Letters to Kate - It's Who You Know

Kate,

Since later today I’ll be attending a networking event, I figure it's an appropriate enough topic for this letter.

Let’s be honest here, networking is wildly intimidating and downright hard. You, a lowly undergraduate, are expected to make connections with professionals living out your dream career. Framed that way, yeah, it seems nearly impossible. But it doesn't have to be.

In my time at UMass I’ve found that this school does an incredible job of providing ample networking opportunities to its students. Most of them are aimed at particular majors, colleges or career paths but there are all-major career fairs too. UMass makes sure you can get a taste of everything if you want. My personal favorite networking event is Meet the Law (you can check out my story about the one hosted last semester here) which is the one I’m going to tonight!

During these events students get to meet with alumni attorneys speed-dating style, moving table to table in order to ask alumni about all aspects of a legal career. I like it because it's in a group setting so there’s less pressure on you to “perform” per se, plus other students in your group will for sure have amazing questions you never thought to ask yourself.

How do I prep? I do my research. And I really think that that applies to any networking or even job interview situation. There is a plethora of information online about the professionals you will run into and may one day need—there's no excuse not to take time beforehand to learn what you can about them. You might find the one thing in common that sets you apart from the rest of the pack, that makes the follow up email that much more natural or even gives you insight into how you too can have their job one day.

I also relax. Networking isn’t about getting a job offer day one. It's about cultivating
connections, learning as much as you can and having the opportunities to ask questions you wouldn’t otherwise. I try to approach these events with that mindset. I’m there to learn and gain insider perspective. As college students, we have a lot of practice in doing just that.

Smile. Be friendly. And have some questions ready to go.

Don’t worry about being more impressive than the next student. In my experience, I’ve found that being genuine and kind goes a very long way.

See you around,
Marie

Blog Column:
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Source URL (retrieved on 10/23/2018 - 10:46pm):
https://www.honors.umass.edu/blog/mmaccune/letters-kate-its-who-you-know