

Tips for Networking and Informational Interviews

Networking is an important career development skill that can be the key to your job search success. In its simplest form, networking involves having a “career conversation” with someone for the purpose of exploring career or job search pursuits. Networking is the process of meeting people, having conversations and sharing information. It is about building relationships, and is one of the best ways to find a job because:

- **People do business primarily with people they know, trust and like.** Resumes and cover letters alone lack the human element and are often too impersonal to convince employers to hire you.
- **Job listings tend to draw piles of applicants,** which puts you in intense competition with many others. Networking can make you a recommended member of a much smaller pool.
- **The job you want may not be advertised at all.** Networking leads to information and job leads, often before a formal job description is created or a job announced. This is often called “the hidden job market.”

Think of networking as a “rippling” effect. You know someone who knows someone, who in turn knows someone else. The more people in your network, the larger your pool of contacts becomes. In order to build your network, though, you have to work at it. You can’t just wish it into existence. Even if you fear or dislike the idea, take the risk. It’s worth it!

1. You already have a network. Build from it.

Make a list of everyone you know who may be able to help. Include family, friends, previous co-workers, parents of your children’s friends, members of your faith group, sports teammates, references and social media contacts. Start by writing down the names and you’ll be surprised at how many people you know. Then branch out from there to connections of theirs you don’t know yet but would like to. Your network will continue to grow.

2. Reach out and keep track of your network.

All the connections in the world won’t help if you don’t actively reach out to them. Let them know you are job searching. Be specific about what kind of work you are seeking and ask them if they know anyone you can speak with in a relevant field. Don’t assume who can help and who can’t. You will be surprised whom they may know. While you are actively networking, keep detailed records: with whom you talked, about what, when, who connected you to that person, what the results were, when you followed up, and what ideas or next steps were generated.

3. If connecting seems daunting, consider simply reconnecting.

Dormant relationships are often overlooked or underutilized. Yet they can be valuable sources of knowledge and connections, and often even more helpful than a recent contact. These can be friends you haven’t kept in contact with, people on your holiday card list, former co-workers. It can be easier to reconnect first, get the hang of it and then jump into connecting with those you have met more recently.

4. Use LinkedIn and other social media to connect.

There’s no doubt social media can be powerful connectors. Use them to your advantage. LinkedIn, in particular, is built to be a professional networking site. Make sure you have a profile and presence—then use it to your advantage. Employers often look at LinkedIn profiles, so make sure yours presents the face you’d like to put forward. Then use the site to connect to hiring managers at your target companies, or who work in your target field. Ask for informational interviews. Hiring managers like proactive employees. Show them you are assertive from the very beginning.

5. Networking events allow you to meet new people.

Take the leap to meet new people. There are a number of places to meet people who can help you. Think about Meetups (meetup.com), Chamber of Commerce events, job fairs, job clubs, faith and professional groups, and volunteering. All of these, plus many others, offer opportunities for you to meet people who can connect you to others.

6. Develop your 30-second elevator speech.

This short statement summarizes who you are, what you do, what you are seeking and what you can offer an employer. It is important to have ready for an interview or at a job fair when asked, “tell me about yourself.” You should also be prepared to reel off your speech at any networking opportunity. However, it should feel and sound natural, not “canned”. (Note: for information on developing a 30-second elevator speech, review our 30-Second Tip Sheet.)

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7. Actively seek informational interviews.

Informational interviews are 20-30 minute phone or, preferably, in-person conversations with someone in the field you are pursuing. They are NOT job interviews, so don't ask to be hired. They are non-threatening, fact-gathering opportunities to get yourself in front of a person who can connect you to others. The conversations offer insight on career paths, industries and companies. The point is to make contact and then to keep that relationship alive. At a minimum, you can count each informational interviewee as a valuable new member of your growing network.

- **Identify people to interview and make contact.**

Look at your own network, then branch out to LinkedIn or directories such as Chambers of Commerce or the Book of Lists. Contact people by phone or email, being sure to mention how you got their names. Emphasize you are looking for information, not a job. Ask for a convenient time to have a 20-30 minute appointment.

- **Make it easy for them to help you. Offer a phone conversation or to meet in their office.**

Make it easy for your contacts to give you their time. Offer them the choice of a phone conversation or an in-person meeting. Let them make the choice of location that is easiest. They may prefer to visit outside of the office. If you are meeting in his/her office, offer to bring coffee, a soda and/or snack in exchange for their time.

- **Do your research.**

Find out what you can about the person, through your referral, or on LinkedIn or other sites. Know what industry in which they work, if they've written articles or blogs. If you're well prepared, your interviewee will be both impressed and flattered that you did your leg-work.

