

By Alaina G. Levine

Superhero Success: How AIChE is helping ChemEs
achieve professional triumph and land their unicorn careers



Fact Check: You. Are. Awesome.

This should come as no surprise to you. After all, you chose to study one of the hardest subjects known to humankind, chemical engineering.

Lucky for you, you are also a member of AIChE®, the Universe's largest professional society specifically and only dedicated to advancing your career success as a chemical or process safety engineer. AIChE is helping to shape the future of the chemical engineering profession and ensure it remains a positive, responsible force for change that benefits all of humankind. It does this by enabling your triumph as a ChemE superhero.

In fact, you should consider AIChE your strategic career partner. The organization and its leaders and members, 60,000 strong (including 23,000 student members!) in 110 countries and at least 4 galaxies, want to see you succeed in whatever career you choose, because your success is their success. Think about it from a business perspective: The organization is investing in you because the benefits it and its members (including you!) will receive will solidify and ensure the continued growth, expansion, innovation, and triumph of the fields of Chemical and Safety and Process Engineering. Simply put, the stakes are very high. And it is interesting to note the double entendre in AIChE's mission, which is specifically "For the Life of Your Career": it aims to enable your professional victory by arming you with all of the information, ideas, tools, tactics, and networking opportunities that will embolden and enliven your abilities to achieve your wildest professional dreams, for the life of your career. That's right- AIChE is in it for the long haul!

Whether you are looking for your first or third internship, your first or 10th full time job, or anything in between, your AIChE membership provides you a golden ticket to advance, grow, and craft your own career pathway.

Making the Most of Your Membership

So how can you leverage all of these benefits to land your first job or internship?

Network your way to a job, career, and lifetime advancement

Start by recognizing that the most important benefit that AIChE provides its members is extensive networking opportunities, which manifest across all membership offerings. If you look at networking as crafting a win-win alliance with another party, where you are both providing value to each other at different times and in different ways, you'll see that you can and should network with as many AIChE members and representatives as possible. You want to become a "known quantity" in the ChemE community, so the risk in hiring you is mitigated because established leaders have already engaged you and seen you in action. So start building those connections and become an engaged member in AIChE.



TIP: Become an engaged member. Reach out and interact with the leadership and staff, join committees, understand how the organization functions, participate in its activities (such as conferences and informal discussions), and generally be an active volunteer.

Become an engaged member

Start by visiting the Volunteer Central Platform, where you can learn all of the different opportunities you can leverage to become involved in AIChE locally and globally. This Platform aims to share and make it easy to apply for volunteer positions, track participation, and reward engagement. AIChE encourages volunteerism at all levels. Your volunteering can start with small tasks and virtual participation working all the way up to committee and leadership positions. You can even fill out a volunteer profile so AIChE can match you with future volunteer opportunities for which you are both qualified and interested. Looking for a good place to start? Consider volunteering to serve on committees or get involved at the Annual Meeting or a Local Section meeting. Log on to www.aiche.org/volunteer and check out all of the opportunities to get involved!

Access the membership directory: Learn who the members are, where they work, and who might be a potential collaborator

As a member, one of the most valuable benefits you have is access to the contact information of fellow members. When you reach out to members for informal discussions on the Engage Membership Directory, be confident in the knowledge that you are not intruding or “interrupting” their day by contacting them. They also joined AIChE for a specific purpose –they too want to expand their networks and seek out new career opportunities. So reach out and ask for “Informational Interviews” where you can learn how you can position yourself for success in their industry. Ask them questions about their projects, careers, and roles in AIChE. Invest in these relationships early on.



The informational interview

The informational interview is the lifeblood of networking and it is the best and most efficient way in which two people can come together to learn about how they can possibly help each other in the future. When you ask a fellow AIChE member for an informational interview or informal conversation, this is a code phrase that tells them you are not trying to “get” a tangible benefit from them, but rather are looking to grow a win-win alliance for the long-term. Therefore, they are more likely to speak with you than if you ask for a job at their firm. When you reach out and request an informational interview, tell the other party a little about yourself, where you are in your career now, and that you are looking to grow your career in this arena in the future. Ask for only 15 minutes by phone or skype. Ask questions such as:

- What types of opportunities are available for someone with my expertise?
- How can I best prepare for an opportunity at your company?
- What skills do you especially look for and don't often see in candidates?
- What's the best part of your job?
- What challenges will you be working on in the future?

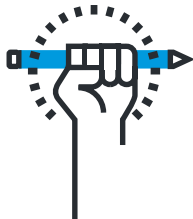
And then don't forget to connect with them on LinkedIn and keep them informed of your progress!

Seek leadership positions: Demonstrate that you want to make a positive contribution to the AIChE community

Serving in a leadership role in AIChE elevates your brand, attitude and reputation. It gives you a reason to reach out and connect with other members and additional society stakeholders, and it serves as a credential – the organization elected you to this position, so they perceive you as a leader. It goes a long way to even help you create your own career opportunities!

Write for ChEnected and other AIChE publications

When you write an article or a blog for ChEnected, for example, you spotlight your skills, passion, and abilities to the entire community. Readers get a sense of your knowledge, and communications and organizational talents, and you showcase your professionalism and dedication to becoming a ChemE. These are all characteristics that decision-makers are looking for in the hiring process. Essentially, you are building buzz around your name and brand, so when a job opens up, the decision-maker thinks of you first.



