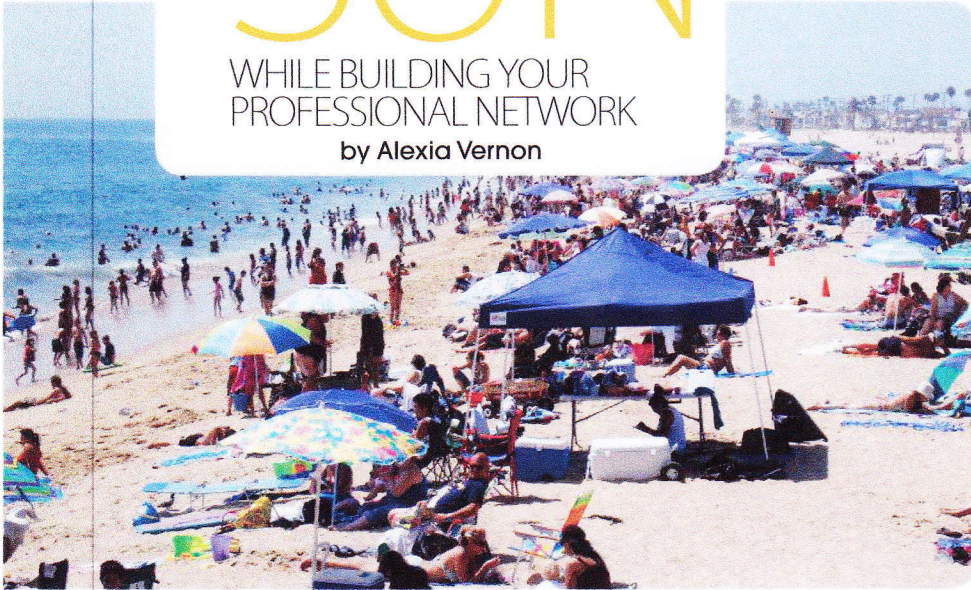


# HAVE FUN IN THE SUN

WHILE BUILDING YOUR  
PROFESSIONAL NETWORK

by Alexia Vernon



**As summer nears**, if you're anything like me, it can be tricky to keep a career development mindset. You look for — and take — any opportunity to start work a little late and end a little early. If there is a pool party or barbecue, your name is all over it. Even if you've financially scaled back over the last couple of years, you eke out some kind of vacation to relax and restore.

The good news is that while you play hard this summer, you can also work smart. Whether you seek to build relationships for your business or score face time with potential employers, summer provides many opportunities to build the professional network necessary to start your next level of success.

The key to closing the gap from where you are to where you want to be is surrounding yourself with the people who can make it happen. Approximately 90 percent of career opportunities arise from our relationships. Challenge yourself to attend an equal amount of social functions with people you don't know as well as those you do know to expand your network.

It can be tempting to hit your favorite beer garden with the same friends or colleagues each week. There is certainly utility in letting the people closest to you know where you are professionally, where you seek to be and how

they can help you take the desired leap. It's equally important, however, to fill your smart phone with contact info for people you don't know.

Frequently, people a couple of degrees outside our circle of close friends and family have the perfect clients for our small businesses. If you are unemployed — or simply keeping an eye toward a career transition or external promotion — these newest contacts may be the people poised to connect you with an HR manager at one of the companies you have been lusting to work for.

When you meet new people casually by going to a summer event with a friend (or a friend of a friend) — or perhaps sucking it up and going to your significant other's workplace function — make sure you always have several dozen business cards on hand. If you don't want the person contacting you at your current job or if you're unemployed, order low-cost cards with your pertinent information — name, phone number, email address, job title/career field, and professional website or social media information.

Follow up by email or phone within 48 hours after meeting new people. Strive to set up to share coffee, sangria or a cupcake within the next two weeks to deepen the relationship. Be transparent about what you're looking for. Invest time getting to know the other person. Successful networks are built from mutually beneficial relationships.

Always be open to unanticipated opportunities to start a relationship. Think about the places you go to enjoy the summer and ways you could start a conversation with the people there. Take a book with a provocative title when you hit the pool, the lake or the beach and be on the lookout for others devouring books you've read or plan to read. If someone is turning the pages of a book you've had on your Amazon Wish List, ask how he or she is enjoying it. Be open to where the conversation might lead from there. Don't hesitate to move it along with a statement such as, "We have similar taste in books. I'm curious, what do you do?"

Go early to a summer performance or concert. Talk with the other people standing in line with you or picnicking on the grounds. You have at least one thing in common: your interest in whatever show you're about to see.

One of my other favorite summer networking strategies is to try a new outdoor activity that lends itself to communication — golf, surfing, volleyball or, if you're more adventurous, rock climbing or a kayaking excursion. Resist the temptation to speak only with the person or group you came with. Shared athletic experience creates a natural bond between people. Use it.

Anything you do in the company of other people this summer could be a networking opportunity. You just need to push slightly outside your comfort zone, strike up a conversation and exchange contact info so your first interaction isn't your last.