- **Prepare a list of questions for your informational interview.**

Come to your meeting prepared with open-ended questions to ask. This makes it easier on everyone and keeps the conversation going. Have more questions than you think time will allow, but ask the most critical ones first to be sure you work them in. Let the conversation flow naturally, but be sure to focus on your questions and answers.

- **Dress the part.**

Come to your informational interview, on the phone or in-person, prepared to put your best face forward.

- **Listen well and take notes.**

Show genuine interest in those you interview. They are giving you a gift of time and experience. Show up to your appointment five minutes early and with pen and paper in hand to take notes. They may give you great tidbits of information that can help build your resume, or suggest people to contact next.

- **Follow up.**

You will make yourself memorable to your contacts by following up on the meeting, sending a thank you, and giving them updates on your progress. Let your network know what's happening. Tell the person who connected you to this interviewee that you met, express appreciation and offer updates. Continue to get your name in front of them both.

Sample Open-Ended Informational Interview Questions:

- What are your main responsibilities as a...?
- What is a typical day (or week) like for you?
- What do you like most/least about your work?
- What kinds of problems do you deal with?
- What kinds of decisions do you make?
- How does your position fit within the organization/ career field/industry?
- What current issues and trends in the field should I know about/be aware of?
- What are some common career paths in this field?
- What kinds of accomplishments tend to be valued and rewarded in this field?
- What related fields should I consider looking into?
- How did you become interested in this field?
- How did you begin your career?
- How do most people get into this field?
- What are common entry-level jobs?
- What kind of education, training, or background does the field require?
- What skills, abilities, and personal attributes are essential to success?
- What are the most effective strategies for seeking a position in this field?
- Can you recommend trade journals, magazines or professional associations which would be helpful for my professional development?
- If you could do it all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself? If not, what would you change?
- What advice would you give someone who is considering this type of job (or field)?
- **Can you suggest anyone else I could contact for additional information?** (Note: Make sure to always include this last question!)

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It can be a bit nerve-racking to come up with the words to introduce yourself to someone you might never have met. First impressions are important, in person, on the phone or via email. There are many sample introductions online. A simple search will find many examples from which to base your email or phone call. Below are some suggestions adapted from Englishforbusinesscommunications.com.

Intro Sentence:

- Dear , (ie: “Dear John,” or “Dear Mr. Smith” – followed by a comma and continue to the next line)
- On the phone: “Hello, Mr. Smith.”

Explain who you are:

- My name is Karen Black.

Explain how you got their phone number or email address:

- I see that we have ... shared connections on LinkedIn.
- I found your email address/phone number in the alumni directory of ...
- Mark Handler from AGT gave me your email address.

Add how you know the person, if applicable:

- We met each other last month and the Dublin Chamber of Commerce evening mixer.
- You may remember me, we were sitting next to each other on a flight from Atlanta to Oakland last Friday.

Add a brief summary of what you are doing and wish to do:

- I have recently been laid off and am looking to move into a new field.
- I am very interested in...(the engineering management field...in biotechnology research...in training...in X company)
- I’m conducting career research in your field...

Explain your reason for writing/calling:

- I am writing in regard to the conversation we had about (the bio-manufacturing field, such and such company)...
- Mark tells me that you would be a good person to speak with regarding...
- I understand you know a great deal about ...
- I would very much like to learn about your career path and how you got where you are today.
- I am not looking for a job, but rather information from you regarding....

Make the request for a meeting:

- If you would be willing to have a 20-minute conversation by phone or in person, I would be incredibly grateful.
- I would very much appreciate a 20– or 30-minute conversation to learn more about your career (or field).
- I would be happy to meet you at your office if you have 20 or 30 minutes to spare so that I may learn more about...
- I wondered if you were free next week for a 20– or 30-minute conversation to learn more about....

Ways to Formally End the Email:

- Kind Regards,
- Sincerely,
- All the Best,

-Callamer, Nancy. “The Perfect Elevator Pitch To Land A Job.” Forbes.com. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/nextavenue/2013/02/04/the-perfect-elevator-pitch-to-land-a-job/> February 4, 2013.

-career.berkeley.edu/Info/InfoQuestions

-helpguide.org/articles/work-career/job-networking-tips.htm

-monster.com/career-advice/article/build-job-search-network.

-englishforbusinesscommunication.com/how-to-formally-introduce-yourself-in-emails/

This WIOA Title I financially-assisted program or activity is an “Equal Opportunity Employer/Program.”

Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities.

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