

Networking

Networking is the process of establishing contact with others to assist you in career exploration. It creates the opportunity to gain insight into a profession, job leads, current industry trends, hiring practices and referrals. Networking is the most efficient way to assist you in making career decisions regarding a job search. Most jobs are found in the hidden job market not in the newspaper. Remember that employers are more comfortable in filling positions through their personal contacts. You can become of those individuals by building your network and maintaining it long-term. Discovering new contacts and reestablishing old ones can be fun and interesting. Generally, people enjoy assisting others and usually have at least a free half hour during the week to schedule an interview with you. Before you begin enlisting the aide of others, it is important to consider your purpose and what your expectations are for the interview. What type of information are you searching for from others? What are the necessary steps to get there? Networking is the key to gaining insight into a profession, making new relationships and alliances and maintaining them.

Preparation

Begin by brainstorming a list of contacts with family members, previous and present coworkers, close friends, neighbors, members in your church, club members, mentors, professional associations, and business associates. Most experienced job seekers have made countless connections through work, family, and recreational activities. Be realistic about your goals. Decide how many people you want to contact within a week, design a schedule and stick to it.

Although the power of networking is in building relationships and alliances, creating a well-organized system to track and collect your information is the backbone of networking. If you discover that you aren't satisfied with the results of your networking efforts, you may wish to reconsider your strategy and goals. Are you asking the right questions? Do you need to increase the number of contacts per week? What resources can you discard? Are you asking the right questions? Where can you find new contacts?

Interviewing can be stressful for some people enlightening for others. Not every contact will be able to speak with you. Be prepared for some rejection. If you are a naturally shy person informational interviewing can be intimidating. Keep in mind that first impressions are lasting ones. Interviewing of any type takes practice and the more you prepare the more confident you'll feel. Here are a few suggestions that can be helpful towards decreasing the anxiety of networking.

1. *Choose non-threatening situations to meet new people.*
2. *Review tapes and books about interviewing.*
3. *Bring a friend to a networking event for support.*
4. *Research and keep up with the current trends in your field.*
5. *Participate in a mock interview.*

Making Contact

There are a variety of ways to contact people. You can write them a letter requesting an interview, make phone-calls, initiate face-to-face contact, and write emails. If you decide to request an interview by letter, it is important to state immediately who you are and why you are contacting them. If you're using a referral mention the name of the individual who referred you. Keep this letter short and concise. Be realistic in your request for an interview and clear that you're seeking information not a job. Requesting a thirty-minute interview from your contact is appropriate.

The purpose of networking is to search for opportunities to have contact with others. Face-to-face contact can happen in numerous situations such as attending a networking event, career fair, informational interview, meeting a family friend or attending a conference. Networking is more effective when you know your audience, prepare questions to ask, research your field and remain calm.

Cold calling is another method for introducing yourself to a contact. Make calls when your energy is the highest. Practice what you are going to say before you call. Write a script with bulleted notes about important points you want to mention. The enthusiasm you project with your voice will make a positive impression on your caller. Projecting confidence, presenting an upbeat tone of voice, and a positive attitude will make a positive impression on your caller.

Emailing is a method for quickly reaching people. It is immediate and your contact can respond to you at their earliest convenience. As with a cover letter, it is important to mention the name of an individual who is a referral. Once again, the content should be clear as to why you are contacting them. Avoid shorthand often use in personal emails. Your email message is an example of your writing and communication skills.

As you continue to meet with people don't forget to ask for suggestions of other people to speak with and a business card during a meeting. Send them a thank you note for their time. Your contacts like to know that they've been helpful and appreciated. They enjoy meeting new people and making connections too. It is appropriate to re-connect at a later date to update them about your progress. Ask for new referrals and resources for your networking activities. Bear in mind that networking is a pro-active and reciprocal relationship. They may ask for your assistance at some point in the future. *Never take your network for granted or disrespect it.* Networking is a lifelong activity. If you carefully cultivate your networking system, it will continually work for you and can shorten your job search.

There is a difference between checking in and becoming a pest, remember the people you speak with have many other responsibilities.

Networking Opportunities

Networking opportunities are everywhere. Never miss a chance to talk with others about your career interests. Consider for a moment the casual conversations you've had standing in line at a grocery store, talking with someone who's sitting next to you on a plane or perhaps at a concert. These are all golden opportunities to talk with people. You never know who or what information these individuals possess and are willing to share with you.

Networking Tips

The purpose of networking is to build and maintain relationships throughout your career. Networking etiquette is an important aspect of the networking process. People don't want to feel like they are not being appreciated or feel taken advantage of for any reason. Your contacts are taking time out from their busy agendas to accommodate you. Always be mindful and respectful of their time and efforts. Here are a few suggestions regarding the do's and don'ts of networking.

- Networking is proactive and reciprocal. Your contact may request your assistance in the future. Be enthusiastic and helpful.
- Don't waste your contact's time by asking unfocused questions. Do your research about the industry and its current trends.
- Be clear about your purpose for networking. The contact wants to know how he or she can assist you.
- Be respectful and don't monopolize a conversation. Remain enthusiastic and positive.
- Don't be aggressive or demanding during your interviews.
- Ask permission to use a contact's name as a referral.
- Bring copies of your resume.
- Always ask for resources before you leave your meeting. If done properly, networking is a professionally rewarding endeavor. If you are conducting a job search or considering a career transition, networking is the key ingredient to exploring your options and increasing your chances of success. Remember the best time to network is when you don't need it.

* For more information on networking, visit the Career Services Office and/or check out our website: www.salemst.edu/careersvs for additional resources.