



## NETWORKING

# MAKING STRATEGIC CONNECTIONS

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Networking is a process of developing strategic connections with people (e.g.: friends & family, faculty, staff & alumni, former employers and colleagues) for purposes of career advice, employer information and professional mentorship. Used properly, it can lead to:

- Realistic career goal-setting
- Critical insight and information about a job or employment sector
- Opportunities to interact with alumni
- Effective job and internship searches
- Satisfying and fulfilling jobs and internships

Networking occurs throughout your career regardless of the cultural setting in which you work and live. Although your personal network of professional contacts is fluid and ever changing, it has the potential to provide life-long advice and support in future work transitions.

An important networking objective is to create opportunities to meet alumni or professionals in a targeted field or employment sector. These arranged meetings are referred to as **Informational Interviews**. They are often set up as informal discussions either in an office or, at the discretion of the professional contact, outside a place of employment. If conducting a long-distance search, networking can result in a telephone conversation or at the very least, an email exchange which provides specific career information.

### GETTING ORGANIZED

- **Clarify and identify your skills and interests** since you are seeking to match these with appropriate fields and organizations.
- **Define your objectives and priorities.** What are the information gaps you have at each stage of your search? For example: details of a job description, background on an offer, insights into workplace environment, related organizations to explore, entry-level positions, resume critique, hiring practices/ strategies, etc.
- **Identify** prospective networking contacts: Consider family, friends, peers, mentors, former employers, alumni (via GoHopOnline and LinkedIn), undergraduate alumni, faculty, and professional friends.
- **Research** each contact's career field and organization. This preparation will add to your credibility in an interview and also create a purposeful and focused atmosphere during the discussion. Some sources could be career advisor, Google search, Vault guides, company literature, or LEXIS-NEXIS.
- **Prepare/tailor a list of specific questions** for each informational interview. Remember, you are in the role of interviewer, and it is your responsibility to come prepared and to clearly articulate your goals for the discussion.

### MAKING INITIAL CONTACTS

- Be proactive and initiate contacts by email or letter (initial telephone contact is not recommended unless you've been advised to by someone making a referral) See Appendix for sample content in a first communication. Use whichever approach is most

appropriate to your relationship with the contact person and the target industry/field.

- If you have little or NO prior experience with networking and making initial contacts, speak with a career advisor and arrange for a practice session. Practicing initial telephone calls and role-playing the conversation will lead to increased confidence in these situations.
- Be prepared to inform your contacts about your job search goals, tell them that you are a student, and briefly outline your career focus or specific job interest. Remember that you are not directly asking for a job in an informational interview; you are seeking advice and counsel about your career direction and job or internship search.
- Review the following two useful Career Guides available in hard copy in Career Services and on the website: ***Effective use of Email; and Effective Cover Letters, email and Thank You Letters***

#### CONDUCTING THE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

- Arrive on time. Take your resume along in case the contact/alumnus asks to see it.
- Agree on time parameters for the meeting. Be sensitive to time pressures on your contact.
- Strive to develop an easy rapport and be positive in your responses.
- State your objectives for the meeting at the outset of the conversation.
- Ask open-ended questions (it is acceptable to have a list of questions in front of you). Avoid questions that have a simple Yes or No answer. Demonstrate that you have done your research by asking informed questions!
- Observe the job setting. Would you enjoy working there?
- Although inappropriate to ask for a job, you may ask about future hiring trends for someone with your background and experience. If your background and skills are seen as a match and the timing is right, your contact may inform you of openings for which you are qualified or perhaps agree to bring your resume to the attention of a colleague.
- **Before concluding the interview:** Ask if the contact might have a referral(s) to other professionals in his/her field and ask permission to use their name when contacting them.

#### FOLLOW-UP AFTER THE MEETING

- Evaluate whether or not the field, job, and organization are right for you.
- Be prompt and send a thank you email or letter (See Appendix)
- Review and refine your interviewing technique based on the outcome of the meeting. What went well and what needs improvement in your approach and style?
- Keep a record of the outcomes of each meeting. Organization is key to networking success.
- Keep in touch with your contacts regarding your job search progress.
- Inform your contacts when you find a job or internship.

