

NETWORKING 101: THE BASICS

“Your Power is in Your Network”

Did you know:

- That 80% of available jobs never get advertised
- 70 – 80% of all job seekers find their positions through referrals

What is Networking? Networking is the process of asking people you know (and the people *they* know) for information, advice, ideas, support and maybe even job leads as you plan and pursue your career goals. It’s as simple as 1-2-3:

1. Determine your goal(s) – What kind of information or advice do you need?
2. Identify appropriate people to contact – Who has this information for you?
3. Schedule meetings or conversations, preferably in person. Make sure to do your homework before meeting!

WHAT’s the point? Get information about a career, job, company, or industry that interests you. Brainstorm with knowledgeable individuals about your career plans. Let others know of your goals and enlist their help.

HOW do I do it? Choose your communication channel according to each networking contact: face-to-face, email, or phone. The ideal way to begin the process is to write first and then follow up by phone. The ideal scenario is to meet in person. Vary your approach according to the needs of each situation and to accommodate your contact.

WHEN should I network? Every day! You are limited only by your creativity and confidence. Let discretion be your guide.

WHERE should I network? It’s ideal to meet at someone’s workplace or at a coffee shop; however, you should remain flexible and accommodating to your contact’s preferences.

WHO is a networking contact? You’d be surprised, nearly everyone is! Begin by reviewing your personal network (family, friends, fellow students, neighbors); professional contacts (managers, internship supervisors, colleagues, faculty, advisors); and people you know from volunteer or community activities (clubs and sports, religious and cultural organizations).

EMAIL ETIQUETTE: AN ON-LINE INTRODUCTION

- Send a BRIEF email and request time to talk
- Maximize subject line: “Question from recent grad,” “Referral from Amy Smith”
- Don’t ask ‘YES/NO’ questions (e.g., “Are you hiring?”)
- Proofread email ALWAYS (or ask someone else to read it)

- Assume your email will be printed, passed around, or filed
- Follow-up by phone whenever possible
- Don't expect immediate responses; follow up in a week or so by phone/email

**NETWORKING:
LET THE FUN BEGIN!**

Following is one example of an email from a senior to an alumnus of your alma mater, requesting an informational interview. Note that it's not a "canned," generic approach, but customized to the alumna's background and the senior's interests. You might also ask if it would help to send along your resume as background information for your discussion.

Subject Line: XYZ Senior Seeking Advice

Dear Ms. Anderson,

As an XYZ senior with career goals in product design, I was told that you're now at ABC company doing user research. I am wondering if I could ask you for some advice. At this point in my career, I'd like to gain a few years of experience before going to grad school. In the meantime, I'm interested in learning more about which types of companies and part of the country might be best to develop this experience. My internships have ranged from research to working in a manufacturing environment, and I also have interests in outreach and leadership.

Would it be possible to speak with you – at your convenience – to ask a few specific questions? I'm living in Boston and can accommodate whatever might work with your schedule.

I'll call to follow up with you in the next week. In the meantime, thank you for being willing to share your experiences and your time.

Sincerely,
Jane Ballou

**INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS -
A POWERFUL WAY TO NETWORK**

If you say to someone, "I'd like to talk to you about a job or internship," they may say "I don't have a job or internship to give you" and the conversation is over.

However, if you say, "I'd like to learn more about how to break into the field of XX. Would you mind sharing some advice with me about what got you where you are today?" your chances are much better of getting the Informational Interview. People are always willing to help a young person, and often enjoy talking about their experiences and learnings over the years.

An Informational Interview is a conversation with someone who can give you an insider's perspective on a specific career, employer, or industry. It's also an opportunity to brainstorm with knowledgeable individuals about your career plans, let others know of your interests, and enlist the help of those in your targeted field.

Do not come right out and ask this person for a job. However, it is OK to tell them what type of job or internship you are looking for. And a job opportunity often develops later out of these conversations if:

- 1) You've impressed your contact with your preparation, knowledge and enthusiasm,
- 2) You've followed up with them and others as you said you would, and
- 3) You have continued to stay in touch via thank you notes, updates, including the end result of your search.

