**10 Tips For Using PLN’s**

1. **Keep the spirit of collaboration as your driving force.**  PLNs are all about working together.  Be reciprocal and resourceful.  Don’t think about what you have to gain, first think about what you have to give. Why?  Because it’s the right thing to do.  By buying into the process and sharing useful information, your PLN grows naturally.  Collaboration creates a common ground and allows others to see your interests.  Genuine interest builds a solid, authentic network.  Try to see the big picture of how your ideas can change the world.  Social responsibility is the best kind of motivation for establishing a PLN.
2. **Join an online community.**[Nings](http://www.flickr.com/photos/cobannon/2983755589/sizes/m/in/photostream/) are online rings of people with similar interests. Sharing ideas and contacting people for direct feedback is more effective in a community setting.   Communities such as, [Classroom 2.0](http://www.classroom20.com/)  and [The Educator’s PLN](http://edupln.ning.com/) provide a meaningful circle of experts.  They provide professional development resources, such as online events, and are a great place to start networking.  Plus, using [Mightybell](https://mightybell.com/), [Edmodo](http://www.edmodo.com/), or [Ning](http://www.ning.com/about/product/) you can create your own virtual space to share pictures, documents, calendars, or projects.
3. **Join a**[Meetup](http://www.meetup.com/)**group.**Meetups are common thread interest groups that meet in the real world.  The groups can also extend in social networks.  For instance, social studies teachers in your district or city might create a group to share teaching ideas.  Meetups take online networks and bring them into the real world.  And if you can’t meet online try using a cyberspace, like Google+ HangOut, SecondLife, or Skype. Some university academics even have virtual labs on [SecondLife](http://www.secondlife.com/).
4. **Become a beacon of light.**PLNs rely on open sharing of information.  So if you know something, share it!  It’s best to start with a specific interest and then grow into other topics as time goes on. Become an expert in your niche by researching current trends.  This will draw a larger following on your network, because you can provide a novel source of information.  You might write a blog, start a [Scoopit](http://www.scoop.it/) page to repost interesting articles, share a free tool, or create a Youtube video.  Cater to your strengths and use what’s comfortable for you.
5. **Don’t be afraid to ask questions.**  After all, PLNs are all about learning.  But don’t ask questions that you can easily research yourself.  Try simple searches on TED talks, Wikis, blogs, or news articles before posting a question. Try to be specific and think of how a question might generate interest from others.  For example, you may want to refer to an article or research study when asking a question.  Be specific!  This will generate the best answers.
6. **Be an active participant.**Brain power is the main asset of a PLN.  Spend some time to identify a specific cause and communicate it on your profile.  Let your knowledge of a specific cause help grow your PLN.  Keep up to date with your niche.  Stay relevant.  Try to post at least once a week.
7. **Remember to be polite and acknowledge contributions to the rightful owner.** Show common respect for the people in your network.  This may seem like common sense, but can be a pitfall.  It took me some time to learn “web etiquette” over the years, but it has helped me tremendously.   Send thank you notes, acknowledgements, and use your true voice.  Not only does it make the other person’s day, but it will help you gain more meaningful connections.
8. **Designate a professional and personal account.**I keep my social life on Facebook and my professional life on Twitter, LinkedIn, and Google+.  There can be some crossover, but it’s best to keep it minimal so things are easy to find.  Certain groups will appreciate different types of content.  Your Facebook friends might find your baby’s stories adorable, but your Twitter followers might not appreciate extra messages cluttering their inbox.  Do this in ways that are comfortable to you.  You might designate accounts for each sphere of your life.
9. **Create a landing page.**  It may be a good idea to consolidate all of your accounts on a landing page.  A webpage or personal blog will make it easier for people to find you.  It will also create a space where you can showcase the different projects you are working on.
10. **Engage newbies.**It is best to include a mix of newbies, peers, and experts.  Having this type of diversity in knowledge allows you to increase your mentoring skills.  It keeps with the essence of collaboration.  One blogger in Australia provided [a great visual and commentary](http://iwoods2807.blogspot.com/2010/11/most-of-big-discussion-on-plenk2010.html) on how varying levels of expertise are vital to developing a meaningful PLN.  He describes how he learned in a PLN learning MOOC that the 3’Rs have been replaced by the 3 C’s Collaborate, Communicate, and Create.  PLNS create new projects through the power of active collaboration.