Hello from SWE headquarters. My name is Alysoun Park, and I use she/her pronouns. Thank you all so much for joining us for today's webinar, *Follow Through 2.0-- From Connections to Collaborations,* with Dr. Jen Winikus, Beth McGinnis-Cavanaugh, and Virginia Counts. This is our final session for this year's Countdown to Conference series, and our first engaged exchange panel. Sessions in the series were handpicked for the Advance Learning Center during the WE25 call for participation process.

So a couple housekeeping notes before we get started. We will take questions at the end with our speakers. So if you have a question during this live session, please type it into the Q&A window or on the interactive platform in the presentation. We'll get those questions asked for you towards the end.

We also have closed captioning available. You can turn that on or off by clicking on the Closed Caption button that appears below and to the right of your screen. This session is recorded, and on-demand version of today's presentation will be made available in the Advance Learning Center within 48 hours.

So we strives to create programming that suits your needs, and one way we do that is with your feedback. So please take a moment afterwards to complete the feedback survey. The survey can be found towards the bottom of this Events Course page on the Advance Learning Center, but I will also drop that link in the chat. Now it is my pleasure to hand over the presentation to our lovely panelists, so please take it away.

Welcome, SWE. So welcome to *Follow Through 2.0-- From Connections to Collaborations.* We call this a 2.0, because we did the first one at WE24. So this is the follow up.

So I'm Virginia Counts. And I'm a SWE life member, a SWE fellow, and a past president. And you can go to the next slide.

I'm an experienced program manager and Lean Six Sigma master black belt. Typically, I lead cross-functional teams on complex, enterprise-wide initiatives across regulated operations and global supply chains, usually supporting about $6.5 billion in revenue. My focus is making work faster, clearer, and safer end-to-end, streamlining how things get done, and delivering results, most importantly. As I explore my next chapter, a little unexpectedly, but I'm looking for my next role, I'm networking more than ever, and will share today some of the simple, repeatable systems that I'm working to use to turn those quick hellos into lasting opportunities.

Hi, everyone, I'm Beth McGinnis-Cavanaugh. I'm an engineering and physics professor at Springfield Technical Community College in Massachusetts. In SWE, I chair the Academia Working Group. I co-founded and co-led the Community Colleges Affinity Group, and I write for *SWE* magazine as a member of the Editorial Working Group. I'm also a faculty advisor to my institution's SWE affiliate.

Full disclosure, I'm an introvert, and networking has never been a strength of mine-- until now. I've learned a lot working with Virginia and Jen on this topic, and hope to pass on some of it in this presentation, especially about overcoming barriers to networking.

Thanks, everyone. I'm Dr. Jen Winikus. I professionally am an Associate Professor at Lehigh University. I have been on collaborative grant teams with over $10 million in proposal attempts.

My fund does revolve around SWE and ABET. I'm a SWE life member, the faculty advisor and counselor to Lehigh University, Student Section, Chair-Elect for SWE's new Accreditation Working Group, since SWE's now a full member of ABET, and my last year as the Academic Representative on the Conference Advisory Board. SWE has provided me with a place to network that is comfortable, and through that, I found working with Beth in Virginia. And that has led to confidence to actually collaborate with people that are not in SWE.

During this session, we will be making use of Slido. Slido is an active learning technique tool. It has free versions and paid versions. We are not sponsored or endorsed by Slido, but we will be making use of it. It has a anonymous, real-time Q&A that you can choose to put your questions in, in addition to the Q&A that is available in Zoom or in the chat-- whatever is most convenient for you. We will be using this, however, for interactive engagement questions.

Which, to kick us off on that interactive engagement journey so we can help tailor our conversation with you, we do have a poll. We'd like to know who's all here with us today. I know we have a lot of people from all over the world. So what's everyone's background?

And we'll give it a couple seconds to collect some insights. And, of course, during this time, if you're not comfortable using Slido, feel free to put your responses in the chat, as well. I am seeing a lot of industry-- diverse industries, actually-- that we've got joining in.

Can you share the link again, Jen, please? I think a couple of people missed it.

They can use the QR code, or the link that is on the window.

So the chat seems to be predominantly industry. What's the poll telling us?

The poll is telling us that it doesn't want to share the results. [LAUGHS] Give me one second, and I will turn that back on. And our results are 76% are industry, 14% are students, and 7% are academics.

OK.

So a diverse group of individuals. But where in the world are you connecting from right now? We'll give this a few more moments to see how everyone's connecting. We got Texas, we got abroad. Awesome.

