

Professional Networking

WHAT IS NETWORKING

Simply stated, networking is communicating with people and developing contacts in order to locate possible opportunities. This is how the majority of people (sources claim 75-85%) get a job- not solely job search websites. Networking involves connecting with current contacts and generating new ones in the career field you are interested in. You network all the time and probably don't even know it. You are networking when you:

- Attend club, association, or other group meetings
- Talk with Ithaca College professors and alumni
- Volunteer for a local fundraiser
- Visit with other members of your social, academic, and professional groups
- Talk to your neighbors
- Strike up a conversation with someone else waiting at the doctor's office

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Professionalism and tact are vital if you want to get anywhere with networking. Here are some basic preparatory steps to begin building and using your network:

- Know yourself: It may sound simple, but many people are not prepared to articulate their attributes in a way that will impress potential leads or employers. Know your career-related skills, interests, and values and be able to convey them to others. An easy way to do this is to prepare a 30 second "elevator speech" answering the following questions:
 - Who are you? (education, experience, etc.)
 - What special/unique qualities and skills do you have?
 - Why are you interested in this field/organization?
 - How can you contribute to this organization?
- Know the field: Before starting a conversation with someone in a particular organization or field of interest, research that organization/field so you appear motivated and informed.
- Professional up-to-date résumé: Always have your résumé current and ready to go to a contact; you never know when you might need it.
- Prepare what you want to say: Presenting yourself in a professional manner is essential, so you should prepare a statement of purpose. For example: "I am interested in obtaining more information about _____. I was hoping to schedule a time that I could ask you a few questions about your position, the organization you work for, and what you might recommend for someone with my background entering this field."

NETWORKING TIPS

- **Begin networking early**. Don't wait until spring of your senior year to begin networking.
- **Know specifically what you want**. The more specific details you can provide to your contacts, the better chances people will have to help you out.
- **Be polite and personal**. Get to know people not only from a professional perspective, but a personal one as well. Always be grateful when you receive assistance, referrals, advice, etc.
- **Get involved**. The more clubs and organizations you belong to, job and internships you have, etc., the more contacts you have.
- **Take advantage of networking events**. Attend networking events like Speed Networking and Network Nights, and career fairs like the Job and Internship Fair and CNYCC.
- **Remember names**. Make it a point to remember the names of your new contacts.

GETTING STARTED

1. **Make a list of everyone that you know.** Write down family, friends, supervisors, neighbors, co-workers, colleagues, teachers, etc.
2. **Make a list of people you want to know.** Think of people who can provide valuable information about the kind of job you want.
3. **Initiate communication via e-mail or letter.** This is especially important with new contacts and those with whom you may not have talked in awhile. Give contacts time to respond (few days for e-mail and couple weeks for mail) then follow up with a phone call.
4. **Set up informational interviews.** When e-mailing, sending letters, and making phone calls, set up a convenient time for you and the contact to talk. See sample questions down below.
5. **Keep records.** For future reference, jot down notes including names, companies, and conversation details. Maintain contact with these people or you will lose valuable links and credibility.
6. **Always follow up!** Regardless of the helpfulness of responses, it is professional etiquette to respond and follow up to all correspondences.
7. **Ask for referrals.** Don't be afraid to ask, "Is there someone else you know of that I may contact who might tell me more about this area of work? May I mention that you were the one who referred me?"
8. **Always reciprocate.** When you ask others for help, be prepared to return the favor. Keep supporters informed about your progress and successes.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

- What is a typical day like at your job?
- What are your duties/responsibilities?
- How did you get your job?
- What jobs and experiences have led you to your present position?
- What do you find most satisfying in your job? Most challenging?
- Do you find your job exciting or boring? Why?
- How does a person progress in your field? What is a typical career path in this field or organization?
- What is the best way to enter this occupation?
- What are the advancement opportunities?
- What are the major qualifications for success in this occupation?
- What particular skills or talents are most essential to be effective in your job? How did you learn these skills?
- Is there flexibility related to dress, work hours, vacation schedule, etc.?
- If your work was suddenly eliminated, what kinds of work do you feel prepared to do?
- What are the salary ranges for various levels in this field? Is there a salary ceiling?
- From your perspective, what are the problems you see working in this field?
- What are the major frustrations of this job?
- If you could do things all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself? Why? What would you change?
- Does your work relate to any experiences or studies you had in college?
- How well did your college experience prepare you for this job?
- What kinds of experience, paid or unpaid, would you recommend for someone pursuing a career in this field?