

# NETWORKING

The purpose of this chapter is to help you:

- Identify potential contacts
- Learn how to make initial contact
- Gain comfort networking at different events and in different situations

## 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 or even a career 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 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, 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 captured 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 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.

## 6 Steps to Effective Networking

### 1. Prepare to keep records of your network

Start a *Network Notebook and Folder* or *Excel spreadsheet*. 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, advisers, current and past supervisors, alumni, your Career Center Adviser, 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 Informational Interviewing in **Chapter 3**).
- b. *You heard they have/know of a job opening* - you would like to know more about the position and the name of the person to whom you should send your resume. 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.

## **5. Make contacts within your Network**

Contact all the people 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. 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.

## **Networking at an Event**

### **1. Change your thinking and thus, your behavior**

Thoughts precede behavior. It is important to change the negative self-talk that inhibits many of us from reaching out to others. Do these thoughts sound familiar?

- No one wants to talk with me; I'm only a student.
- I don't know enough to engage these people in an intelligent conversation. I've always had trouble meeting people. It's just the way I am.
- These people are important. I shouldn't waste their time.

Negative thoughts can prevent us from reaching our goals. The truth is that most people hold similar thoughts in group situations and therefore take no action to initiate conversations. Yet they wait in the hope that someone will approach them in a friendly manner! Change thoughts from negative to positive.

Remember:

- People like to talk about themselves.
- People are flattered when you show an interest in them.
- People reciprocate sincere interest.
- You won't waste people's time. If they don't want to talk, they'll just move on. Don't take it personally, and, likewise, move on.
- You can change your behavior; you weren't just born one way.
- Your value is intrinsic and not based on status (i.e., student, CEO, lawyer, etc.).
- You have more to offer others than you think; just believe it.

## **2. Redefine the term "stranger"**

As humans, we all have things in common. Regardless of how sophisticated and "important" we become, we all share threads of commonalities. When you go to a new health club, a new church, a new synagogue, a new student organization, you have a common interest with those people. When you go to a party, you probably know the host or hostess. At a wedding, you have some connection with the bride or groom.

- Identify commonalities with people at an event.
- Use commonalities as the basis for conversation (ice breakers) with someone you don't know
- During your conversation, listen intently to discover commonalities.

## **3. 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 you're your own worst critic!). Here are some possibilities:

- [Career Fair] "Hello, I'm Karen White. I'm excited about this event and eager to learn how a philosophy major can break into advertising."
- [Wedding] "Hi, my name is Yolanda Cruz, former roommate of the bride."
- [Chamber of Commerce Meeting] "Hello I'm Earl Duke, a Vanderbilt student. I'm visiting your meeting to learn about Nashville's business community."

Practicing self-introductions will feel awkward, perhaps artificial, but soon it becomes natural and provides a means to begin a conversation with someone new.

## **4. Risk rejection**

It happens. Some people may not respond to your introduction. If this happens, don't take it personally; just move on. Be outgoing and friendly. Have a sincere interest in others and plan for networking success at events by:

- Identifying what you want to accomplish at a networking event *before* the event (examples: learn more about a career, develop job leads, sell a business idea, etc.).
- Treating EVERYONE as you would like to be treated (besides being the correct thing to do, you never know who might be helpful to you).
- Having a sense of humor.
- Physically moving about (you can't meet potential contacts or employers in a sitting position).

## 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?***

It is easy to forget who you called and when.

It is 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.

It is difficult to sell your good points.

It is 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 the 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 to which you would willingly commit. 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).