

Networking

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Building Relationships

Networking is a concept that often sounds intimidating to job-seekers. When you break it down into its basic elements, however, networking is two not-so-scary tasks: 1) building relationships and 2) sharing information. Nearly everyone has implemented networking in the past whether they realize it or not. Have you ever asked a classmate for a suggestion on what class to take? Needed a suggestion for a good restaurant in the area and asked a friend or co-worker? This is networking!

Why Networking is Successful

It is estimated that 60% or more of jobs are found via networking. Employers prefer to find candidates via referrals because studies show that those employees tend to be more successful on the job and also stay in the position longer than those hired through other methods. It is also more time efficient and cost effective to hire someone via a referral.

Another reason networking is so highly successful is that the process of networking allows you to showcase skills and qualities that employers seek: communication skills, motivation, initiative, and confidence.

Networking Steps

Step 1: Create a List of Those In Your Network

Many people have made the wrong assumption that your networking list should only include those people working in your industry of interest. This is not true. Your networking list should include every friend, family member, or acquaintance who might be willing to help you out regardless of their line of work. The St. Paul Campus Career Center has a Networking Contact Log Handout to help you brainstorm your network contacts.

Step 2: Develop your “Elevator Speech” or “Personal Commercial”

To be effective in networking, you need to clearly communicate what you are looking for in terms of work and what skills and experiences you can bring to the table. As a result, you should have a quick 30-60 second statement that summarizes your education, related experience and your job target.

Example

My name is Sue Smith and I plan to graduate in May with a degree in Family Social Science. I have spent the past six months working part time at a program for teen moms called CHART. I have been involved in individual counseling and teaching small groups. I also completed an internship with a local non-profit where I developed a new class that helps young mothers learn effective parenting techniques. I am currently looking for a full time job in the Twin Cities area where I can work with adolescents in a counseling role.

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Times to use your elevator speech (variations of the speech will be needed depending on the circumstances):

- When someone you just met asks you “What do you do for a living?/What is your major?”
- Family members, friends or acquaintances ask you “What’s new?”
- When introducing yourself to recruiters at job fairs.
- When cold calling a stranger for an informational interview.

Step 3: Contact People In Your Network

The next step in networking is to contact those people you already know. Use your elevator speech to explain to them your background and career goal, and then ask if they have any advice or if they know of someone that you can talk to in your industry. Collect any names and contact information they provide. Ask if you can mention their name when you call the new contact.

Step 4: Attend Events, Be Visible, Meet Others

An important part of networking is to put yourself in places to meet new people and re-connect with old acquaintances. Always be ready to use a formal or informal version of your elevator speech. You would be surprised how often strangers will share job lead information or contacts! Some ideas connecting with people:

- Join a professional association: attend professional events, and/or volunteer for the organization.
- Go to family reunions, extended family gatherings, or parties and talk to people you meet there.
- Consider striking up a conversation with a stranger on a bus, airplane or in a class.
- Join the alumni mentor program or attend alumni events in your college to meet professionals.

Step 5: Conduct Informational Interviews

Once you have generated contact names of people in your industry through family and friends, your goal should be to meet with these new individuals face to face to see their organization, get job search advice, and to learn about their jobs. This process is called Informational Interviewing and is outlined in detail on a handout in the St. Paul Campus Career Center.

Networking Tips

- Do not bluntly ask someone for a job when networking; this makes people uncomfortable.
 - More phone calls lead to more job leads. Assign yourself a quota of calls and informational interviews to be made each week to stay on task.
 - If calling makes you uncomfortable, consider introducing yourself via email and following up with a telephone call. For a sample letter visit: <http://www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/2002/summer/art03.pdf>
 - Follow through with referrals, and always thank contacts in writing for their time.
 - Keep a resume or business card with you at all times should a chance encounter become a contact.
 - Write down your elevator speech and practice it so it flows effortlessly.
 - Stay organized when networking. Have a system for tracking contacts and take notes to remember the details about new contacts you develop.
 - Stay in touch with contacts! Staying in contact with people is key. Ask if you can keep them posted on your search, send them articles that may be of interest, and let them know when you followed their suggestion.
 - Successful networkers respect that people are busy and don’t ask for too much time.
 - Never use someone’s name without permission when calling a new contact.
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