

Networking
And
Informational Interviews

A Comprehensive Guide
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NETWORKING

“It’s not what you know, it’s who you know.” This common expression is the basis for understanding the importance of networking as a strategy for career development and exploration. Everyone has a network, even if you don’t realize it, and when it comes to job searching, this network may be just as important as your skills and experience. A personal network is that group of people with whom you interact every day – family, friends, parents of friends, friends of friends, neighbors, teachers, bosses, and co-workers. With these people, information and experiences are exchanged for both social and potential professional reasons. Networking occurs every time you participate in a school or social event, volunteer in at the community, visit with members of your religious group, talk with neighbors, strike up a conversation with someone at the store, or connect with friends online. ***Networking is the planned process by which one becomes known to people who can provide information about job openings, leads, personal contacts and start-up companies, and who have the power to hire.***

According to Cornell University’s Career Center, **80% of available jobs are not advertised. These jobs are often referred to as the “hidden job market.”** In fact, according to *Quintessential Careers*, one out of every 12 informational interviews results in a job offer. This is a remarkable number considering the fact that research indicates that only one in every 200 resumes (some studies put the number even higher) results in a job offer. When networking for the purpose of career development, it’s important not to seem desperate or “bothering” people for a job. Though networking is an important skill, and one that can certainly be taught, it rarely is – some of us are “naturals” and some of us are not.

MASTERING SUBTLE NETWORKING

1. Not a Job

Never ask someone for a job, always ask for suggestions! **Don’t** ask for favors, always ask for advice! Networking should never be a dirty trick to get a quick job interview. A network meeting is a chat; don’t try to make it more than that. Emphasize that you’re only asking for advice by saying something like: “My purpose in asking for a brief meeting is just to get some advice, a little market exposure, and perhaps the names of a few people I can call to expand my network of contacts.” Getting more names should be one of the main goals of networking.

2. Research

Just like a professional detective, you must identify individuals who will serve as your information resource. You can find names of people in business directories, journals and magazines, annual reports newsletters, professional association directories, alumni, professors, fraternities/sororities, parents, friends of parents etc. If you’re unemployed or changing careers, make sure your resume is up to date, but never hand it out unless someone asks for it first. You can also have business cards made using your “specialty “ as a title and hand them out to potential leads.

3. Dialogue

The best way to create a dialogue is through questions and praise. People often love to talk about their personal successes. When you’re “at a loss for words,” shift the conversation back to the person with whom you are speaking, and give them a pat on the back while you’re at it. A little praise can go a long way!

THE THREE P'S OF NETWORKING

Adapted from: Make things Happen

PREPARE: Do what you need to do to get ready. For example:

- To prepare for a telephone call, write a script and practice it. Know why you are calling (have notes). Prepare yourself on how to leave a message if the person doesn't pick up or isn't available.
- To prepare for a face-to-face meeting, do a lot of the same as you would do for a phone call. If you're meeting with someone to get information about the work they do or a particular company, visit the company's website (if they have one) to learn more about it ahead of time.

PRACTICE: Practice what you want to say over and over and over. The more you hear yourself say what you want to say, the easier it will be – and the more confident you will feel.

- Ever think about smiling when you're on the telephone? Believe it or not, people can hear that confidence in your voice. People can determine friendliness from the tone of your voice. Along the same lines, fear can also be heard over the phone. Concentrate on speaking clearly, be calm, and don't forget to breath!
- Prepare for one-to-one meetings by practicing in front of the mirror or by practicing with a friend, parent, or someone you know and trust. Ask them to role play with you – they could pretend to be the person you are going to meet with and you could practice asking the questions you have prepared.

PULL YOURSELF TOGETHER: Part of feeling confident at a networking meeting is feeling good about yourself. If you feel good about your appearance, you tend to give your confidence a big boost!

