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Enhancing Professional and Personal Development

The Art of Networking



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Networking

"I read somewhere that everybody on this planet is separated by only six other people. Six degrees of separation between us and everyone else on this planet... I find it extremely comforting that we're so close. I also find it like Chinese water torture, that we're so close because you have to find the right six people to make the right connection... I am bound, you are bound, to everyone on this planet by a trail of six people." – John Guare, Six Degrees of Separation (1993)

What is Networking?

Networking is not just a strategy by which you develop associations that may be useful when you search for a job. It is also a powerful way of building professional relationships by actively fostering contacts and creating ways to circulate information. And the surprising thing is you do it every day without even realizing it. Many decisions you make are based on information you received by word-of-mouth.

Many people are uncomfortable about the idea of asking for help. But the fact is, most people like to be asked for help or advice. It makes them feel knowledgeable and important. Knowing that you value their expertise will often motivate someone to go out of their way to help you.

Disclaimer: Don't be fooled – networking requires work. It takes time, effort, and motivation to build and maintain lasting relationships and it does not end once you have a job. Continued networking will increase your visibility in your field and establish personal connections that will help you move forward in your career.



Why is networking important in a job search?

Nowadays, most organizations don't advertise job openings. They look first at people they know and people who come recommended by people they know before resorting to the classifieds. Even in a good economy, one is more likely to find a job through personal contacts rather than through any other means. At this point in your life (entering the job market), more than any other time, you have an advantage: people are out there willing to help you.

These are just some of the reasons networking is critical to professional success:

1. Jobs posted on the internet and even those listed with campus recruiters have often been filled or are close to being filled by the time you become aware of them.
2. You will face less competition because no more than a handful of other people will typically be brought in through an organization's own networking activities
3. Networking also gets you access to people who might not be responsive to a direct approach letter, and may also give you with the added advantage of a recommendation from someone the hiring manager knows.

How the Center for Professional Excellence can help you:

- Attend professional events and presentations offered by the Center for Professional Excellence
- Connect with professionals on LinkedIn.com
- Meet with a career advisor to identify people in your network
- Participate in the Shadowing/Mentoring program to meet professionals in your career area of interest.

Who is Already in My Network?

Create a Contact List

The next step in preparing for networking is to prepare a comprehensive list of people you know. The average person potentially has 250 people in his or her network. The following classifications are provided to assist you in preparing a contact list and will hopefully serve to jog your memory regarding persons whose names may not immediately come to mind, regardless of whether or not you believe they can be of help to you in your job search.

Social Contacts

Friends	Neighbors	Acquaintances
Church members	Relatives	Social club members

Educational Contacts

Teachers	Professors	Class officers
Fellow alumni	Class members	School administration
Fraternity members	Sorority members	Alumni association officers

Community Contacts

Clergy	Public office holders	Service club officers	Business leaders
Politicians	Business brokers	Chamber of Commerce	Insurance agents
Attorneys	Public accountants	Service club members	Beautician/ Barber
Bank officers	Stock brokers	Doctor/Dentist	Storeowners

Business Contacts

Industry leaders	Competitors	Salespersons	Attorneys
Consultants	Headhunters	Vendors/suppliers	Stock brokers
Customers	Business brokers	Insurance Agents	Public accountants
Bosses	Co-workers	Subordinates	Past employers
Bank Officers	Venture capitalists	Trade/Professional association members	

Ways to Develop Other Contacts

- Connect with professionals on LinkedIn.com
- Enlist the help of your siblings and close friends
- Attend professional/trade association meetings
- Volunteer for non-profit organizations
- Visit with members of your social/religious groups
- Talk to your neighbors
- Strike up a conversation with someone else waiting in line or in an office
- Invite a friend you haven't seen for a while to lunch
- Sign up for a club or class of interest
- Meet with friends of your parents – or older relatives – who are retired
- Track down former co-workers
- Become an early-morning regular at a coffee shop or restaurant known for its professional clientele
- Join a health club that's utilized by professionals in your industry, especially during the lunch hour

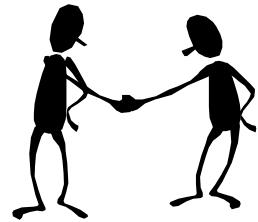
Plan Before you begin networking activities, you need to determine what you're going after. To help others help you, it is important to first identify your:

Your Networking Strategy to Ensure Success

Prepare yourself before networking

- skills and interests
- accomplishments
- career options/positions

Create a personal “sound bite”(15-20 seconds) or “commercial” (30-60 seconds) highlighting your career aspirations and something that makes you especially appealing to employers.



Networking tools:

- Update your resume/LinkedIn profile to highlight your skills/qualifications in further detail.
- Create networking cards containing your contact information and a short summary the type of job you are seeking. You may consider printing highlights from your resume on the back (key words, skills, qualifications).

Setting up Informational Interviews

Food for thought:

1 out of every 200 resumes results in a job offer.

1 out of every 12 informational interviews results in a job offer.

It's the ultimate networking technique. Informational interviewing is just what it sounds like – interviewing to gather information. Then, do your homework. Don't ask for information from your contacts that you could have easily discovered by doing a little research. The more you know about your contact and his/her company and industry, the more impressive you will appear.

Once you're ready, start by contacting people on the list you've developed. It might be easiest to start with the ones you already know. Develop a script to help to lessen your feelings of intimidation and awkwardness.

