Networking and Informational Interviewing

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General Information

Definition of Networking

One thing needs to be emphasized right in the beginning: networking is NOT to ask for a job. Ultimately, networking is relationship building. Networking offers the opportunities to gain new career-related information and insight, and to gain exposure and experience to the "hidden job market".

Purposes of Networking

- To attain valuable insider's advice to improve and refine you job search.
- To help you refine your ideal job role.
- To identify employers you want to include in your marketing plan.
- To get advice on how to market yourself from people performing the role you want to perform.
- To have your résumé critiqued by someone knowledgeable about the requirements of the role or employer you seek.
- To be introduced inside organizations you have targeted as desirable employers.
- To introduce yourself to individuals who might actually know of an organization or individual looking for someone with your skill set.
- To develop new contacts in a community or field of interest.

Interestingly, though networking is indeed not about looking for a job, here are some numbers to ponder. The percentage of jobs found through want ads is 7-10%, through recruiters is 10-12%, and through networking is 70-80%.

Networking is successful, if you are

- Developing a contact list based on your current contacts.
- Systematically contacting virtually everyone you know.
- Tailoring what you say to each individual based on circle of influence and area of expertise.
- Understanding that networking is a Quid pro quo interaction; you look for some way to be of assistance to each contact that makes time for you.
- Using an expanding list of contacts to penetrate potential employers you have identified, so that you have advocates inside these organizations.
- Keeping your contacts advised of the outcomes when they refer you to new contacts, so that they know you valued their referrals and acted on them.

Networking Methods

- Face-to-face
- By letter or note
- Over the phone
- Via email and other forms of online communication
- Through public speaking opportunities

The methods you choose from the above list depend on a number of factors including your preferred communication style, your networking time frame, your goals and needs, and your resources. In most cases, a thorough networking effort involves a combination of all of these approaches. In any case, your strategy should suit your personality and augment your marketability.

Who to Network with

The basic theme of networking is relationship building. Therefore, in

order to have your network work most effectively toward your ultimate goal, a job, you must have a clear understanding of your current network and remain vigilant about maintaining your connections.

At your school

Professors, classmates, faculty administration, alumni, academic advisors, members of professional organizations. Contacts from career fairs, workshops, and speakers you have heard.

In your community

Contacts where you have volunteered, religious community, political organizations, community organizations, neighbors and acquaintances, chamber of commerce, local businesses, and other professionals.

In your personal life:

Family, friends, neighbors, people you met traveling, fraternity or sorority, cultural associations, advocacy groups, and chat-room pals, your hairdresser (seriously!), etc..

Set Up for an Informational Interview

You can have an informational interview either face-to-face or over the phone. Either way, this is the structure:

Time frame

Ask for 15 minutes; if contact expands that, or takes you to lunch, fine; otherwise end the interview at the appointed time.

Agenda

You set the agenda; pace it accordingly.

What you must offer during the interview

Offer something that might be useful to your contact: referrals to students with interests in a field other than yours that is more aligned with contact's current needs, copies of an article that the contact may not have seen on a topic you had discussed. If you do not know what do

offer, ask. This is much appreciated.

(Warning: do not offer proprietary material from a former employer or material from a not-yet-published – and therefore not yet copyrighted – work in progress.)

What you want to come away with

Contact's business card; at least 3 new referrals with whom you may use contact's name.

How you must follow up

Thank you note; deliver what you promised to send; phone call or note the source of this contact. Follow-up on referrals to new contacts; follow up within one week while they are still hot.

Steps of an Informational Interview

- 1. Establish Rapport (ice-breaker)
- 2. Diffuse Situation: You want no hidden agendas. Let interviewee know you only want advice.
- 3. Mission: Summarize goals, and give your background.
- 4. Strategies: Give examples of strategies you are using
- 5. Resume Draft: If opportunity arises ask for criticism and advice on your resume. Write 'Draft' at the top so that it is not handed on to other people. You want to be in control over who is receiving your resume.
- 6. People: Try to obtain at least three referrals. It is both the quality and the quantity of contacts that counts. However, decision makers are the KEY. Note: Follow-up all referrals within the week while they are still hot!
- 7. Campaign/Target List: Ask for/ share your list of target companies, ask for recommendations. Keep your eye on the time do not overextend your welcome
- 8. Verbal Thank You
- 9. Telephone Update: Ask for permission to call for telephone update
- 10. Write a Thank you Letter. Send this letter right away and thank them for the meeting time and suggestions.