- Good grooming isn't just for dogs. Don't forget about those day-to-day essentials that keep you presentable. And don't wear too much perfume or cologne as sometimes people are allergic – wearing too much will make them remember you because of your smell, not for your skills or your ideas.
- Dress the way you think the other person will be dressing. If you were networking with your uncle at a family BBQ, shorts and flip-flops might be just fine. But, if you're meeting with someone in an office and people usually wear ties, then you should wear a tie too. If you're going to meet the head of a landscaping company and people usually wear jeans and t-shirts, go one step above and wear khakis and a button down shirt.
- Don't forget the other important things like a pen and a pad of paper. Your contact might say something really great and you'll want to write it down. It's always a good idea to take a resume with you, even if you're not meeting with someone for a job. It's a good way to leave someone with a reminder of your skills, talents, and experiences. After all, who knows what might happen? Also, ask the person to suggest additional people you could contact to learn more.

QUICK TIPS FOR FACE-TO-FACE MEETING

1. Know where you are going and with whom you are speaking to
2. Arrive **10-15 minutes early** so you can freshen up and relax a bit
3. Bring **extra copies** of your resume with references listed on a separate page.
4. Have a **firm handshake** – no wimpy shakes (men and women alike).
5. Establish **eye contact** throughout the interview. (Eye contact in the USA is a sign of honesty and respect).
6. Be aware of your own **body language** (tapping feet, crossed arms) and **non-verbal cues** (rolling your eyes, smiling, nodding).
7. Avoid talking **too much** or **too little** (30 seconds – 2 minutes).
8. Always answer questions in **complete sentences** (no yeah's, na's, or um's)
9. Create a dialogue by remembering this formula:
A. Answer the question
B. Give an example
C. Ask a question

DO's

DON'Ts

Thoroughly research the company

Be unprepared

Smile, relax, be pleasant and friendly

Argue with the interviewer over an issue

Wait to be offered a chair – sit up straight

Slouch in your chair

Be able to have specific goals and examples

Make elaborate promises

Assertively express your strengths

Criticize yourself

Be sincere and listen

Go into too much detail about anything unless asked

Express your 100% interest in the job

Criticize your former boss

Address the interviewer as Mr. or Ms. _____

Address the interviewer by first name unless asked

Have the answers to tough questions rehearsed

“Hem and Haw” with embarrassment

Be able to explain anything that's on your resume

Forget what you have written

SAMPLE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. From what I've researched about your company, I have found out (xxx). Can you tell me anything more about the company's history?
2. How would you apply for a job at this company?
3. Do you have a written job description I can look at?
4. What is a typical career path that someone entering this position might follow?
5. Does the company place great emphasis on its' employees continuing their education?
6. Does the company offer any training programs?
7. What other types of jobs are there at this company?
8. What characteristics do you look for in your employees?
9. What is the schedule? Is there much overtime?
10. What are the day-to-day responsibilities as a _____?
11. How does this company measure it's' success?
12. Do you like working here?
13. How do the people generally get along in the office?
14. Do you know of any other people that would be willing to talk to me?
15. Can I use your name when I talk to _____?
16. **May I have your business card?** (always ask this so you can send thank-you emails or letters to everyone with whom you've met and interviewed)

THE FOLLOW-UP

WRITE YOURSELF NOTES

Write down anything you feel is important which occurred during the interview as soon as you get home, and while it's still fresh in your mind. When you're nervous, it's easy to forget important details so the notes will also assist you when you're writing your thank-you emails/letters.

SEND A THANK-YOU EMAIL

Where thank you letters are preferred after a job interview, a thank-you email is preferred after an informational interview. Because emails are generally shorter than thank you letters, you won't be taking any more of the person's time. Thank-you emails should be sent within **24 hours** after your meeting. Don't send a mass email. Make sure you take the time to personalize each one. A thank-you email serves two purposes: (1) It is a courtesy to the person/people with whom you met. It thanks the person for his/her time; (2) You want them to remember your name in a *positive* way as much, and as often, as you can. The thank-you email also lets the interviewer know that you paid attention during the informational interview, and that you understood his or her comments and thoughts.

SAMPLE THANK-YOU EMAIL

Hi Mr. Jones,

Thank you once again for allowing me to conduct an informational interview with you. I understand how busy you are this time of year, so the time you took to help answer some of my questions is greatly appreciated. Not only was I excited to hear about your vision for future growth, but I also felt very comfortable with your staff members. Thank you for making what would otherwise be a tense situation into one where I felt completely at ease. Don't forget, if there is ever a time when I can help you, please don't hesitate to ask!

Sincerely,
Mary A. Smith