Oh, wow. All over the world.

Thank you for those waking up early or staying up late to join us. OK, so we're seeing a lot of people from the USA connecting in. This is a great turnout, and thank you all for being here live. And for those of you watching at home on-demand, we appreciate you logging in.

So this session is aimed to address three key learning outcomes. To identify key opportunities to connect beyond the initial follow up. Explore strategies to advance connections with leaders, mentors, and collaborators. And to plan the right approach to transitioning networking into tangible collaborations.

So when we think about networking, who thinks it's only about when you need to find a job? A few more seconds. We're getting some nos in the chat. That's great to see. Awesome. A majority of people think that networking goes way beyond just the job hunting experience.

And that's really consistent with our message. While finding a job can be one outcome, the real value of networking goes much deeper. When most people hear the word networking, they often picture awkward receptions, stacks of business cards, or that moment when someone reaches out only because they need a job.

But real networking is something quite different. It's about building relationships over time, staying curious, showing genuine interest in others, and being willing to help along the way. It matters, because so many opportunities don't come through job postings or formal channels-- they come through people.

So when you build authentic connections, you can gain a few powerful things-- like access to information, the kind that you don't or won't find online. For example, networking may yield insights about an organization, an industry, or emerging opportunities. You gain visibility and credibility.

And when others understand your strengths, they can recommend you and open doors. You gain support and guidance from mentors and peers who can help you navigate challenges and make decisions. And you gain a sense of community, which is important for women-- especially women in engineering and technical fields, where connections and collaboration drive opportunity.

So it's not just who you know, it's who knows you and what they know about you. Networking isn't about transactions, it's about relationships. And when you approach relationships with intent and inconsistency, they keep your career resilient and continuously growing.

So, like you, I can get head down and focus on my work. And I'm the first to admit that I haven't kept my network as warm as I should. I often would make connections just through what I was doing, headed to a meeting at SWE, and I'd see people that I hadn't seen in a while and make a connection with them. It's really since I started this work that I've been much more thoughtful about being systematic and making sure that I'm doing this on a consistent basis.

Fortunately for me, a lot of the ties that I've made in SWE, while I may not have checked in with them, most recently they go really deep. So it's OK for a little time to lapse and then connect back up to them. But for all of us, the best thing we can do is keep that pot simmering all the time. And here are some of the things that you get when you do that-- really faster replies.

Years ago, on a really high stakes project that I was working on sourcing parts, a critical part went on allocation. It just so happened that I happened to have a recent connection with somebody that I knew in SWE who had a connection to another person in SWE that worked at the company that was building that part. I was able to really quickly give them a call, and we got parts loaded off of a ship in China and onto an airplane so that my project could keep on track. Without that connection, there's no way that that would have ever happened.

You can get hidden information. A lot of jobs never actually post. A lot of information isn't actually put out in the media.

I recently interviewed for a job where a site has been announced to be shut down. But because of the contacts that I had that worked for that company, I was able to find out, oh, it's quite likely it's really going to be sold. So that made all the difference in the world.

You're considered to be credible if you're top of mind, if somebody talked to you recently. And often you're going to get pulled into rooms that you're not even in, so people are going to be saying good things about you and helping promote you. So it's those deep ties that are going to show up, time and time again.

Resilience. When things are moving really fast, you might need advice and intros on short notice. And a warm network is going to help shorten that path from stock to actually moving.

Partnerships. It's through connections that we made in SWE with the three of us that helped us come together, and made it easy when Jen gave me a call and said, "would you like to do this?" So you're not going to need everybody, but you're going to need someone, and you're never going to know who they are at the right time. So this week, pick one small action, one person that you know that you're going to check in, one thank you, one helpful share of somebody's information on social media. So keep that network warm so that it's there when you actually need it.

So as Virginia mentioned at the start of this session, our presentation today builds on our WE24 panel session, which was called *Building Scholarly Connections, Effective Networking, and Follow Through Strategies.* We affectionately refer to it as *Follow Through 1.0.* And the goal of that session was to help participants develop authentic networking skills and effective follow up strategies. In other words, tools to build meaningful professional relationships. That panel brought the three of us together, voices from both industry and academia, because networking matters in both spaces.

So in the WE24 session, we helped attendees explore practical ways to break the ice and start conversations naturally, introduce themselves in memorable and genuine ways, close a conversation with an opening for future follow up, and plan effective follow ups, both short and long-term. That session was very well attended and highly interactive, and the energy in the room confirmed that networking is a topic that people care deeply about and struggle with.

