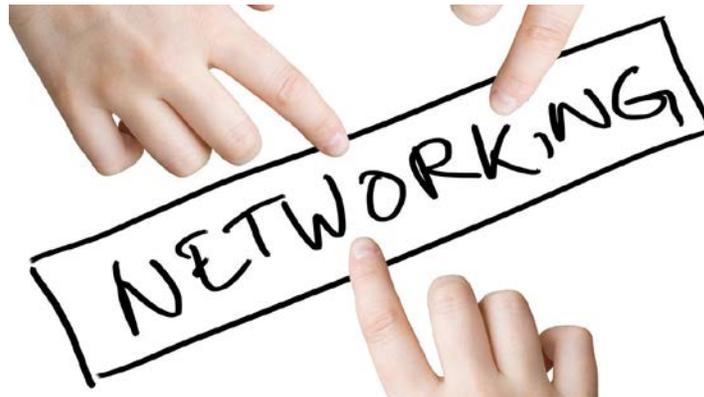


NETWORKING GUIDE

WHAT IS NETWORKING?

Networking is the systematic process of developing and cultivating a pool of professional contacts. Networking is not just telling a few friends, relatives, or faculty members, “I’m looking for a job, so let me know if you hear of anything.” Rather, it is a strategic approach to building professional relationships through which you can share and learn information about career opportunities, important industry trends, and practice methods. Networking is a refined skill, learned through experience that takes time and effort. Effective networking can help you enormously in your career search.



WHO NEEDS TO NETWORK?

Everyone. Even if you think you will get a job through another job search strategy, you still need to build a network. First, it will help educate you on the career you are seeking and can provide valuable feedback on your resume and interviewing strategy. Second, it expands your pool of opportunities by revealing options that you may not have known existed.

BENEFITS OF NETWORKING

Networking is a valuable job search strategy that provides a variety of benefits. The people within your network can help you in the following ways:

- **Educate you on a career, company, and/or industry:** It is important to understand industry trends, the competitive landscape, language used within the industry, and current events. In addition, you need to understand what positions exist within a company that would be of interest to you.
- **Prepare you for your job search:** Those who work within the industry you are pursuing serve as great resources for feedback on your resume, interview tips, and guidance on your strategy.
- **Build a list of potential companies and contacts:** You should use every contact as an opportunity to learn the name of another company that may be of interest to you and to gain the name of at least one additional contact with whom you could speak.
- **Guide you to open positions:** Frequently, positions are open inside a company before they are posted on a website. By knowing a few “insiders,” you can learn about opportunities early and potentially be recommended for a position.

HOW NETWORKING WORKS

Building your network takes significant time: it takes time to find people who can assist you with your specific career path and it takes time to build a relationship. When building a network, the key to remember is that you are creating and nurturing a relationship. You cannot just start asking for a job. If you ask immediately, you will get no response since others won't recommend you for a position if they don't know anything about you. But people, especially alumni, have a natural tendency to want to help, guide, and assist others. So your best strategy is to use a two-phased approach:

1. **Seek advice, information, and assistance:** You will build trust and gain support of others during this phase, which is necessary before asking to help you find a job.
2. **Hone in on specific job opportunities:** Once you have built a relationship with someone, you can then contact them with more specific questions regarding job opportunities.



Your Networking Pitch

The term “elevator speech” reflects the idea that it should be possible to deliver a summary of a person, product, or organization in the time span of an elevator ride. Effective elevator speeches should be able to describe and sell an idea in 30 seconds or less. Today, an elevator speech can be any kind of short speech that sells an idea, promotes your business, or markets you as an individual. In networking and professional settings, an elevator speech or pitch is as essential as a business card. You need to be able to say who you are, what you do, what you are interested in doing, and how you can be a resource to your listeners. If you don't have an elevator speech, people won't know what you really do.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Before you can convince anyone of your proposition you need to know exactly what it is. You need to define precisely what you are offering, what problems you can solve, and what benefits you bring to a prospective contact or employers. Answer the following questions:

- What are your key strengths?
- What adjectives come to mind to describe you?
- What is it you are trying to “sell” or let others know about you?
- Why are you interested in the company or industry the person represents?

OUTLINE YOUR TALK

Start an outline of your material using bullet points. You don't need to add any details at this stage; simply write a few notes to help remind you of what you really want to say. They don't need to be complete sentences. Use the following questions to start your outline:

- Who am I?
- What do I offer?
- What relevant experience or skills do I have?
- What are the main contributions I can make?
- What should the listener do as a result of hearing this?

FINALIZE YOUR PITCH

Now that your pitch is outlined, you can finalize it. The key to doing this is to expand on the notes you made by writing out each section in full. Don't try to pack too much information into your elevator pitch. Make it short, informative, and interesting so that a prospective client will want to know more. Practice rehearsing your pitch out loud or with a friend. Your pitch should be between 30 to 60 seconds.



Online Networking

Online networking, through websites such as LinkedIn, has become one of the most effective ways to build your pool of professional contacts. They can provide you with access to people who you would not otherwise encounter, and they are great venues for sharing information about your professional interest and qualifications.

ONLINE NETWORKING TIPS

- Restrict networking activities to professionally oriented websites, such as LinkedIn, professional organizations, and the Ohio State Alumni Association.
- Remember that employers and potential employers often use these websites (including Facebook and Twitter) to investigate candidates.
- Make sure that the information and pictures posted on your profile are not professionally damaging. Use privacy settings to manage the visibility of your content.
- Uphold normal standards of networking professionalism by sending thank you notes, using professional language and grammar, and following-up on suggestions and referrals.

Building Relationships

In addition to gathering information, the goal of every networking encounter is to leave a lasting positive impression. This will help you to establish and cultivate ongoing relationships with professionals in your field. Networking is a continual process. Staying organized and maintaining contacts are just as important if not more important than the initial contact.

STAYING ORGANIZED

As you begin networking, you will find that staying organized is an essential aspect of cultivating your pool of professional contacts. Be sure to gather as much relevant information as you can about the people you meet. Collect business cards, and write notes about where you met each contact, what you spoke about, and the next steps for follow-up. Keep your business cards organized. If you are not able to get a business card, keep a list of contact that contains all the aforementioned information. Always store your information in an accessible location and in a user-friendly format. This will make it easier for you to review and update key information about your professional contacts on a regular basis.

FOLLOWING UP & MAINTAINING YOUR NETWORK

For the savvy professional, following up on networking encounters is not an option; it is a necessity. Follow up on your networking interactions with a thank you note, and always let people know when and how they have been helpful. This positive feedback will encourage your contacts to do more on your behalf.

Once you find a job, stay connected by updating your professional contacts on your progress, attending industry events, and sharing relevant articles and announcements whenever appropriate. Remember, networking involves reciprocity. As you employ your network's resources, be willing to also act as a resource to your own contacts.