

OASIS Alert

Education: Get More Out of Professional Conferences with 4 Tips

Take your own notes -- don't rely on speaker handouts.

Attending a conference is a great opportunity to glean the latest information and meet new professional contacts who can share what works well in their care settings.

To achieve these goals, experts suggest these strategies.

1. Do your homework. "If you chose a conference, there's something about the agenda that appeals to you," says **Kurt Haas**, former Ohio survey agency chief and currently CEO of **Nursing Home Perspectives**. "So look at the agenda and prepare questions. Speakers may not be able to answer the questions but they will likely be able to point you in the right direction."

2. Capture the highlights. Haas recommends taking some notes rather than just relying on the handouts. "When you take notes, you're writing what 'speaks to you' about the information which is probably something you don't know or haven't thought about. There's always going to be a significant portion of the information that you know. It's the exceptions that you want to focus on."

Organize your materials: Many conferences have stopped providing notebooks, but you can take one with the printed handouts in it. Include a section or few pages to jot down novel ideas or specific answers to questions you have.

3. Expand your circle of contacts. If you know just one person at a reception or other networking event, you've got a connection, says **Maribeth Kuzmeski**, author of *The Connectors: How the World's Most Successful Businesspeople Build Relationships and Win Clients for Life*. Walk up to that person and chat for a while, Kuzmeski tells **Eli**. Then ask the person: "Who here does your marketing or your quality assurance or who's your director of nursing" and ask to be introduced to that person.

Tip: "If you don't know anyone at all, lingering at the refreshment table as you get some food and beverage is a good place to strike up a conversation," Kuzmeski advised. "Or get a plate of food and look for someone sitting alone or a group at a table with empty chairs and ask if they mind if you join them."

Consultant **Rena Shephard** may "strike up conversations" with people around her before or after a session, she says. "Drawing the speaker into that discussion can be really helpful if you can do that," says Shephard with the **American Association of Nurse Assessment Coordinators**.

4. Develop a standard format for reporting on conferences. You can do oral presentations for staff as part of meetings or inservices. But providing a concise (one-page or so) written format can help you share the highlights and any insights.