During that session, we received a lot of very thoughtful questions-- most of which were submitted via Slido, so they were anonymous and very honest. And most of them centered around challenges that quite a few of us face when networking, such as how to build and maintain connections and how to keep those connections warm, how to ask for help, or even a referral, without feeling transactional, how to find or cultivate mentorship and career guidance. Or in other words, how to turn conversations into ongoing relationships. And, of course, how to overcome the personal fears and doubts that can make networking tough.

These topics drive our presentation today. And throughout our talk today, we'll share some of our own challenges and lessons learned, and we'll invite you to reflect, and share, and take that next step towards building your own authentic connections. So let's dive in.

Let's talk about the human side of networking. Because networking isn't about just intent or strategy, it's also about our own doubts and fears. So out of our WE24 session, again, many questions came through like, how do I network with someone senior, like a director or vice president? And we would say, start by asking thoughtful, open-ended questions. Something like, what do you wish you had known earlier in your career? Or, what trends do you see shaping the field right now?

Leaders appreciate genuine curiosity. They're people. Most people love sharing their insights from their own experiences.

So don't focus on trying to impress them. Focus on learning from them. Be curious. We've mentioned this word curious a couple of times now, and curiosity is a strength in networking because it shifts focus from trying to impress to genuinely trying to learn about the other person.

When you ask thoughtful questions, you signal interest, respect, and engagement-- qualities that make people feel valued. And this naturally opens the door to deeper conversations, uncovers shared interests, and build stronger, more authentic relationships. It also helps you gather insights that you wouldn't have known to look for, and that turns every interaction into an opportunity to discover and connect.

Another common concern we heard was, what if I freeze and we can't find common ground? This happens to everyone. To combat this, have one or two starter questions ready, such as, what drew you to your current role? Or, what project are you most excited about right now? Again, simple, authentic questions like these can open doors to real conversations. And again, most people genuinely enjoy talking about their work and passions.

And then there's this one. What if I feel I have nothing to offer? It's hard for me to even say that. And I would say you do have something to offer-- your curiosity, your attention, and your perspective. Offering genuine interest and thoughtful listening is often more valuable than you realize. The key takeaway-- connection isn't built on what you know, it's built on how you make others feel heard and valued.

OK, now let's be honest. Sometimes what really holds people back from networking isn't a lack of skill or opportunity, it's what's going on in our own heads. Fears just don't appear once and fade away, they spiral, they loop back on themselves until we get stuck in what we call the infinite loop of doom. It's where many of us live or find ourselves from time to time. And it's a trap. It's an endless cycle that keeps people from reaching out. It's an endless cycle of imposter syndrome, not knowing how to ask, overthinking, intimidation, and feeling like you have nothing to give back.

It often starts with imposter syndrome. That quiet voice that says, I really don't belong here, or everyone else is more qualified than I am. And because of that, you might not know how to ask for help or advice. You don't want to sound needy or uninformed, so instead, you hold back.

Then the overthinking starts. What if I say the wrong thing? What if they think I'm awkward? And that leads to intimidation, the belief that everyone else knows more than you do or has more to offer.

And by the end of that cycle, it's very easy to convince yourself I have nothing to give, I have nothing to give back, so why would they want to connect with me? But those thoughts and doubts are incredibly common. We've all been there. And acknowledging them is the first step towards breaking the infinite loop of doom.

The truth is, everybody starts somewhere. And again, you do have something to offer-- curiosity, effort, and genuine interest. These are powerful building blocks for real relationship building. So networking isn't about being perfect or impressive, it's about showing up and connecting as you are.

Now, breaking that infinite loop of doom starts with understanding ourselves. Because often it's not just fear holding us back, it's actually how we're wired. That's where introversion and shyness come in.

Many people see introversion as a weakness, but it's actually a strength. Introverts tend to be great listeners, thoughtful and observant, qualities that make other people feel heard and valued. Introversion and shyness get mixed up, but they're not the same. Introverts recharge by spending time alone or spending time in smaller, quieter settings. Large social events drain introverts-- not because they don't like people, but because the constant interaction uses more of their energy.

Shyness, on the other hand, comes from a sense of social anxiety, that fear of judgment or rejection. A shy person might want to connect, but feels nervous about doing so. So an introvert might prefer solitude, but feel confident socially. A shy person might crave connection, but struggle to take that first step. And yes, some people are both. But not all introverts are shy, and not all shy people are introverts.

