tuesdays and Wednesdays work best for networking events

Location:
- Bar or restaurant
  - Someplace with a private room with capacity for at least 75.

Price:
- Typical price points:
  - $20 for Texas Exes members/$25 for non-members
    - Includes 2 drink tickets and heavy hors d’oeuvres
  - $10 for Texas Exes members/$15 for non-members
    - Includes heavy hors d’oeuvres only with cash bar

Industries represented:
- Have representatives from industries that are dominant in the area.
- Examples of past industries in other cities:
  - Finance
  - Real Estate
  - Marketing
  - Telecommunications
  - Career Transition

Industry representatives:
- Should be UT alumni
- More than one representative per industry
- If possible, diverse representation per industry
  - EX: Representatives at different stages of their career
- Representatives targeted, pre-selected, invited, and confirmed prior to event
- Purpose of industry representatives:
  - Discuss their experience in their particular field with interested alumni
  - Answer questions from alumni
  - Talk about their experience breaking into their field
  - Offer guidance on breaking into the field, if applicable

Tentative Program (can fluctuate starting times – in commuter heavy cities it may be better to start later):
- 6:00 – 6:30 Registration
- 6:30 – 6:50 Overview of event and introduction of industry representatives
- 6:30 – 6:32 Welcome by chapter president/MBBA president
6:32 – 6:40 Overview/purpose of event
6:40 – 6:50 Introduction of industry representatives
6:50 – 8:00 Networking