

NETWORKING

What is a Network?

A common myth is that networking is about calling or meeting strangers when you need a job. In reality, networking is simply building and maintaining long-term relationships long before you need something from them. Over time, people find ways to balance relationships by providing advice, information or support to each other.

Almost all of us already have a network and 'do' networking, we just don't call it that. Your current network may include family, friends, neighbours, coworkers, instructors and classmates.

- » A **professional network** is a strategically developed group of people that have professional interests or activities in common or complementary to yours, and usually grows from your personal network.

What are the Benefits of Networking?

- ✓ A good network of professional contacts which you connect with regularly is essential to career success regardless of your industry, field, position, how long you stay in a job or change careers.
- ✓ Networking and a genuine interest in learning about the professional lives of people you meet will help you develop professional social skills.
- ✓ Networking provides support, enjoyment, experience and knowledge while building a higher profile, gaining recognition and increasing your self confidence.
- ✓ More job leads are found through people we know than any other way, opening doors to 'hot prospects' not otherwise publicized.

Am I Networking Effectively?

I have a 15- to 30-second introduction to clearly and concisely describe my professional interests and goals that can be used in a casual setting, on the phone or to focus a conversation.	Y / N
I have a process for keeping my professional contacts database up to date including current contact information, common topics of interest, areas of expertise, people referred and contact history.	Y / N
I have identified individuals I want to connect with regularly to stay informed about their work and keep them informed of my career development, as well as others I will only connect with occasionally.	Y / N
I have identified organizations and associations which are relevant to my career interests and have a plan for volunteering and attending a minimum number of functions this year.	Y / N
I have built an hour a week into my schedule to stay in contact with my network members.	Y / N
I have a specific achievable goal for each networking event (e.g., 2 people I'd like to make contact with, 3 follow-up meetings I will finalize, 2 meaningful conversations).	Y / N

How to Start Networking

- **Practice.** Talk to friends, people you work with, club members or the person who regularly sits with you on the bus about what they do and what you enjoy doing (taking) right now. People in all businesses and those not recruiting have information, resources and contacts, too.
- **Make a list of people you know.** Current/former co-workers, relatives, friends, neighbours, instructors and people from volunteer, community and religious activities. Identify five people from your current network who work for a company or industry you find interesting.
- **Seek information from friends of friends.** This is easy and the most common way professionals network every day. Before calling, do some research on their company, position and questions you'd like answered to provide a solid starting point to put both you and your contact at ease.
- **Jot down a few talking points.** What do you want to (i) convey, (ii) learn, and (iii) have to offer? Then call. After the call, calendar dates for staying in touch. Begin with a 'great to talk to you' email.
- **Think about your interests** – both professional and personal.
 - » What off campus industry organizations relate to your interests? Go as a visitor to events, meetings, etc, then choose which one to join. Student memberships are often available at reduced pricing.

BONUS: Many organizations have exclusive job postings for members.

- » Is your personal interest movies, books, gourmet cooking or investing? Join a related club where you will meet people from various walks of life with whom you will be talking about something you enjoy. Consider everyone as a valuable potential network member to explore.
- **Get out and meet people.** Talk to people you don't know at parties or social events. Use a 15- to 30-second professional introduction (similar to those below) to start conversations.

TIP:

Don't expect contacts to be part of your network if you only contact them once or twice, or only when you want something. Occasionally relationships develop quickly; most take longer. To develop professionally rewarding relationships, build goodwill by finding ways to help.

Types of Networking Situations

Networking isn't something that needs to take a lot of additional time. It is simply a series of conversations and can be done by phone, email, online or in person. There are four broad types of professional networking: (i) informal (ii) formal, (iii) arranged, and (iv) through social media.

Informal networking

Everyday interactions, community and volunteer activities can be used for informal networking. This is the easiest way to build a network. Prepare to describe your professional interests clearly. Ask a clear question to open conversations on 'professional' topics with people you know, then listen.

Examples

1. *Hi Pat, it's Chris. You know I am at Mount Royal University and interested in _____. I know you now/used to work in that field, and was hoping I could talk to you about _____ aspects of it and how to connect with people in that specialty. Could we meet for a coffee to talk about it? . . . Thanks, I owe you one!*
2. *Hi Mr. Smith. This is Chris Doe. I work at the same store as your daughter, Sue. I am also a student (grad) taking _____ and am doing research for an assignment. I am very interested in _____. Sue suggested you might be able to help me. I was hoping you could talk to me about how artificial intelligence is affecting your industry and industry events I could get involved in. Is there a time that works for you?. . . Thank you. I really appreciate you taking the time to talk to me.*

Formal professional activities/events

In every field there are organizations, meetings, conferences, committees, events and trade shows. If you are a new member or not yet a member, volunteer to help out at such events. This provides opportunities to meet and talk to professionals of all stages working in multiple settings.