When it comes to networking, that distinction matters. For introverts, large events might feel overwhelming, but one-on-one or small group conversations can be much more meaningful. Introverts often shine through deep listening, authentic connection, and thoughtful follow up, all of which are excellent networking strengths. For shy individuals, the challenge is easing that first bit of discomfort. Start small. Prepare a few questions ahead of time. Go to an event with a friend, or connect online before meeting in person. Every small step makes the next step easier.

My own introverted nature has actually been a strength, even though I did not always see it that way. I think people in general remember who really listens, and not the ones who talk the most. So here's the thing. Both introverts and shy people can be great at networking when they do it in ways that feel genuine to them. So if you're introverted or shy, own it. It's not a weakness, it's a strength.

So what are some other barriers for you or what are your barriers? So we have a poll up. Let us know what you feel prevents you from networking. I see imposter syndrome. It's the first step in the infinite loop of doom. Time management.

So I'm going to go ahead and show the results as they keep coming in so we can see everyone's not really alone in this.

Absolutely. So I think we all struggle with time management and workload. I can say that I do, for sure, and I'm not always attentive. And Virginia touched on this earlier about keeping those connections warm. But again, asking questions, offering help, all ways to start conversations with folks. So thinking of what you can offer, as opposed to what they can offer you-- and you all have something to offer.

Sometimes asking can be really hard. But positioning yourself that you are seen and have that great reputation that when you ask get responses, but also, you become someone that they come to to build the collaborations. Collaboration is not a one-way street.

And so ways that you can actually start getting into that role is actively engaging. And active engaging and visibility does not mean that you have to brag, but it does mean sharing and engaging. Speaking up when you're in meetings, or posting about projects you're working on or completed, and volunteering is a great way to be seen.

I know all the connections that we saw between Virginia, Beth, and myself that came about, about us being seen in the community within SWE. And so some of these things that you can do to build visibility are more tangible. And some are less tangible, but have more long-term meaning to it.

So the things that are not tangible tend to be more relationships-centered, those friendships and bonds that grow out of your network. Tangible things often include actual physical, measurable things, such as grants, speaking opportunities. And you can tell by our little group here, they go hand-in-hand.

So one thing to consider with it is, again, that academic industry piece. We talk about barriers a lot, and we have these great mindsets of people in industry, they have business hours. They have to stay busy during it, and then they have life outside. We're an imposition. And then apparently industry, we found out, has the same perspective of the academic lifestyle.

So in working together with Virginia, it started with her showing up and engaging with the women in academia community for a webinar. She put herself out there visibly as an ally to us, which made it comfortable for us to approach her. And over time, we're just thinking the same thing about the other people. So the best thing you can do is just find ways to engage and show up.

And one of the things you'll see on both sides is mentoring. Mentoring is not one size fits all. It does not take one form. It's not going to be consistent in your relationship over time. And then we also have these words like coaching and sponsorship that get thrown around in this context-- but they don't mean the same thing, even though the same person over time can serve all those roles.

So mentoring is a process that involves a sharing of experiences and wisdoms. A lot of times there's such a thing called peer mentoring. You might experience that with your colleagues, that you go in and you have those discussions about supporting each other, navigating difficult situations.

Coaching, on the other hand, tends to be very short-term and targeted, and it's about guiding you on your way to navigate to your goal. That wisdom isn't shared with you from the mentor, the coach, it's helping you find your path.

And then sponsors are the people that advocate and talk when you're not in the room. These are the people that keep you in mind, and when something happens, they bring it up.

A lot of these have different times and places in your life. And formal mentorship can sometimes be more difficult, since it is explicit and intentional. Depending on your workplace, you might actually have a say in how that was developed. It also can be intimidating to create or ask the mentoring piece.

So one thing you could do is leverage the SWE mentor network, where anyone that's on there is a click away from setting up that conversation. And these are people that are willing to mentor and have these relationships with you. And from this, you could also ask for introductions to someone that you'd want to learn from, or want to be a mentor. And you can establish absolute goals, or you can let things come to and go with a flow. But these relationships help make you more visible and more seen, and that then translates into more opportunities.

So we're going to shift now into some more nuts and bolts tools. We do have a handout for the session that will give you at the end, and many of these have some really specific examples to help you. So one of the first tools that can be helpful in this process of networking is to really shift your mindset. I don't know about you all, but when I'm out there asking for help, as I am right now quite a bit as I'm looking for a new role, I can go in not feeling very powerful. In fact, sometimes I can feel pretty pathetic, like I'm walking in with a wound-- and my energy broadcasts that.

