



**ORGANISTS.RQ**

# 5 TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL NETWORKING



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## **Five Tips for Successful Networking**

Community shapes an important part of our lives, and working in churches provides a built-in community for many organists and music directors. However, unless you work at a church large enough to employ an assistant organist, you're unlikely to work day-to-day with people of your skill set. This is unlike traditional work settings, where you might easily meet others in the same department of similar positions.

It takes time to build relationships, especially in a field where people may relocate for a particular job. Here are some steps to creating community, or network, with like-minded musicians. By networking, you can find substitutes, collaboration partners, and potential opportunities down the road.

## **1. Attend**

The American Guild of Organist offers a regional and national conference every other year, as does the American Choral Directors' Association. Many denominations hold their own music conferences, and you may also be interested in music education conferences. You'll not only learn something, but meet many other people in the same field by striking up conversations with attendees and speakers. At AGO and PAM conferences, I've had many chances to share ministry ideas with organists young and old.

Depending on your church's continuing education budget, you may be better off simply attending local performances. If you're a student, this can be especially helping for forging relationships with established organist/choirmasters who hire a keyboardist on special occasions. You can also likely attend performances at a reduced price as a student, so take advantage of the opportunity while it lasts!

In a state like Mississippi, where just one organ program serves the entire state, I met many organists relieved to find someone who could fill in for weddings and funerals. On the other hand, when competing with a more crowded, it's important to show your face so that you stand out.

## **2. Prepare**

You don't want to stumble over the question of "what do you do?" or recite your entire resume. Think of ways to summarize your work in a couple of

sentences. By practicing your introduction in a way that comes naturally, you don't have to worry about thinking on your feet.

With that out of the way, you can listen more genuinely as the other person introduces themselves. Ask about their projects, how long they've lived in the area, and offer contacts that might be useful to them. By truly connecting with others rather than focusing on what you might say, you can build stronger networks based on reciprocity and shared goals.

### **3. Contact**

In traditional fields, you might exchange business cards, but this isn't as much of a practice in church music. Social media works well for maintaining contact, as platforms such as LinkedIn and Facebook provide convenient ways to interact with colleagues. Communication can deepen new relationships and strength those you already have. Without flooding an inbox, periodically reaching out can go a long way. In this scenario, quality trumps quantity.

As social media blurs the line between business and personal, you'll likely find out more about a person than a short meeting might have communicated. Many organists my age are getting engaged and married, and it's truly fun to see those happy milestones. Avoid online drama like the plague.

### **4. Prioritize**

Author [Andrew Sobel](#) recommends, "Think people, not positions." If you try to carry on a lengthy conversation with the keynote speaker at a conference, they will very likely be busy, with their attention drawn in many different directions. As a general rule, it's not easy to break into the circle of an established professional.

However, you'll always meet up-and-comers. At one recent workshop, I heard a music educator in the early stages of his career present a fantastic lecture. Despite having not necessarily "made it" yet, it was easy to notice the incredible potential, and he was very approachable as a relative newcomer.

## **5. Diversify**

Maybe you already know plenty of organist/choirmasters in the area, and just need a good cellist for your Tenebrae service. Maybe your network only includes organists your own age, but few older or younger.

It can be especially important for us as organists and music directors to meet others outside of our own denomination. First, there are plenty of wonderful music resources in other churches that you may not hear about in your everyday circles. Secondly, you could someday find yourself in a different denomination, without the benefit of your previous contacts.

Every professional musician likely has a wealth of information from their individual experiences. By widening your circle, you only learn more in the end. Networking can require energy and time, but can result in truly rewarding community.