**FINALLY:** Remember that building a professional network is an ongoing and lifelong process.

**START EARLY**

**KEEP MOMENTUM**

**MAINTAIN CONTACTS**

**PERSEVERE**

## APPENDIX

### SAMPLE 'APPROACH' LETTER OR EMAIL REQUESTING INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

This is a suggested format and intended to be adapted according to each student's prior experience and/or relationship with a contact.

**Paragraph 1: Introduce yourself** (a first year student at the Johns Hopkins University School of \_\_\_\_\_ with a concentration in \_\_\_\_\_); state the purpose of your letter: e.g. to request their advice and guidance in exploring career opportunities in your field of interest; mention in what capacity (researcher, marketing position, public affairs). *If referred by a career advisor or other person, mention in the first sentence: "I am writing to you at the suggestion of \_\_\_\_\_."*

**Paragraph 2: Provide a BRIEF overview** of your background and highlight points particularly relevant to this field (e.g.: previous work experience, current coursework, related skills). Mention that you are enclosing your resume so that they can get an idea of your background before you meet.

**Paragraph 3: Include follow-up information.** Mention how you would like to pursue a meeting or conversation; e.g., I will call you the week of xxx to see if we can arrange a convenient time to meet (or speak by phone, if they are not local).

**Closing: Thank you** for your time and attention and I look forward to meeting with you...Always use *Sincerely or Sincerely yours, your full name – as below.*

### SAMPLE 'THANK YOU' LETTER OR EMAIL

In addition to thanking the person you met with, remember to also report back and thank the party who may have referred you.

Dear Dr/Mr/Ms:

Thank you very much for the time you spent with me on Monday to discuss my job search process. Your insights and perspectives about the field of [or name of company or organization] \_\_\_\_\_ were extremely helpful. In particular, I appreciated the introductions to Ms. Y and Mr. Z. Both have agreed to meet with me over the next 10 days and I am looking forward to my discussions with them. I will let you know the outcome as soon as I can.

Your advice and comments concerning improvements to my resume were also very useful. I have made the suggested changes and am pleased to say that it is a much more convincing document. I am sure this will have a significant impact on my job search process.

Thank you once again for spending time with me. I appreciate your advice and offer of continuing support for my job search and I will keep you informed of how my networking is progressing.

Sincerely,  
[Full Name]

## EXAMPLES OF NETWORKING QUESTIONS

### About the Career Field

- How large is the industry?
- What is the future outlook for this field?
- Which parts of the industry will grow/decline over the next few years?
- Who are the major players?
- Which are the better companies in my area of interest?
- Are there professional journals I should read or associations I should join?

### About the Organization

- How old/large is the organization? What can you tell me about its history?
- Who are your major competitors?
- How is the organization structured?
- Which are the growth/problem areas within the organization? Which would best match my background?
- What is the company culture/working environment like (who tends to get ahead, stress levels, office accommodation, problems, etc.)?
- What important challenges face the company now or in the near future?

### About the Job or Function

- What are the major tasks you perform in your job?
- What skills, qualifications, background are needed for this job?
- Could you describe a “typical” career path [If an alum, this may become a more personal history] from entry level to management?
- Are there alternative means for putting myself in line for a position (e.g. volunteer, part-time work)?
- What is the expected salary at entry level? Mid-career?
- Is my resume appropriate for an entry or mid-level job with the organization? Do I need further skills or training?

### About the Contact

- Could you tell me about your professional background and career path?
- Could you outline your duties and responsibilities?
- What are the most challenging/frustrating aspects of your job?
- How has your education helped in your job? How did you market your degree after graduation?
- Are there specific classes you would recommend to better prepare me for an entry-level or mid-career position?
- Could you recommend other professionals in the field with whom I could talk? May I use your name as a referral?