Why would anyone want to meet with me? And how will I ask them? People who enjoy their work like to talk about it. Most are willing to discuss their jobs and careers with you as long as you're respectful of their busy schedules. It may take a while for them to fit you into their schedule – be persistent, polite and appreciative. An effective approach is to email first and schedule a convenient time to talk. A face-to-face meeting is optimal; however, phone and email are good options due to geography and time constraints.

In your first email, introduce yourself and indicate the source of your referral. Did you get the individual's name from the PGP Office or the Networking Database? A professor? A friend? Request 20-30 minutes to get advice and an "insider's perspective." As a young professional, you should have your calendar handy, respond with flexibility to accommodate your contact's schedule, and ask if it would help to send along your resume as background information for your discussion.

CONDUCTING THE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

Before the Meeting: Do your homework. You'll be speaking with busy people so make the most of their time. Don't ask questions that are readily answered at the organization's website. Instead, demonstrate your knowledge through conversation and questions that reflect what you learned *specifically* about this organization or industry. This might involve a recent article in a professional journal, a change in leadership, a competitor's product line, or entrance into a new market.

How to get this inside scoop? Search online resources. Read news periodicals and trade journals. Ask your professors. Even though this is *not* a job interview, prepare as exhaustively and present yourself as impressively as if it was. You never know the possibilities that might emerge from an Informational Interview.

At the Meeting: First impressions count! Dress as if it were an actual job interview. Be prompt, come with a list of questions, and bring something for note-taking. If you clearly show your interest and your research, you'll create a favorable impression. Your contact will be more likely to remember you if/when a job becomes available. And relax! You and your contact share something in common – whether it's your college, the individual who referred you, or a mutual career interest.

Take the initiative in conducting the interview; you asked for it. Come prepared with open-ended questions to create a good discussion. Avoid questions that can be answered with one-word responses. Remember, you are not there to ask for a job. It's politically incorrect as well as counterproductive; most people don't have jobs for you. What they have agreed to provide you with instead is valuable information, advice, and contacts. Don't stay too long. If you asked for 20-30 minutes, be sensitive to that timing. However, be prepared to stay longer if your contact indicates an interest/willingness to extend the meeting. Remember to say "thank you"!

After the Meeting: Immediately send a thank you note, either email or hardcopy. Be as specific as possible; for example, citing particularly helpful advice from your contact or new conclusions or decisions you've reached as a result of your meeting. Use new information to further tailor your resume, cover letter, and job search techniques. Keep accurate records and find reasons to stay in touch with your contacts so you're 'top of mind' when they learn about a position or lead for you.

Sample Questions The following are some questions that you might ask in an Informational Interview. Select a dozen or so that would be most helpful for you; do not expect to ask *all* these questions.

Career Questions

Which jobs and experiences have led you to your present position? Which have been most helpful?

Would you describe the tasks or projects that occupy most of your day?

Which skills do you use on a daily basis?

Which particular skills or talents are most essential to be effective in your job?

How would you describe your environment and the people with whom you work?

From your perspective, what are the challenges of working in this field?

Which college courses and experiences have proven most valuable in your work?

How important are grades/GPA for obtaining a job in this field?

What obligations does your employer expect of you outside of the work week? Are there organizations you are expected to join? Are there social commitments? How has your job affected your lifestyle?

Which professional journals and organizations would help me learn more about your field?

Are there trends or changes in your industry that you foresee?

How does a person progress in your field? What is a typical career path in this field or organization?

How does your employer support your professional development?

Could you describe an entry-level job and its functions in your organization/company?

What other kinds of organizations hire people to perform the functions you do here?

What kinds of experiences would you encourage for anybody pursuing a career in this field?

Will my education prepare me for a job in your field? If not, how can I improve my candidacy?

Job Search Questions

How did you go about finding your job?

Which strategies would you recommend for getting a job in your field?

Which skills are the most important to highlight during my job search?

Why did you decide to work for this organization? Which criteria would you recommend for evaluating employers?

With the information you have about my education, skills, and experience, what other fields or jobs would you suggest I research?

If you feel comfortable and it seems appropriate: Would you mind taking a look at my resume and giving me some advice on how I might improve it?

Two Golden Questions

Who else should I be talking to? May I use your name in contacting them?

If you were in my position, what steps would you be taking?