So somehow we need to shift our mindset so that we can broadcast the energy of who we really are. So the reframe that can be helpful here is to give some value. Try to give more than you get as you're talking and networking with people. Sometimes this is as simple as at the end of the conversation you ask, what can I do for you?

In one of the networking conversations I had recently, the person found that to be totally unexpected. And they say, oh gosh! I don't have anything right now, but it's so nice to be asked.

Another example is, as I stood in line at this WE Career Fair at WE25, I would chat with the students that were in line with me and say, what's going on? How do you know this company? Can I help you with anything?

And in many cases, it was they practiced their elevator speech on me, or I practiced mine with them. So this can go back and forth. That tiny change changes the current and changes the energy. It moves us from this place of "please rescue me," to "let's collaborate." And it helps both of you see each other with a different energy. So the next time you need help, try to give one compliment, one connection, one offer. Pity is temporary, and that one small action can shift you into power.

So again, some nuts and bolts. After SWE, I had a lot of new LinkedIn connections, but oftentimes it stalls right there. So here are some things about how to change it. Try to turn those connections into conversations. Send them a quick little congrats, and here's some information that maybe we talked about. Give them a template or a checklist that you actually use that you found helpful.

Think about those people. Invite them to participate. Even one of the executives you met, inviting them to a SWE panel, maybe something that they really get a lot out of.

Try to do a helpful intro, which we're going to show you in just a minute. Sometimes it's asking people a question, "do you prefer this or that," and I'll share the results on Friday. Just think about making this consistent, one a week. Spend a few minutes doing it, start today. Pick one thing, and try to help make one connection move on.

Another thing to offer you is if you're really stuck with what to do, try to go to an AI tool and say, "I met this person two years ago and I feel funny connecting with them. I know this and this about them." See what it comes up with. Of course, read it before you actually send it. Next slide.

I talked about introducing people. This is a really powerful thing that you can do. Most of the time when I'm meeting with somebody and we're talking about things, it'll pop through my head, oh, they need to meet so-and-so and so-and-so.

This is super easy to do on LinkedIn. I have to say, I'm embarrassed to say I just learned this recently. You can start a conversation with a group of people. And again, very easy to do. And it can really turn some fast wins into goodwill, because you might connect somebody who does something that they didn't expect. Next slide.

So how to ask without awkwardness? This title really says it all. Be specific. Try to make it only one topic at a time. Don't do a mind dump on email, but be clear.

Make it under 90 words. Give them a couple options to reply to you, or have the conversation. Maybe it's a call and an email. Show them homework. Let them know why you're reaching out to them at this particular time.

Right now, I'm reaching out to a lot of my SWE contacts, and most of the time it's because they're well connected. And I'm telling them that. You're well connected, and I'm hoping we can chat.

Remember that giving them a little something first, if you can, and then close the loop and report back to them. Try to avoid really vague asks like, I want to pick your brain. Pick your brain is code for I'm asking for advice, so just say that.

Or maybe not go with "I really need this now." Just ask them, and most people will be more than happy to help. Next slide.

So how do you turn that "I should do something" into a repeatable system? The answer is, you need a tracker. We're going to show you one here in just a minute. Doesn't matter how you do it, you just need something.

When you meet people, it's a really good idea if you can somehow capture some things that you learned about them, three things in common. You both went to the same school. You both love to go to Pilates. You both loved the ballet. Something that you guys connected on.

All of the networking experts do say very quickly do that first reach out and say, it was great to meet you at SWE, your point about this really stuck with me. I'm remembering it. Let's check in again after so many weeks-- or cheering you on.

A really good tip I got at this SWE conference is, if you're around the table and you guys are connecting right away on LinkedIn, go to your messages right away and send a note to them. "Hey, it was great to meet you at this event." Then you can go back through those messages in LinkedIn and be able to mine them and say, oh yeah, that's where I met that person.

Pretty quickly get them in whatever system you have-- for me, it's just an Excel spreadsheet-- and start to look at when you're going to reconnect with them. Is it somebody that you're going to connect with monthly? You should probably be looking to do this with about 12 people, quarterly about two dozen, and semiannually-- so every six months-- about three dozen people. That turns out to be about one person a day.

