

Networking

What is “Networking”?

Networking is the process of gathering helpful information from a personal contacts and actual professionals in your field of interest. Networking is a fantastic way to research career paths of interest to you AND later create job leads. Did you know that research shows networking as the No. 1 way most people actually find a job or internship?

A successful *networker* is someone who realizes the value in building and maintaining a strong networking relationship throughout their career, not just while exploring career options or during a job search. Whether your goal is to explore a career field, get a job, build a business, sell services or products, or promote yourself or your favorite cause, the difference between success or failure can depend on your ability to make contacts. You should make networking a regular practice, which will help you stay informed and connected in your field and ready to make a successful job change when necessary.

Why is networking important?

When you apply for a job through the newspaper or even a Career Services Hire-A-VOL 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...OR they may even be that potential employer! In either 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, studies show that only 20% of jobs are actually posted—leaving 80% to be discovered or developed. Therefore, 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 and when does it end?

You can begin networking as you begin exploring career options. You can meet people while doing informational interviews to research a field that has captured your attention. You will definitely want to network once you have decided on a career path and begin looking for jobs or internships. 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 in which you work. 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.

Getting Started

Decide the purpose of contacting your network. What is to be gained from meeting with these networking contacts?

- Gathering information about jobs and careers of interest to you
- Advice on how to conduct your job search
- Getting leads

The Second Step

Consider and list your existing and potential network

- Family, friends, and neighbors
- Friends and co-workers of your parents or other relatives
- Supervisors and acquaintances from past and present jobs and internships
- School faculty and administrators
- Contacts through church or other religious organizations, hobbies, athletic participation, community involvement
- People you have met at on-campus information sessions or job fairs
- Members of professional organizations relevant to your field or area of career interest
- Contacts through public service and volunteer work
- Other professionals including doctors, dentist, accountant, lawyer, banker, and insurance agent
- Alumni, especially recent grads
- Social Networking sites; i.e. LinkedIn. Be aware of appropriate internet behavior and safety!

The Third Step

Determine what you have to offer.

- What are your Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs)?
- What are your accomplishments that provide evidence of these KSAs?
- What interests you professionally and personally?
- What is important to you?

You want to be able to quickly and concisely communicate to the networking contact your purpose...to set up an informational interview or to develop specific job leads. You will need a brief self-introduction or *sound bite and commercial* that tells about your background, experience, and what direction you are headed. Think about your education, interests, skills, values, and what industries, locations, and types of jobs interest you. It is a good idea to write out this introduction and practice it before calling a contact

How to use a *sound bite*:

- Introduce yourself by name and university, what your major is, and purpose of networking.
- Example: Hi, I'm Mary Jones and I'm a psychology major at the University of Tennessee and I'm interested in the field of human resources.

How to use a *commercial*:

- I became interested in the human resources field last summer when I interned at XYZ Company and got to know the Human Resource Director there. I found her job very interesting. She worked in all aspects

of employee relations and hiring. When I returned to school this fall, I decided to add a business class and I also joined the Human Resource Management Association. I hope to obtain an internship in human resources next summer.

Putting Your Network Into Practice

Schedule and Conduct Informational Interviews

Informational interviews are a crucial and often overlooked aspect of networking. They are the best way to find out about a job and make a contact.

- **Call, write, or email** the person you want to meet, emphasize that you are not looking for a job, but researching an industry or position.
- **Set up a meeting** and have 10-20 questions prepared.
- Before the meeting, it is imperative that you **research the industry/organization** in which you are interested. Don't waste your contact's time. Research the interviewing individual(s), the organization, and the industry utilizing books, periodicals, company literature, annual reports, and the Internet.
- Set a time limit of about 20 or 30 minutes.
- **Prepare questions**
 - Why did you choose this career field?
 - How did you get started in this organization?
 - What experiences helped you to be prepared and qualified for this job?
 - How did you get to this point in your career?
 - What do you believe is the ideal education and background for this career?
 - What are your primary responsibilities in your current position?
 - What do you like most about your job, your company, and your industry? What do you dislike about them?
 - What has been your greatest challenge?
 - What are typical career path options for someone in this company/industry?
 - If you could change something about your career path, what would it be?
 - What skills do you find most critical to your success?
 - Describe a typical day at work.
 - What things impress you when you interview candidates for positions?
 - What advice would you give to someone looking for a job in the industry?
- Always end by **thanking the contact** for their time and within one or two days follow up with a thank you note.
- Once you achieve your goal, don't stop. **Ask your contact for the names of two other contacts in the industry.** Keep your network current. Remember to **maintain your network** even once you find a secure job. You never want to have to rebuild, so stay in touch with those in your network and add people to it.

See more information at <http://www.quintcareers.com/networking.html>.

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