

The Guide to Networking for Career Opportunities

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Handshake

About Networking

Simply stated, networking is learning about job opportunities through conversations with other people. If you talk with people who share information about your chosen career field, work preferences, or area you want to live in, you are already networking. If you learn some basic principles of networking and apply them to your conversations, it is even more effective.

In fact, networking is the best way to conduct a job search. Studies show that about 80% of jobs are found through networking. People like to be helpful, and usually enjoy talking about themselves, their jobs and contacts. And you may be able to help them in some way - if not now, perhaps in the future.

Remember, you are asking for information when you network, not a job. Job opportunities come from meeting with people in the career field you want to pursue.

Other benefits include:

- Exploring career options
- Learning about a career field, industry, or organization
- Getting to know people in your chosen field or industry

How Does Networking Lead to Jobs?

There are two dimensions of the job market--the open job market and the hidden job market. The open job market consists of advertised jobs that are open to the public. The hidden job market consists of opportunities that are not advertised. Networking will help you uncover job opportunities whether or not they have been advertised. If your skills match the needs of an employer you meet, there is also a possibility that a position will be created for you.

How Do I Begin?

Before you contact anyone, think about why you are contacting them and what you want to say. Are you looking for information about different careers so you can choose your career path? Or, are you looking for people working in a specific company or career field to find job opportunities?

When you have a clear idea of your purpose, you will be able to develop an effective message about who you are and what you want to accomplish. Then, clearly tell everyone you network with what information you are looking for and how they can help you. Start by writing your "elevator speech," intended to provide information quickly to anyone who will need to make a referral for you.

This introduction will include your name, why you are in a job search (i.e. I will graduate from ETSU with a B.S in Business Administration this May), a few key experiences or skills you offer, and what you are looking for (i.e. an opportunity to explore careers in financial services). Then ask the question: “Do you know of anyone in that line of work I could talk with to learn more about opportunities?” If the person you are talking with provides some names, ask them how to get in touch and request permission to use them as a referral when you contact the people they have recommended.

Networking – One Step at a Time

If your purpose is to network for a job, you need to know what you want to do, or at least have a strong sense of your career objective. You also need a resume that demonstrates the qualifications and skills you have in relation to that career objective. For assistance in determining your career direction or writing a resume, contact University Career Services at (423) 439-4450.

First, Make a Personal List of Individuals You Will Contact

Start with people you know. Potential contacts to begin networking include:

- Family
- Faculty/Staff at ETSU
- Classmates
- Friends
- Neighbors
- Current/Past Employers
- Internship/Co-op Supervisors
- Alumni
- Mentors registered on BuLink (contact Career and Internship Services)
- Members of Professional Associations

Take the time to include as many people as you can. Anyone you know can be a networking contact. Keep in mind that some of your contacts may be able to help you directly, while others may be able to refer you to someone else who can help. As you talk with more people, you will discover more opportunities.

You can reach your contacts by phone, email, letter, or in person depending on your relationship with them. As you begin, your goal is to get referrals to people in your chosen career field, organizations you want to learn more about, or geographic areas where you want to live.

Second, Follow up with Your Referrals

Just as you decided how to connect with your primary contacts, you need to determine the best way to get in touch with the people they named as referrals. Again, it depends on the nature of your relationship. The goal here is to schedule an information interview in person, or by phone if time and distance preclude a personal meeting. For new contacts you do not know, a letter of introduction may be best. Be sure to emphasize that you are looking for information and advice—not asking for a job. Again, jobs come to your attention as a result of networking.

The following sample letter illustrates an effective way to request an information interview:

Ms. Jocelyn Gray
Gray & Associates
Knoxville, TN 77077

Dear Ms. Gray:

During my recent conversation with Mark Smith, he suggested that I contact you. Mark told me about your success in building a respected public relations firm in the Knoxville area. He also shared how much he enjoyed working with you on Chamber of Commerce projects.

In May, I will graduate from East Tennessee State University with a B.A. in Mass Communications. My concentration in Public Relations helped me secure an internship with Jarrad-Ingrams in Nashville, where I worked with several non-profit organizations.

The knowledge gained through that experience and related coursework reinforced my enthusiasm for a public relations career. Mark thought that your extensive knowledge and expertise would be of great help to me in learning more about career options.

Please understand that I do not expect you to know of a job for me. My request is simply to talk with you about your experience and ask your advice about getting started in public relations. If you can afford 30 minutes of your time for a personal meeting, I would truly appreciate it.

Next week, I will call to ask you for a convenient time to meet. The best way to learn about careers is through successful people, and I look forward to talking with you.

Caution: Be prepared to ask your questions when you call. They may want to talk while you are on the phone. Typical questions are outlined below.

Third, Initiate Your Information Interviews

Once you set an appointment for an “information interview,” you need to prepare. Organize your questions in advance, so you can facilitate the meeting in a professional way.

The same rules apply for informational interviews as for job interviews. Wear professional dress, bring copies of your resume and arrange work samples or other marketing material in a presentation folder. During your conversation, maintain good posture and eye contact. Take notes, listen carefully and show your enthusiasm for the career you are discussing.

While this may seem stressful, an information interview is much more relaxed than a formal job interview. You set up the meeting and you are the one asking most of the questions. Just remember to use only the time requested and thank your contact for their time and information. Follow up with a thank-you note. Handwritten notes are good, but email is also acceptable. As with all job search correspondence, make sure that your note is free of grammatical and spelling errors.

Sample Questions for Information Interviews

About the person

Why did you choose this profession?

What skills and personal qualities have helped you most in your career?
How would you describe your typical day?
What do you like most about your job? Least?
What are your main responsibilities? What takes most of your time?
Who do you work most closely with and who do you report to?
How did you get to where you are today?

About their organization (Do some research to prepare good questions)

It was interesting to learn from your website how well you are doing in the US market. What has contributed the most to that success?

I noted that your leading competitors are A and B corporations. What makes your organization different?

How would you describe the culture of your organization?

What are the characteristics of your most successful employees?

What direction do you see the company taking in the years ahead?

About their career field (Again, research is important here)

Some of the more pressing issues facing this field today appear to be A, B and C. What do you see as the most important?

What needs to occur to meet that challenge?

What are your predictions about the changes that will take place in this field in the next 5 years?

Which professional associations do you recommend?

What is your advice for someone trying to get a start in this field?

About Career Opportunities

What advice can you give me about the types of positions that are realistic for me to pursue?

What is the best way to find these opportunities?

What type of educational background, experience, skills, and personal qualities are important?

About Next Steps

What publications or web sites do you recommend to find career opportunities?

Do you know of any organizations that are expanding? Do you know someone there I should contact?

Are there any other professional associates you suggest that I contact? May I use your name as a referral?

Thank your contact for their time and assistance.

Stay in Touch with the People Who Take Time to Help You

Write down and follow through on any promises you made to any of your contacts. Provide feedback on your progress and let your contacts know when you start your new job. They invested time and thought in providing you with information and want to know how everything worked out.

Networking is about building relationships, so stay in touch. At some time in the future, you may be able to assist the same people that helped you.

To learn more about networking, contact University Career Services using Handshake at <https://etsu.joinhandshake.com> or email careers@etsu.edu and request an appointment.