I know many of us said we had difficulty with taking the time to do this. Connect with one person a day. That's often what I put out as my goal.

So tracking, this is an example of a spreadsheet. It doesn't matter how you do it. It doesn't matter what the columns are. You just need to do something.

You could do it on paper. You could do it in an Excel sheet. Again, it doesn't matter what you do, you just need to do something.

And you need to have a time in there. I know for me, I've just come back from two and a half weeks of travel, and I pulled up my spreadsheet. Oh yeah, I had totally forgot I'd said I'd connect with that person. So use it. Next slide.

So moving forward, it's important to recognize networking is not a commitment, it is connection. That connection is not always visible on a daily basis, but the root infrastructure to help each other grow and succeed. Intensity and frequency will change over time. It could even be they're your new conference buddy. And when you get to SWE's annual conference, or WE Local, they're the first person you say hi to to start off that experience with excitement and comfort as you go explore maybe 700 people, or 14,000 people like we had in New Orleans recently. But it will change over time.

So I do have a call to action for all of you before we get into our Q&A, and that is that networking is not just about following up. And so Virginia and Beth are both giving you this challenge. We'd like you now to think a little bit more critically and identify someone that's been at least two weeks since you followed up with and send that person a message.

If you're not sure who to speak to, keep in mind the fact that this spun out of trying to foster industry and academic connections. And so if you can't think of anyone, think about a former faculty member that you had at some point, and send them an email letting them know how you're doing. Those really do make a huge difference in our day when we see those updates. And it also lets us know what you're doing, so things that cross our path we can share with you when we see them.

Similarly, if you're a faculty member, check in with your students that are in industry. There's very good likelihood that a position will open up in their department. And remember, wait, you still work at this institution. Do you have any students ready to graduate as a recruitment pipeline?

And there is no time limit. I have students that check in every four years or so, but it's still great to hear them. So if you're rusty or you're not sure, reach out to a professor.

So when you think about this moving forward, remember, following up is a critical piece to following up and building those connections. So I'm going to turn it back over to Alysoun for some closing words, and then we're going to go ahead and go into our Q&A.

Perfect. Yes, thank you so much for an amazing presentation. I'm looking forward to the Q&A.

So I just wanted to remind everyone that there is a feedback survey for this session, so I encourage you to complete it as soon as possible while everything is still fresh in your mind. I'm going to drop that feedback survey link in the chat. And I guess everyone can continue to type in Q&A questions as the session is going, but I'm going to hand it right back over to our panelists so that you can look. I'm already seeing a couple questions in there.

OK, so I'm going to actually start off with one that I think is really tricky, I'm excited to see. And that is, "in your experience, have you been able to build effective relationships with both male and female leaders? I have found more success with female leaders, and it's easier to maintain a relationship with them." What do you all think?

I'm going to say I think over my career it has been easier to connect with women, especially if it's kind of a cold call. Most of the time, especially if you're looking at an executive, many of the executives that I've reached out to, they are a little more receptive-- or maybe not more receptive, but receptive. But men are important, too. We need men to help us along. It probably doesn't matter whether it's in industry or academia, the majority of the people in the room are going to be men. And you need men to be sponsoring you, and so you need the people in that room to be able to speak about you.

So start with the people that you work closest with. You never know when one of your peers is going to become a manager, or a director, or VP, or the equivalent in academia. So connect with them on something. It might mean you have to go look into something that you're not terribly interested in, like a sport or something like that. But pay attention to the people that are around you, and connect with them. Beth, you're on mute.

The dreaded mute. No, it's a great question, one that I never thought of, actually. I would say for me it's probably even-- although slightly skewed more towards women, just because of the number of women that I connect with through SWE.

So for me, the comfort level comes from people within the SWE community. I know where their values are, because this is where they show up. There's a lot of nerve in trying to approach leaders from other communities, because I don't always know where their values are. I know their technical interests, but I don't necessarily have that same comfort level. But it is very important, still, to connect with them. So that's a great one.

Jen, there's a question in the Q&A that I'd love to address.

Awesome.

It's one saying, "how can I feel more confident in asking for help, and find what value I give? I'm still a student, and most times I don't know what to offer the other person." I would say just ask. If you're a student that's working close to me, I would love for some of you young folks who know how to use Instagram to teach me how to use Instagram.

So it might be something super simple that you know how to do that you totally take for granted. It might be something that, in a corporate or an academic environment, the young people know how to mine a system, or how to do something that some of the more experienced people don't know how to do, and they'd love to have you teach them. So I think just ask, is there anything I can help you with, and know that there are.

