Networking

Building and Maintaining Professional Relationships

Networking begins with simply talking to people — everyone from your professors, neighbors, peers, friends, family, alumni, and former employers. Everyone you talk to may potentially suggest another person who might help you, and your circle of contacts grow.

Some people who network, don't call it networking — they just call it talking to people and maintaining good professional relationships.

Makes sense, doesn't it?

Did You Know?… Over 50% of job seekers find their position through networking.

GET STARTED ON THE RIGHT FOOT

Show interest in others – DO NOT flat out ask for a job or internship. Instead seek advice and ask questions (see the Informational Interview handout for great suggestions and approaches).

Pay Attention – give everyone your full attention and be present in the moment of conversation. Remember: every person matters. No one wants to be in a conversation with another person looking over their shoulder for the next.

Promises, Promises – if you say you will follow-up with them, or send them something, actually do it in a timely manner. Make yourself a note on their business card, or on your calendar, as a reminder.

Communicating What You Want – if you’re contacting someone who doesn’t know you (online or from a referral), introduce yourself briefly. Tell the person how, where, or from whom you got their name and why you are contacting them. Think about your reaction to getting a call from a stranger and what you would want to know.

Prepare Yourself – the more information you have about a person, the better you’ll be able to relate to them. At a minimum, look at the person’s LinkedIn or company profile so you can get a feel for the different ways you can work together. Make it a point to ask targeted questions based on what you know, so you can aim for the outcome you want.

Expand Your Contacts – ask if they can recommend a professional organization or the names of some other people you should be talking to.

Respect – their time and willingness to help you. If they introduce you to another contact, be sure to follow-up with the referral in a timely manner and let your first contact know you reached out.

Establish Rapport – create ways to keep the relationship going. Ask the person if you may keep them informed of your search progress. If you read an article that pertains to a discussion you had at a networking meeting, send it to him or her with a brief note. Try to find at least two to three opportunities yearly to reconnect with members of your network. Use commonalities to keep conversations going.

Thank everyone who helps you and keep people posted on your progress. Write thank-you letters to people who take time to talk with you. Leave a good impression — someone might remember you in a few weeks when they hear about a job or internship that you'd like (see handout on Professional Correspondence).

Reciprocate – return the courtesies extended to you. Share information with others in your network to help them as well.
ONLINE NETWORKING

LinkedIn – The primary tool for professional networking, using features such as the Find Alumni search tool. Student-friendly advice: university.linkedin.com/LinkedIn-for-students (see the Art of Social Media and LinkedIn handouts for great suggestions and approaches).

Did You Know?…LinkedIn has a standard message when requesting to connect with another user. Use this space to write a personal message briefly introducing yourself and why you want to connect and talk. Otherwise, why will they want to connect with you?

LinkedIn is the tool to move you to a phone or face-to-face interaction.

Ultimately helping you build and maintain that relationship.

You get 300 characters for a LinkedIn request – use them wisely! 83% of employers say positive online reputation influences hiring decisions.

Sample LinkedIn Connection Request:

Dear ______,
As a sophomore at H-SC majoring in History, I found your profile in the Find Alumni section and see that you were also a History major. I would appreciate adding you to my professional network as I explore the (field/industry).
Thank you for your consideration,

Your Name

Sample Email Requesting a Phone/In-Person Conversation:

Dear ______,
I do not believe we have ever actually met, but we were on the Hill together for a year before you graduated. I am now a senior getting ready to graduate in May and I am an aspiring entrepreneur. I have a strong relationship with Ellen Masters and she has had nothing but great things to say about you in my meetings with her. I was hoping to start building a relationship with you, as it seems like you have become a successful entrepreneur in your short time since graduating from H-SC. I have been coming up with new ideas, but I am having a hard time taking my ideas and making them a reality. I was wondering if you could offer any advice from when you were in my place, and were getting ready to start Quantifize Solutions Inc.

I know you are very busy, but if you have any free time when we could speak I would greatly appreciate it.

I hope to hear from you soon,

Your Name

Key Elements:
✓ Introduce yourself and how you received their contact information.
✓ Share your aspirations and professional goals.
✓ Tell the contact why you wanted to connect and talk.
✓ Acknowledge that the contact is busy, and asked for their time.

*Other helpful handouts – Informational Interviews, Networking Pocket Guide available in Career Education