

Intergenerational Networking & Student and Young Professional WEF Mentoring Program



Individual Networking

Research shows that even though workers have more ways to connect than ever, a person's network is usually a group of people very similar to them in terms of race, gender, age, etc. Diversifying your network requires conscious attention.

- ❑ **Make an effort** to reach out to people who are not of your generation—if you don't normally make a phone call, try it; if you don't normally send an email or teams message, try it. Have you used platforms like TikTok, Reddit, Slack, etc.? While you don't need to know them all, it's helpful to seek out new information channels.
- ❑ **Reach across WEF sectors** by joining committees doing work you're interested in knowing more about, not only those where you bring expert knowledge. Adopt a beginner mindset as you engage in topics of interest and meet new people.
- ❑ **Consider the relational power dynamic** in networking and work to level it as much as possible. This can be done by recognizing that, no matter your level of seniority, there's always something new to learn. Ask for and respond to feedback.
- ❑ **Ask authentic questions, give authentic answers.** Jokes or sarcastic comments about age differences or life experiences can backfire. They may shut people down or come across as offensive.
- ❑ **What may have been acceptable in the past is now dated,** for example male colleagues referring to female colleagues as "sweetie" or "honey". The speaker may think they're being kind and familiar, while the receiver may experience this as overly familiar, derogatory or exclusive. Be responsive to feedback on how a person wants to be addressed.

(see [How to Shift My Behaviors as a Leader](#) for more on this topic)

The workforce of the future does not look or operate like the workforce of the past. How do organizations like WEF use this diversity to its advantage in innovation and problem solving?

There are currently 4 to 5 generations of people operating in the workforce together using different approaches to work and collaborate. Research shows that diverse companies and organizations are the most innovative and outperform less diverse organizations.

Intergenerational networking is key to developing diverse committees and work groups that can balance historic organizational knowledge and diverse perspectives for innovation.



Committee Outreach to Enhance Diversity

Diverse networks make it more accessible for employees to make connections and referrals that result in diverse teams and committees. In these arenas, diversity of perspective, experience, and knowledge lead to more innovative solutions and dynamic problem solving. Think about where you can get involved to share your expertise and learn from others.

- **WEF InFLOW program** partners with HBCUs and other organizations of underrepresented groups to bring students and technical professionals from these arenas to WEFTEC and support them in getting a strong start in the water sector.
- **Connect with WEF Member Associations** to look for newer members who want to get involved at the international WEF level.
- **Go outside the "usual water stakeholder"**, as outlined in the WEF strategic plan update, to connect with all water community partners—non-profits, community organizations, environmental advocacy groups, and small systems and companies.
- **SYPC Mentorship Program**, see the next page to find out more.



"It is a seasoned professional's legacy to the water sector to mentor the next generation of leaders."

— **Lou Storino, P.E., Mentor**



SYPC Mentorship Program Advances the WEF Mission, Supports New Professionals

WEF's **Student and Young Professional Community (SYPC)** offers a structured opportunity to expand your network through their mentoring program. The program features pre-scheduled group networking calls as well as 1:1 time for pairs to connect. Past participants highly recommend the program.

SYPC is actively looking for participants, with particular emphasis on recruiting mentors interested in supported the program. Do you have industry experience to share in the following categories?

- Working with project teams i.e. for design and construction, responsibilities & roles of utility/owner, engineer, contractors
- Understanding technical documents and contracts
- Working through difficult manager and leadership relationships
- Asking for what you want at work, i.e. technical opportunities, support, leadership opportunities, salary
- How and where to get involved in WEF



"I would recommend this to anyone who is given the opportunity. It's rewarding seeing your protégé succeed, and helping them avoid the pitfalls that you've experienced in your career can help them get to where they want to be."

— **Brian Persing, Plant Superintendent, Mentor**



"I would recommend this to others! It's a great way to connect a young professional to an industry leader which is very helpful in the early stages of one's career."

— **Blaga Delic, P.E., Protégé**



"I was surprised at my ability to be successful in a virtual mentorship format. As a result of being paired with my mentor, I have an example of someone who has successfully built a thriving career while residing in their hometown. I now feel confident in my decision to live here and still have ample career opportunities. I've gained an increased confidence in my decision-making abilities over the course of this program."

— **Cheyenne Harris, P.E., Protégé**

Mentorship Best Practices

Whether you network through the WEF program or on your own, here are tips to get you started.

Positive mentoring relationships are categorized by:

- Mutually beneficial time commitment
- Honest, two-way exchange
- Respectful debate on differing views
- Critical assessment of ideas
- A leveling of the power gradient
- Mutual positive regard and openness
- Respect for limits and boundaries
- Commitment to confidentiality

Mentors:

- A desire to support others in their development
- Current and relevant industry knowledge or expertise to share
- A willingness to share failures and personal experiences, both "how I did it right" and "how I did it wrong" stories
- A growth mindset, because the best teachers are those who are continually learning
- Skill in developing others: active listening, asking powerful questions, self-reflection

Protégés :

- Own the opportunity by identifying your initial development and career goals
- Be willing to discuss short and long-term career goals, obstacles, & successes
- Seek and be open to feedback
- Be willing to push outside your comfort zone to test/apply mentoring lessons to work in real time



"I have had a few protégés over the years and each experience is different but getting to know the next generation of our industry and helping them is a rewarding experience."

— **Brian Persing, Plant Superintendent, Mentor**