Additional Tips

- Have your script written down in front of you. You may not say it word for word, but you have a much better chance of delivering it completely and smoothly if it's there to refer to.
- Be well-groomed and dressed conservatively.
- Be organized. Use a presentation kit: leather folder with business cards, draft résumé, target list of companies, paper tablet, list of personal references, certificates if appropriate, and your portfolio/proposal if appropriate.
- Make certain your handshake is firm and eye contact solid.
- Smile. Maintain an open posture and firm/solid eye contact.
- Remember, approximately 80% of your leads will come from approximately 20% of your contacts. Therefore concentrate on the 20% that you feel most confident with.
- When you make phone calls, stand up and smile. If you don't believe this makes a difference, record your networking script (into your own answering machine if necessary), both while sitting with a normal expression and while standing, smiling. Compare the difference. Standing makes you alert and precise; moving the muscles into a smile puts warmth in your voice.

90-Second Pitch

The aim of this pitch is to communicate your career goal as well as the experience that backs up your goal. The pitch therefore summarizes your career past with regard to your goal. To present the pitch, you have 90 seconds at the most, which is approximately the time an elevator needs to go up several floors. That is the time you have to communicate your main messages essential for someone to understand your career goal and expertise.

The following information should be included in this pitch:

- Name
- If you are still a student:Program of study, degree and date

- anticipated as well as school; undergraduate degree, major and school attended.
- Job target: Which role do I pursue in which industry, and where and when do I pursue this role?
- Work experience:Industries, roles, kinds of organization (corporate, non-profit, government)
- Areas of expertise
- Languages
- If you are an alumna/e:Graduate degree, program of study and school attended.

While you want to present as much as possible, you want to – as with the résumé – present only what is absolutely necessary to make your experience and skills look as best you can.

To phrase a good 90-second pitch does take time. So be patient with yourself. Write down what you want to say and read it out loud - both to yourself and to others. Let them give you feedback regarding the following criteria:

Loudness

Most people tend to speak with too low a voice. Speak up; if you think it is too loud, it is most likely just right.

Speed/Tempo

Don't rush through it just because you want to put in as much information as possible. Include what you absolutely need to include, but make it concise so that you will have enough time for the presentation. If you think it is too slow, it is probably just about right.

Comprehensibility

Even an 8-year old should be able to understand what you are saying.

Flow of information

Some people stress a specific order of the information. For whichever order you decide, remember that it should be easy for the receiver to follow your mini-presentation and to make sense of what you say.

Possible lack of important information

Possible information overload

Time

It must not exceed 90 seconds!

Intonation

In the beginning, when you are reading your different drafts out loud, your voice may sound dull and boring. With time, as you learn your pitch by heart, intonation and emphasis will come in. This is a criterion that you should work on in the end.

Networking Script

Your Draft Networking Script to Schedule an Informational Interview

Good morning, this is	I'm calling
at the suggestion of	who thought that you
might be able to	[piece of 90–second pitch
applicable here?]	Would you be willing to meet with
me briefly/for 15 minutes sometime in the next two weeks?	

What to ask

Here are some things that may be of interest to you:

- How did you get into the career? How did you do it?
- How did you make the transition from X to this career?
- What is best/worst, most exciting/boring in this career?
- What are the opportunities/limitations of this career?
- What are the most necessary skills in this career?
- What is a typical work day in this career?
- After describing your background, ask the person: Do I fit this career, and if not, what do I lack?

- Where can one find the good job openings in this field?
- What are good professional organizations to join?
- How much does one earn in entry as well as mid and senior level positions?
- Do you know anybody who could have more information regarding my questions?
- What are the developments within the field?
- Would you be kind enough to look at my résumé and give me your comments or suggestions?
- Can you identify executive recruiters whom you've worked with in this field?
- Do you know anyone at [organizations you'd like to work for]?