Yeah, sometimes it's just sharing that excitement. I was at a conference recently and I ended up sitting next to a student. She's like, yeah, this is what I get to do at school every day. I'm really excited about what's next. Can I help you with something? Or, what do you think about these things?

Her energy was so exciting, that actually, in the coming weeks she's got three Zoom meetings with some of my colleagues about potential research opportunities, because she brought that energy to the conversation. She didn't ask for the connection, she showed up and was excited.

So I guess that goes into a really good next one. "What if you don't have a specific ask?"

I'm going to say, in some cases, it's find one. Because you probably do have something you want to learn, or you want to know. I know for me at one point, I reached out to some finance folks in the organizations I was in, saying, "I understand operational finance really well, but I don't really understand the Wall Street finance. Could you explain that to me?"

So I think the answer is dig a little deeper and find something. There are some people that you're going to want to develop a relationship with. And it is literally, I just want to go to lunch.

And the questions are, what are you doing in your job? How is it working? What challenges are you seeing? What's new?

And by the way, you should always have your own answer for what's new. As you walk around your campus, wherever you are, and you see a leader and they say, "what's new" and you say, "same old, same old"-- uh-uh. Always have an answer.

Here's the new project I'm working on. Here's what I'm learning. Here's what I'm looking to learn. Here's what I'm looking for my next step. So dig a little deeper. That's my answer.

That's a great answer. I agree with everything you just said, Virginia. And just going back to what we were talking about earlier in the presentation about people enjoying talking about their own career paths, their own experiences, asking about roles, experiences and that sort of thing is very valuable.

So this question came in, as well. "How do you do that without it sounding so scripted? Those interactions don't necessarily feel authentic."

You need to get them authentic. When you're digging to look for something that you want to learn it, it needs to be authentic. It needs to be what you're really looking to learn. Because otherwise, it potentially can come off as scripted. So yeah, that's my thought.

And go back to a lot of what Beth talked about. Get your confidence in place. Think about how you can help them.

There's a few questions on the Q&A around "it's been a long time since I connected with somebody," or "I'm afraid that they won't remember me." I think you just jump into it. "Hey, it's been a hot minute. I'd love to connect for a phone call."

Even if you don't remember anything about them-- "I know we met at this, could we connect for a quick 15 minute chat just to check in?" I'd love to share the latest." Or go do research, actually look at what they've posted on social in the last bit to see what has been going on for them. Because maybe that can be a clue to help you see they won an award, or they published a paper, or they did something.

Yeah, and there's no time limit. I know that Virginia suggested a cadence, but when you lose touch or lose track, it's OK to go back at whatever time. I frequently will do that, and sometimes I'll apologize for dropping the ball for a bit. But most people are incredibly receptive to that. That never bothers me, being on the receiving end. So I think just do it.

And your visibility can help with that. Post on LinkedIn exciting updates. If you find a really cool article, post it. Share the fact that you thought that was cool, some exciting news. Just because you haven't spoken to them doesn't mean they haven't seen you in some way. And then it's really great for them to maybe reach out to you instead.

And I know, for me, I'm connecting with some people that I haven't connected with in years. As I cleaned out my office, I found a big stash of SWE stuff. And I've kind of gone through it and cleaned it out, and I pulled a bunch aside and am reaching out to people. Like, "hey, I just found the conference material from 2009 with your picture on it, and I remembered this so well. Let's connect." So get resourceful.

So this question I think is a great one. "Mentorship from the formal perspective can be very intimidating, because you go in with some sort of goal-- whether you're told you have to meet with your mentor, or you want something out of it. But do you need an agenda to approach that, or [INAUDIBLE] questions? How do you approach having those meaningful mentoring meetings?"

As somebody who gets asked to mentor, I do find it really helpful when somebody comes in and says, "here's what I want to learn about," because it helps me know what to talk about. And it actually makes me more comfortable in saying yes to mentoring somebody.

But again, that can be simple. I've spent a good chunk of my career as a program manager. And for quite a bit of time, I was the de facto mentor on the site that I was on. Everybody that got promoted into a program management position came to talk to me. And for some people, that was one conversation. For some people, we met monthly for a year just to help them get up to speed and help them talk about, here's what's happening in my project. What should I do?

So I do think it helps to have, maybe not a laid out agenda of we're going to talk about this for 10 minutes and this for 10 minutes, but a general topic. And some of those conversations that people would come into my office, it was about program management in general, but then we would end up talking about something completely different. So you don't have to stick to it, but I do think it helps.

