
Networking Overview

According to *Merriam-Webster*

Networking:

net·work·ing: function: *noun*

1 : the exchange of information or services among individuals, groups, or institutions; *specifically* : the cultivation of productive relationships for employment or business

What networking is:

Networking is building and maintaining long-term relationships with others. Networking is one way to tap into the important “hidden job market” that so many people talk about. This “hidden job market” exists because companies want to hire who they know. Therefore, internal candidates, former interns, and referrals are the first method companies try to fill positions. When you look at the classified ads in the newspaper, you are most likely looking at the positions that could not be filled via the hidden job market.

There are two basic types of networking: *informational interviews & job search networking*.

- Informational interviews help you determine a career path & make important decisions by seeking out information about a company/industry. (See sample questions below.)
- Job search networking involves communicating your availability & seeking job leads.

Networking is not:

- Just about collecting business cards. (It’s more about relationships than a stack of cards!)
- Meeting as many people as possible. (Think “Quality” over “Quantity”)
- “Schmoozing,” or selling yourself.
- Taking advantage of the people you know; ideally, they will benefit from the relationship too.

Who can be in your network:

- Anyone & everyone!

Where to network:

Local small business expos; workshops & seminars in your field of interest; luncheons or presentations; volunteer events; temporary positions; sports leagues; online networking groups.

Networking Do's & Don'ts:

DO:

- Make initial contact in a respectful manner. Send an introductory e-mail or make an introductory phone call. Be sure to mention where you received their name (and make sure it was okay with the referring individual that you use their name).
- Respect other people's time. Ask them if they have time available. Be mindful of time zones! If you are meeting with someone, ask for a time period (e.g. half an hour, 1 hour) and stick to it!
- Prepare! Make sure you have researched as much as possible about the company and/or industry. You will create a stronger impression and they will be more likely to remember you. Also, try to keep up on current events to speak intelligently about other topics, which is especially important if attending a social function.
- Remember to "dress to impress," if meeting a contact in person.
- Have an updated resume readied for use (e.g. emailed, mailed or taken to an appointment).
- Listen actively & wholeheartedly while talking with your contacts. Then respond. Don't pressure yourself to formulate questions or comments while the other person is talking. Feel free to take notes or have questions written down.
- Follow every lead & have an open mind in terms of your potential career path. Consider other options. Be willing to take less pay or a lower position, especially if the company is ideal or the position supports your long-term goals.
- Note your reactions objectively, but pay attention to your gut instincts. Your instincts are often a useful tool.
- Be professional, positive, and appreciative of their time.
- Thank everyone who helps you in your job/internship search. Send thank you notes or call them to thank them personally and let them know how your search is going or if you landed a position.
- Follow through with your network. If you are to send information or a resume to a contact, be sure to send it as soon as possible. Keep in touch by sending them holiday cards, asking them to lunch, suggesting a potential project, sending a referral, or inquiring about a news topic regarding their business/career field. Try to give as much as you get out of the relationship. If needed, put reminders in your planner or PDA.
- Get to know various people and their work. Chatting with people casually (on a bus, at a checkout, social gatherings, etc.) can often give you some great, helpful information. The more you do it, the more you will be comfortable with it.
- Write down key information from each conversation as soon as possible to remember as much as you can. Be sure to remember names!
- Make graceful exits if you are attending a social function. When you would like to speak with another guest, you might say something like, "It's been great talking with you, but I have a few others to catch up with as well." When you leave for the evening, be sure to thank your hosts.

DON'T:

- Assume that the people you contact will give you a job. While networking can help you get a position, it does not happen by simply handing you a job. Your contacts will need to get to know you before they can feel confident in referring you. It is often best to at least initially stick with gathering advice, information, and learning about their work. Sometimes, your contacts will not have direct influence on the hiring process, but may have an indirect influence and/or can give you advice on the hiring process. Your contacts should not be considered your personal headhunters.

- Be discouraged if someone does not have time or the ability to help you. Simply move on to your next potential contact.
- Avoid a contact because you assumed they cannot help you or you “don’t have time.” Networking is an important activity that you should never carelessly dismiss. If you are sure the individual cannot help your cause, thank them for their time after offering to pass their information on to an interested friend/colleague.
- Repeatedly contact an individual who indicates they can no longer be of assistance to you.
- Take one person’s opinion as the truth for everyone. Be sure to get information from numerous people to get a broader information base about a company or field.
- Make up your mind about an industry or company based on appearance or likeability of the facility or your contact. Take all factors into consideration.
- Pass up an opportunity to network.
- Take cell phone calls during functions or meetings. Be sure to turn your phone off ahead of time.

Sample Questions for Informational Interviewing and Networking

- I’m fascinated by this field and would like to know how most people get into the field.
- How did you become interested in this field?
- What do you think is the best educational preparation for a career in your field?
- Which part of the job is most challenging for you?
- Do you think there is enough growth in the business that you would advise someone like me to get into it?
- The industry has been going through dramatic changes in the last few years, what have you seen from the inside of your company?
- Of all the individuals you have met in your work, what personal attributes do you think are essential to success?
- How often are there lay-offs in this field? How does it affect the moral of your employees?
- Where could I write to get up to date materials on individuals working in this field?
- Which professional journals and organizations should I know about?
- I would like to walk through and see with my own eyes the areas where you and your coworkers spend the day. Can that be arranged?
- What are the qualifications you look for in this position?
- As far as you know, which companies hire and train the most recent college graduates?
- What skills are required of an individual in your field on a day to day basis?
- What do you think of the experience I have had so far, in terms of getting into the field?
- What experiences have you had that you think have been invaluable to your learning the business?
- Which classes would you recommend I take before I go any further?
- Would you describe a typical work day in your life for me, please?
- How often do you work past 6:00 and on the week-ends and holidays?
- What else do you think I need to know in order to make an intelligent decision about choosing this position as my career?
- What is the reason most people give when they leave the industry?
- What would you say are the lifestyle considerations of an individual in this field?
- Regarding promotions, how quickly have most employees risen to the top in the business?

- What industry experience do most of the people in this field have in common?
- If you could do it all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself? Why? What would you change?
- Which of my skills do you consider strong points in your line of work?
- What is your response to my resume? How would you suggest that I change it?
- Is there a trend toward an overabundance of people entering the field?
- Are there other job titles that I should be looking at that are comparable to this position?
- How long do people typically stay in the field?
- How would you describe the work atmosphere in your department?
- Is there a basic philosophy of the company or organization and, if so, what is it? (Is it a people, service or product oriented business?)
- What work-related values are strongest in this type of work (security, high income, variety, independence)?
- What are the salary ranges for various levels in this field? Is there a salary ceiling?
- From your perspective, what are the problems you see working in this field?
- What interests you least about the job or creates the most stress?
- How well did your college experience prepare you for this job?
- What are the typical entry-level job titles and functions?
- What are the important "key words" or "buzz words" to include in a resume or cover letter when job hunting in the field?
- Who do you know that I should talk to next in this field? When I call him/her, may I use your name?

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