For example:

“Hello, Mr. Jones. This is Janet Johnson calling. I am currently an Elmhurst College student and am exploring some possible career directions before I graduate this May. I would love to interview you very briefly about your career. I would not take more than 30 minutes of your time. Would you be available this week to speak with me?”

Once you have a meeting scheduled, create an outline for the conversation.

1. Build rapport – “Break the Ice” - thank the person for seeing you, establish commonality

2. Reason for contact - Tell the person why you are there (seeking advice, information and resources). Ask for assistance but don't pressure them for a job. This is an immediate turn-off.

3. Explain your current situation. – Provide information on your progress toward your educational goals, the type of industries, companies, and positions you are or will be seeking.

4. Question and Answer Session - Ask questions, share observations, etc. This is the place to take advantage of your contact's experience, industry knowledge, trends, problems, etc. (See sample questions below)

5. Referrals - Ask your contact for the names of 2-3 other people who might be helpful to you.

Remember, the average person potentially has 250 people in their network.

6. Thank You – Follow Up - Express your appreciation and commit to follow up at some date in the near future.

What to Ask

When you go into an interview, it is a good idea to have in mind questions you would like answered. Below we have listed some questions you might want to ask.

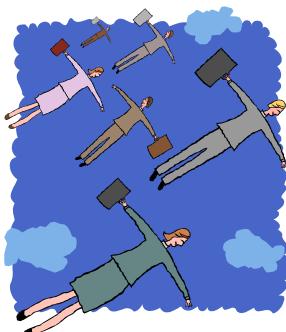
Disclaimer: This is not a comprehensive list – there are numerous questions you could ask that are not included here.

- How did you decide on this career?
- What was your major in college?
- How do you apply your major to the work you do?
- How did you get into this field and your present position?
- Please give me a general description of the work you do, including duties and responsibilities.
- What do you do on a typical day in your job?
- Why did you take this job?
- What kind of skills does someone need to be able to do your job?
- What percentage of your time is spent doing what?
- What are things you find most rewarding about your work?
- What is the most difficult aspect of your job/career?
- How does your job affect your personal life, if it does so?
- What are the entry-level jobs in your area?
- What educational degrees, licenses, or other credentials are required for entry and advancement in your kind of work?
- What kinds of changes are taking place in this field of work?
- Is your work seasonal? If so, when are you busiest? What do you do the rest of the year?
- What are the opportunities for advancement? What does the career ladder look like?
- What are the trade/professional groups to which you belong, and which do you find the most beneficial in your work?
- What skills, interests, values, and personality characteristics are important for a position in your field?
- Are there any particular publications that I should read in order to acquaint myself with what is happening in the industry?
- What experiences would you advise undergraduates to have while in school if they want a job like yours or in a related field?
- What types of employers hire people to perform the kind of work you do? Do you know of any which offer entry-level training programs?
- If you were hiring someone today for an entry-level position, what would be the most critical factors influencing your choice of one candidate over another?
- What is the typical entry-level salary range for someone in this profession?
- How do people usually learn about job offerings in your field?
- Could you recommend others in your field that I may talk with?

You'll find that most people will be receptive if approached in the right way. It may be necessary to stress that you are not seeking an interview for employment. Your goal is to establish a relationship that may be beneficial to you in the future.

And finally, some more tips:

- **Treat networking like a game.** View it as making contacts, creating relationships, finding out about essentials, even as making friends. Consider it today's answer to the lost art of conversation and its cousin, letter writing.
- **Realize that you, too, have something to offer.** As a college student or new graduate, your knowledge of business may be limited and your professional contacts have not been established. But, remember that most seasoned business people know that what goes around comes around and that everyone has to start somewhere.
- **Honor the networking code.** Another way to say this is "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." If you want to have phone calls returned, return phone calls. If you want help with your career, you must be willing to help others. You aren't obligated to accept a position from a referral, but you are expected to follow up. You're also expected to report back to your original contact to say thanks.
- **Make networking a priority.** If you're in the throes of a job search, your first priority should be networking. After you've accepted a job, it's easy to heave a sigh of relief and assume your networking days are over – at least until your next job search. Think again. Every contact you make while working is a potential jewel in your networking crown.
- **Keep track of your contacts – and keep up with them.** That means if you landed the job of your dreams, let networking contacts know that your search has ended and where you're working, and thank them for their assistance. Call contacts occasionally to see how they're doing with no agenda other than keeping in touch. Let them know what you're up to and do a little self-promotion.
- **Don't wait until you're desperate to network.** Networking is a lot like flossing your teeth. For it to do you any good, you have to do it regularly. It takes time to rev up your network's engine if it's been cold or idle for too long. You want to keep it humming so you can quickly shift into high gear.
- **Look for opportunities others might miss.** Networking isn't just about finding people who can help you locate a job. Sometimes the most valuable networking you can do is within your company.
- **Ask permission to use a name.** The main reason for asking permission is courtesy. When you mention names, you're capitalizing on your contact's rank and reputation within the business world, so you want to make sure you have his or her knowledge and approval.
- **Never underestimate the power of a thank-you note.** This lets him or her know that you understand and appreciate his or her effort and contribution. It also allows you to provide a short progress report and feedback about the referrals. Last but not least, it paves the way for future contact.
- **Remember that you're never too old or successful to network.** Don't think that executives or others in authority positions are uninterested or unreachable. Many senior executives are delighted to be contacted and want to share the knowledge they've acquired over the years. And when you reach a pinnacle of your own career, remember to keep networking.



**Now, get out there and
NETWORK your way to SUCCESS!!**