Networking events often see people talking to people they know or handing out and collecting as many business cards as they can. Instead, remember you are attending to selectively build contacts to develop lasting relationships with people who you have something in common with. Talk shop, personal interests and ask questions. Focus on the commonalities and explore possibilities.

Most people are uncomfortable at events, even if they don't look it. Find people standing alone or in small unstructured groups who are not in a private conversation. Shake hands, introduce yourself and ask to join in. Have a real reason to speak with each person.

Examples

1. *Hi, my name is Chris Doe. I am a student in _____. I am here because I am interested in _____. I am attending this event to get information on _____ and meet people who _____. What made you come today?"*
2. *Hi, I'm new at this event. My name is _____. Do you mind if I ask a few questions about this group?*
3. *Hi Mr. Smith. I'm Chris Doe. I really enjoyed your presentation today. I am a student trying to decide between _____ and _____ majors. Your insights on emerging issues really got me thinking. Is there a website, book or other resource you could direct me to? I know you'll be talking to a lot of people today and I'd be happy to follow up tomorrow with this request, if that's all right with you. Do you have a business card with your contact information? It was a pleasure meeting you. I hope I speak with you again.*

This is what is often referred to as the 15- or 30-second commercial and depending on the situation, content may be shared all at once or more commonly as part of a back and forth conversation.

After a brief conversation, thank people you talk to for an interesting conversation and, if you felt a personal connection with someone, confirm you will stay in touch. Then do.

For additional situations see the **Fairs + Employer Events** tip sheet.

Arranged networking appointments

While much networking can be done through events, calls and email, it is worthwhile to arrange occasional one-to-one face time to really connect. Appointments can be as short as a 15 minute coffee. Be aware and considerate of busy times when arranging times.

Social media networking

It is becoming increasingly valuable to develop and maintain a strong professional online and social media presence. Websites such as LinkedIn and MRU's Alumni Association can be good opportunities to grow your professional network. Each social media site has its own etiquette but when in doubt, use what would be your best professional in-person behaviour as a guide. Remember, nothing is as personal as 'face-to-face' interaction.

For more information, see Career Services' **Online Professional Presence** tip sheet.

CAUTION

Be aware that information on non-business sites such as Facebook and Twitter will be seen by potential employers/colleagues. Ensure these reinforce your professional image rather than negate it.

Ways to stay connected

Networking contacts are beneficial only if contact is maintained. Keep contacts up to date with your career progress, interesting projects and common interests.

- ✓ Send a personal note with a copy of an article you think will interest a contact.
- ✓ Send a link to a business site, blog, or book review you think a contact may enjoy/find useful.
- ✓ Selectively forward an email about an opportunity or event to a contact who will be interested.
- ✓ When someone does something to help you, follow up with a short thank you note or call.
- ✓ Ask contacts out to coffee, lunch or an event. Even if they can't go, you're in their mind.
- ✓ Call to ask if a contact knows anything about a person, company or event you heard about.
- ✓ Connect people in your network with other people in your network that can help them.

Leveraging your current network in a job search

Networks are important to employers who don't like to take risks when they do not have to. An unfamiliar worker can be a risk, so they often hire people they have met through their professional networks. Knowing about a group, department or organization 'from the inside' helps target more good-fit and hidden opportunities.

- Let your established network contacts know you are looking for new/summer opportunities and would appreciate leads or contacts. Update them on your search efforts.
- If you are interested in a particular company or department, ask established contacts if they are able to provide you with an introduction.
- Make it easy to help. Ask for advice, suggestions, leads or industry feedback on your resume rather than if they know of jobs.
 - » New contacts may be comfortable with requests such as "What are hiring cycles in your industry?" or "Tell me more about how your industry is changing?"
 - » Casual acquaintances may be comfortable with requests such as "May I tell Jim Smith that you suggested I call him to ask about internship opportunities with the company?"
 - » A well-developed relationship may be comfortable with a request to "... speak to your colleague about my candidacy for the _____ position in your department," or "Would you introduce me to the person in charge of hiring for that project?"
- Email a thank you and tell them about results from leads or suggestions they provided.
- Ask contacts you have worked on projects with if they would serve as one of your references.

Looking for work but haven't established a professional network yet? Consider cold calling. For additional information and help with cold calling, contact Career Services.

CAREER SERVICES

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