So this is always an interesting one. Honestly, I think within SWE we see this a lot more, the idea of career transition switches, reentry, and nontraditional roles. So the actual question is, "is there a strategy for networking when you are considering those transitions?"

My answer is going to be, find somebody who's done it. And ask them, "how did you make this leap?" For me, I started my career in aerospace and went to medical devices. And some people thought that that was a big leap, but it's really not, because they're both highly regulated industries.

So I think that's a great clue is find somebody who's done it. And ask them, "how did you make this case? How did you do this?"

Somebody's asking, "how do I find out what salaries and benefits are like in the other area?" Again, I think that's just research out there. There's Glassdoor, there's lots of tools online that can help you understand that.

Or find somebody that's working in the field, and ask them. You don't have to ask them, "what are you making?" You can say, "what would a typical salary for XX job be, and what kind of benefits are there?"

Yes. Some places, for example, if you're thinking going into a University, all public institutions do have their salaries public. And sometimes speaking to your professors that you had, they'll have some ideas on different kinds of industry engagements. They kind of have an idea where their students ended up and those transitions over time. They're a great source of trying to find out those people that live those lives.

So, for example, if you are in industry and you are looking to maybe have your second career in academia, or give back to education, I know several people in our community that have made that transition. I don't know, maybe they've gone the other way. That might be something that some of you could share your wisdom and network of who's gone academia to industry. So everyone has some knowledge and connections to give.

And mine the SWE database. Mine he SWE leaders. I think as a women in academia leader, if one of these folks got an email that said, "hey, I'm in industry and I'm thinking about going to academia. Could you connect me with somebody who might be willing to talk with me?" They'd be more than happy to do it, and vice versa.

Absolutely.

Honestly, with cold emails, if someone mentions, "hey, I know you through the SWE network, or I saw something--" and the word SWE's there, it's going to get my attention a lot faster. Because I know your interests, your values, and you are here because of that effort.

So make sure you drop your keywords. If you're reaching out to someone in your technical community, point out, "I saw you in your journal article in this place." Make sure you drop those key buzzwords that give that value connection. We have time for one more question.

Somebody asked, "how much networking should I be doing off LinkedIn, versus on LinkedIn?" I'm going to say that you should probably be having as many real life conversations as you can have, because that's, to me, the most rich communication-- in person if you're local, video calls or just phone calls if you're not. But it is great to connect all that back through LinkedIn so that you have that standard tool. I think it is the de facto tool these days for business networking, or for professional networking.

Agreed. And I think in academia, as well. An academic colleague once told me, "well, LinkedIn is not for academics. It's useless for academics." And I think that's very far from the truth. So I love it. I use it all the time.

So I'm definitely more stereotypical millennial. Facebook's my home. I'm on there hours a day. I can't help it. I go to LinkedIn about once a week. But I know the value in the affinity groups, communities on there with SWE.

So one of my friends relocated. She was early career still, active in the [INAUDIBLE]. So she reached out to the Early Career Affinity Group on there, and be like, "hey, I'm relocating to Boston. Can you give me some tidbits?" And when she arrived, she had two weeks of dinner planned with different SWE members showing her the community.

And I do want to touch really quick on the SWE career site not having higher ed jobs. There is actually a growing list. And I thought the same way, we had a great women in academia meeting that we did believe it. The first job that came up on the list is where I am now.

But leverage your professors, leverage the SWE community. And thank you all. As mentioned, we have a handout that will go out later. This session is on-demand, and will be available within 48 hours, I believe. And Alysoun, you got some wrap up tidbits to add, as well.

Yes. Thank you all so much for such a great presentation and a really informative Q&A. It was such a great and fun session.

For everyone that was joining us, please take a moment to fill out our feedback survey for this presentation. As Jen mentioned, this was recorded, so it's going to be available on-demand within 48 hours in the Advance Learning Center. If you have questions for the speaker or need support for any of this, please contact learning@swe.org.

You can find the handout that our speakers mentioned under the Resources tab of this webinar. There is a PDF there. And the Countdown to Conference webinar series is also available on-demand in the Advance Learning Center.

Thank you all so much for tuning in and attending this presentation. A huge thank you goes out to our wonderful panel speakers Jen, Beth, and Virginia. I'd like to wish all of you a great rest of your day. Goodbye.

Thank you all.

Thank you.