

Career & Employment Center

Networking

Adapted from an article featured on the Career Guide portion of MonsterTrak.com

Successful individuals understand that it's not always what you know, but **who** you know that can guide you to the right information and opportunities. Networking is the process of gathering helpful information from a network of contacts to assist you in planning your career and looking for jobs. Networking and Informational Interviewing have some similarities. Networking is identifying contacts that may help you land a job, while Informational Interviewing is only for the purpose of gathering information about a specific career or field, and is used at the beginning of your career exploration. See our handout on Informational Interviewing in the Career Center.

Benefits of Networking

- ✓ **Get advice about your job search** – Speaking to people who work in your field can teach you what works. If your field happens to be competitive and hard to break into, networking with professionals can provide you with leads on jobs that will never be advertised.
- ✓ **Validate your choice of career** - By learning what it is like to work as a physician, teacher, or accountant, you can confirm whether your chosen major or career is right for you before you invest your education and one or more years in a chosen field that is not satisfying to you.
- ✓ **Refine your interviewing skills** – Networking gives you the opportunity to speak about your interests and goals with a variety of professionals. Not only do you become comfortable engaging in conversations with these contacts, you can also improve your interview questions and answers through this experience.
- ✓ **Uncover information about a specific employer or job** – Many students limit their research on an employer to reviewing the company's website or reading printed literature. Networking with current employees or others who are familiar with the organization provide a more comprehensive picture of the opportunity.

Exploding the Myths of Networking

- ✓ Networking is **not** only for job-seekers who know a lot of people and are well-connected. You may feel that your list of contacts is too small to be of any use to you, but you will be surprised by how many people you know once you begin developing your contact list. Interestingly, it is likely that your strongest contacts will be those you do not know well. This phenomenon is called “the strength of weak ties” and has been studied by

sociologists who found that acquaintances are more likely than family or friends to give individuals direct information or recommend them for opportunities.

- ✓ Networking is **not** only for outgoing extroverts. It is natural to feel somewhat shy about approaching others for advice. If you find this to be true for you, you may want to begin your initial efforts with people you know well. You may also want to find a networking style that is comfortable to you, such as writing instead of calling to schedule meetings.
- ✓ Networking is **not** bothering people who are unwilling to help you. Most people love to talk about their jobs and what they do. In fact, letting other people do you a favor allows them to feel needed and gives them an opportunity to offer their expertise and be of service. Asking them for help can invest them in you and your future success.
- ✓ Networking is **not** asking for a job. The purpose of networking is to gather information to assist you in planning your career and in looking for a job. When you ask someone for a job there are only two possible responses – “yes, I have a job opening” or, more likely, “no, I do not have a job opening now.” This ends your conversation with someone who could have potentially provided you with valuable information.

How to Network

- ✓ **Develop a list of potential contacts.** The following can be helpful for developing your list.
 - Classmates
 - Alumni, especially recent grads
 - Parents and other family
 - Parents of classmates
 - Professors and other advisors
 - Current and former employers
 - Guest speaker and Career Fair representatives
 - Members of clubs or other organizations to which you belong
 - Members of professional associations
 - High school teachers, the family doctor, etc.

All of your friends, relatives, and colleagues have friends, relatives and colleagues who can be tapped for information about a particular field. They may refer you to people who can help.

- ✓ **Decide what your purpose is in contacting your network.** This depends on where you are in your career planning. If you are in the early stage of career planning and you are exploring majors or career directions, then your purpose is to gather information about jobs and careers of interest to you. This will include information about job duties, educational preparation, future growth in the field, and recommended work experience. If you are in the later stage of career planning and you are conducting a job search for either full-time or co-op/internship positions, then your purpose is to obtain advice on how to conduct your job search and to get job leads. This will include information about employers in your field, descriptions of various work environments, hiring strategies, preferred qualifications, and referrals to employers who have openings.

- ✓ **Carefully review what you have to offer and what you are seeking.** Knowing yourself better will enable you to talk easily with greater confidence to your networking contacts. Consider your skills, interests and values. What are your greatest accomplishments? What are the skills or experiences that enabled you to achieve these accomplishments? What interests you professionally and personally? What courses, work experiences or activities do you enjoy? (Visit the SRJC Career Center or visit the Virtual Career Center to take self-assessment tests.)
- ✓ **Practice introductions of yourself** that you can use in meeting your networking contacts. Depending on the situation, you'll want to use a brief version, or a more detailed version. The brief one will be good for Career Fairs or receptions where you don't have much time to talk, or for telephone conversations with contacts you don't know. The long version, typically 30-60 seconds works well during a meeting or informational interview with one of your networking contacts.

Examples:

The Short Version – “Hi, my name is Jennifer Vargas. I'm a psychology major at _____ University and I'm interested in learning more about the human resources field.”

The Long Version – “I became interested in the human resources field last summer when I interned at the Santa Rosa YMCA and got to know the Human Resources director there. I had always planned to follow the traditional route to graduate school but her job fascinated me. She worked in all aspects of employee relations and hiring and had a sincere interest in helping people. I liked the variety of her job and the fact that she was a very positive influence in the YMCA. When I returned to school this fall, I decided to add a business class and I also joined the Human Resources Management Association. Next semester I will begin taking courses as a management major and I hope to obtain an internship in human resources next summer.”

In the beginning, you talk to people who are family members, friends, professors or other close contacts. When these initial contacts lead to later meetings with people they refer you to, make sure you have your short and long introductions ready.

When you have been referred to someone you do not know or you are contacting someone without the benefit of an acquaintance's referral, a well-written letter is a good idea. When writing a letter, follow these guidelines:

- Opening paragraph – State why you are writing and identify yourself. Always lead with the name of the person that referred you to the contact, if you have one. For example, “Caroline Marcus suggested that I write to you about my interest in _____.”
- Middle paragraph – Provide information about your background and your career interests, however tentative. Make sure to state that you are in the process of gathering information about career possibilities. Ask about the possibility of arranging a meeting or conversation by telephone or email.
- Last paragraph – Thank your networking contact for their time and consideration of your request. Offer to telephone them after they have had an opportunity to review your letter, usually in a week, to schedule a convenient time to have a conversation.

An alternative to writing is to use the phone. As with the letter, always clearly identify yourself, and the reason you're calling. Communicating by email is the easiest way to contact busy professionals.

- **Follow-up is very important.** Acknowledge the assistance of everyone who helped you, even in the smallest of ways. Stay in touch with your network of contacts to keep them informed of your activities and make a special point to let them know the results of the advice they gave you. Doing this will help them think of you when they learn of an opportunity that would be perfect for you.