

NETWORKING

What is networking?

Networking is the process of developing a collection of people you can call on for help with various aspects of your career development and job searches. Your network should include people who are willing to give you information about their fields as well as feedback on your career development. Your network should also include people who may be in a position to tell you about job opportunities that are open either within their organization or elsewhere.

Why is networking important?

When you apply for a job through the newspaper, a job search website or a Career and Professional Development Center listing, you are one of many candidates -- sometimes you are one of several hundred people applying for a position. When you hear about a job opening through a contact, i.e. a member of your network, you can often cite that person in your cover letter, thus helping your application to stand out from the crowd. In some cases, your contact will even make a call on your behalf and encourage a potential employer to give you more substantial consideration. In any of these scenarios, you will be more distinctive than many other candidates because of your network. Without that contact person, you might have not been considered, as your resume would blend in with several hundred others.

In addition, hearing about a position through your network may allow you to get a head start because you may be able to get your application in before the job is even posted. In other cases, a person who is part of your network and is impressed with you may be in a position to create a new job within her or his organization and may tailor it to fit not only the organization's needs, but also your strengths.

When should I begin networking, and can I stop once I have a job?

You should begin networking as soon as you determine which career field you will pursue. You may also begin to network even earlier as you meet people while doing informational interviews to research a field that has grabbed your attention.

You must maintain your network, even once you have secured a job. You could lose your job or decide to leave at any point and you will be in a much better position if you have kept in contact with the members of your network than if you need to track down and re-connect with those who helped you in the past. In addition, you should continue to add new contacts to your network, throughout your career.

Is networking more relevant in some fields than others?

Networking is important in all career fields and at all professional levels. Some of your networking experiences may differ, depending on the culture of your profession and/or the culture of the organization you work within. For example, some professional cultures include networking opportunities like golf outings or social/professional gatherings. In other fields,

people work more independently and must create their own opportunities to meet people. In either case, there are many people in all fields who are willing to help other professionals, particularly young people just getting started in their careers.

6 Steps to Effective Networking

1. Prepare to keep records of your Network

Start a *Network Notebook and Folder*. Once you start to network, in order to remain effective you need to stay organized. You need to remember your network names, addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, how you made the contact, when you made the contact and a few notes about each interaction with that person. In this notebook, write down everything and keep business cards given to you by people in your network. Some students choose to keep their network records on the computer.

2. Define your Network

Your network is just about everyone that you know. This includes current and past professors, advisors, current and past supervisors, alumni, your Career and Professional Development Center Consultant, friends from home, friends from school, friends from clubs, colleagues that you meet at conferences, colleagues that you meet in your professional organization, colleagues that you are working with now, people you worked with in summer internships, your family, neighbors from home, neighbors from where you live now (it might even include family members of your friends!). Write down in your notebook everyone in your network and gather as much information on each person as possible (where they work, what they do, phone numbers, etc.).

Keep expanding your network. Go to a conference in your profession and meet more colleagues. Join and attend the meetings of your local professional organization.

3. Decide what you want from each person in your Network

Because at different times in your life, you will be plugging into your network for different purposes, you need to decide each time why you are contacting various people. Is it to let them know that you are looking for a new job? To let them know that you are aware of a job opening that may interest them? To find out about a conference in your field?

If you are contacting your network because you are looking for a new job then you may be calling them for the following reasons:

- a. *You are interested in scheduling an informational interview* - a great way to get in the door and talk with the people who can hire you. This is a very non-threatening method to talk with people about what they do and about their business. You can gather information, get advice, show them your resume, and get the names of other contacts. In the future, they may think of you when they have an opening (see the Informational Interviews Career Success Guide handout).
- b. *You heard they have/know of a job opening* - you would like to know more about the position, the name of the person to send your resume to. You could also ask if you might use their name in the cover letter.
- c. *Ask them if they know of any job openings* - not the best option because if they don't have any openings then you essentially have nothing to talk about. Instead use the

informational interview option. If they have a job opening they will surely let you know at that time.

4. Practice talking to your Network

Before you call/email/see in person the people in your network, practice what you are going to say. You may want to write down and try a couple different versions (scripts) to see which sounds the best and which makes you feel the most comfortable. If someone else recommended that you call this person, remember to introduce to yourself and to say who recommended that you call. Practice with a friend or in front of a mirror (sometimes your own worst critic!).

5. Making contacts within your Network

Contact everyone in your network (or email them or see them in person) and let them know that you are looking for a new job (or for whatever purpose you decided). Be respectful of their busy schedules. If you are trying to schedule a time to meet with them, give them several dates and times (see the Cold Calling and Telephone Interviews Career Success Guide handout). Remember to keep track of everything in your Network Notebook.

6. Follow-up with all contacts

Follow-up with each person you contact by writing a quick and brief thank you note. If you promised them some materials, keep your word. However, follow-up does not end here. Keep in touch with your network throughout this whole process. Your relationship with each person will dictate how often you follow-up. You can call a person whom you know fairly well every few weeks; you can call (or email) a person whom you know through a friend once a month. Possible follow-up reasons: to send an updated resume, to update them on the progress you have made in your search, to let them know of any results from people they recommended that you call. The purpose of keeping in touch is to make sure they think of your name when a position opens.

Summary

Remember that networking is a two-way process. There will come a time during your career when you can help others, so be generous with others who are also networking.

Networking is not an easy process. It takes lots of time, energy and planning. If you keep making those contacts, following-up on all leads, thanking people, and taking the advice of others, you will eventually find someone, who knows someone, who knows someone else, who knows someone else, who has the perfect job for you!

Networking Problem Solving

Why is Networking Difficult?

Easy to forget whom you called and when

Hard to start a new Network

You may feel guilty or have a hard time asking others to help you

Good networking takes time; it's easy to get discouraged

Difficult to sell your good points

Hard to make cold calls

Tips to Make Networking Easier

Stay organized by using a notebook or a document on your computer.

Keep your Network active even when you aren't looking, so that when you need to contact your Network it will be easier.

Keep your Network a two-way process by helping others to network and then it won't be as difficult to ask them for help when the time comes. Don't feel like you are imposing when you call, think to yourself "if positions were reversed, would I help them?"

Think of networking as an investment in your career, not unlike taking a class, attending a conference, or other activities that you would willingly commit to. Maintain a positive attitude, and be enthusiastic and genuine with all of your contacts.

Think of networking as marketing yourself. Always have your business card and your resume when meeting with people.

Get leads from your network. Keep calling more people (set-up a schedule for yourself).