Attend the AIChE Meetings strategically

Plan out your schedule, reach out to other members in advance and ask for 15-minute coffee appointments, and introduce yourself to speakers after their talks. If you are speaking or presenting a poster or participating in a competition, invite leaders to attend and post your achievements on social media before and after. For the Career Fair, research companies in advance so you have some educated questions to ask recruiters, and of course bring plenty of copies of your resume.



TIP: show up to talks a few minutes early and introduce yourself to someone who is sitting near you. You get to network with them for only a short period of time but that is the point- the networking has an expiration date and time (when the presentation begins), so this is an especially good tip for networking newbies!

Leverage career services

Not every association has a career services division, but AIChE has specifically invested in career services for your benefit! So take full advantage of their offerings. AIChE's career center, CareerEngineer, has job postings that may not be advertised elsewhere, and its resume/CV "bank" is perused surreptitiously by decision-makers looking for people they wish to invite to apply for open positions. Submit your resume to the bank, and join and contribute to listservs reserved for career-related discussions. Attend professional development webinars and workshops.

Research organizations to understand the hiring landscape and corporate culture

AIChE's publications, website, and even the technical program for its conferences provide a wealth of information about the many, many companies and institutions that hire ChemEs. Read through these sources carefully to get a sense of who is hiring, what sectors are growing and where, and what it is like to work for certain firms. You can gather data that will help you determine where the biggest needs are for employment.



Organize your marketing materials

To land a job, you need to ensure that all of your marketing outputs, which include your brand statement(s), resume or CV or both, and cover letter templates are all reflective of

the full extent of your value to employers. Take time to read through these to make sure they communicate the right information about yourself.

Tidy up your online presence

Most of your networking will take place via phone and skype, and will commence when you send a "cold email" to someone asking for the informational interview or informal conversation. As soon as you reach out to that person, they will google you and look up your LinkedIn profile. So find out what is "out there" about you, remove any potentially compromising photos from your social media accounts, and spiffy up your LinkedIn profile with a professional-looking photo, an engaging headline about your career goals, and an updated list of your skills.



Your profile on social media

The same rules apply for all professional online platforms, not just LinkedIn. If you plan on contacting fellow members of AIChE through Engage, be sure that your profile makes a good first impression. Your Engage profile should include a good photo, your current location, work/internship experience, volunteer leadership experience and your future career goals.

Become active on social media

Play an important role in advancing the missions of the profession of ChemE, the ChemE community, your fellow ChemEs, and your own career progression. Tweet and post strategically and professionally on various social media channels with the aim of contributing value to audiences. Share ideas, links to interesting articles, notes about cool conferences, and announcements about awards, fellowships, and even jobs. The more you are active, the more you are seen as a contributing member of the ChemE enterprise. Join AIChE's various social media channels and groups, follow AIChE on Twitter and Facebook, and don't forget to hashtag your posts so your fellow members can see what you are saying.

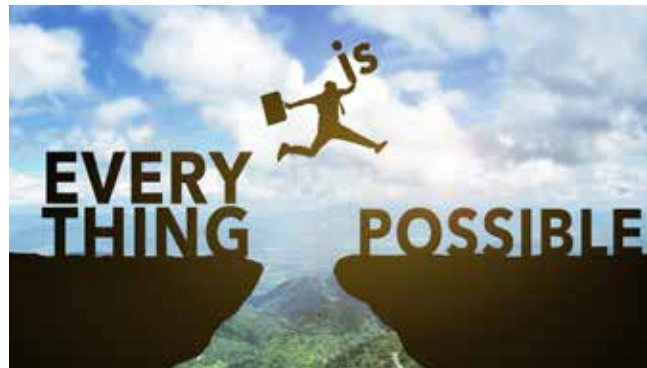
Don't give up!

Your dream job(s) and career(s) are out there. You may not know what they are yet, and you may end up creating your own job (through networking and effective self-promotion!). AIChE will be there with you, to enable your success.

Just know that every experience you have will prepare you for the next even better opportunity.



No matter what vocation you choose and where you are in your profession, do ensure that AIChE continues to serve as your strategic partner for success. Because, frankly, that's what it is there to do – to help you be the best superhero you can be.





Here's to your brilliant ChemE Career!

Author's Note: Excerpts and some of these concepts have appeared in other works by the author, including her book, *Networking for Nerds* (Wiley, 2015), career columns in *NatureJobs*, *Physics Today*, and *Nature Astronomy*, and other publications.

Alaina G. Levine is an award-winning entrepreneur, STEM career consultant, science journalist, professional speaker, corporate comedian, and author of *Networking for Nerds* (Wiley, 2015). As President of Quantum Success Solutions, she is a prolific speaker and writer on career development and professional advancement for engineers and scientists, and regularly serves as a speaker for the AIChE Annual Student Conference and Annual Meeting. If you are interested in obtaining some personalized career coaching or having her speak at your university or company, contact Alaina at alaina@alainalevine.com, through her website, www.alainalevine.com, or connect with her on LinkedIn www.linkedin.com/in/AlainaGLEvine.