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 grows.
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, and 80% of all available jobs are NOT posted online.

The Golden Rules of Networking

**Prepare your ‘elevator speech’** – before a networking event or job fair, prepare a quick (30 sec.) summary of what you want people to know about you. Make it upbeat and succinct, and practice with yourself and friends. See the *Talk Your Way to the Top* handout for details on how to craft a winning elevator speech.

**Where do you begin?** – tap your existing contacts: friends, family, family friends, current colleagues…the Career Education Office! Spread the word you’re looking for opportunities and ask if anyone has a contact that may be willing to offer advice.

**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 to aim for the outcome you want.

**Show interest in others** – Seek advice and ask questions; see the *Informational Interview* handout). **DO NOT** flat out ask for a job or internship. If you seem qualified for an opening, they’ll refer you. Strangers won’t put their reputation on the line for you.

**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 opportunity. Ask questions and get the person to talk about themselves and their experience.

**Promises, Promises** – if you say you will follow-up with them, or send them something, actually do it in a timely manner. As a reminder, make yourself a note on their business card, or on your calendar. If you use LinkedIn, there is a feature to keep notes (only you see) and make reminders on any of your contacts. **Do what you say you will do.**

**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.

**Expand Your Contacts** – ask if they can recommend a professional organization or the names of some other people you should be talking to. You can ask, “Do you know of anyone else who might be helpful for me to meet?” It doesn’t hurt you to ask – you never know where your next opportunity lies!

**Respect** – their time and willingness to help. If they introduce you to another contact, be sure to follow-up with the referral in a timely manner. Keep the other person abreast of how your meeting went with someone he or she referred you to.

**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, which makes it less awkward when you reach out in times of need.

**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, or are asked to recommend someone for a job/internship. (See handout on *Professional Correspondence*)

**Reciprocate** – return the courtesies extended to you. No matter how desperate you may feel, remember networking is a two-way street. You may be a young job seeker, but you can still help. That CEO you spoke with? Perhaps his or her child(ren) are applying to colleges and you can offer your thoughts and opinions.

**Maintain Your Network** – cultivate ties even when you’re not job hunting. Remember that the majority of jobs go unpublished, so you may hear of an exciting opportunity through your network, or be referred by someone in your network.

**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 suggestions and approaches).

**Did You Know?…**LinkedIn has a standard message when requesting to connect with another user.
Do not be standard! 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 professional relationships.**

LinkedIn requests can contain up to 300 characters – use them wisely!
*85% 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 want to connect.
* Acknowledge that the contact is busy, and ask for their time.

\*Other helpful handouts – *Informational Interviews*, *Networking Pocket Guide*, *Art of Social Media, LinkedIn, Talk You Way to the Top*