



## CENTER FOR CAREER & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

# Networking Basics

## What is 'Networking'?

Networking is the mutually beneficial process of gathering and giving helpful information from/to a network of contacts to explore career options and seek opportunities. It's a process of building relationships from which you enlist support and ask for ideas, advice, and referrals to those with hiring power and includes two stages:

**DEVELOPMENTAL:** Networking with first-tier contacts for the purpose of getting further contacts and referrals

**STRATEGIC:** Direct networking with second-tier contacts that lays the foundation for hiring

## Why Network?

Based on a US Department of Labor survey, at least 70% of job seekers secured positions from referrals from friends or relatives (otherwise known as networking!), a figure mirrored by data on new Southwestern grads annually. Networking is a critical 21<sup>st</sup> century career management skill for constructing a well-managed life. We know that a vast majority of job vacancies are never posted. Employers are often reluctant to advertise positions directly because of cost (of advertising and of staff time to look through the mountains of applications generated by direct postings) and because they believe word-of-mouth referrals lead to the best candidates in the most efficient manner. In addition, due to the length of time necessary to conceptualize, craft, and advertise position descriptions formally, networking may uncover job opportunities before they officially exist. Networking is especially useful in highly competitive industries and in fields where full-scale recruiting is cost-prohibitive (e.g. non-profits). Networking serves several purposes; be sure to clarify for yourself *why* you are contacting a particular individual before doing so. Reasons include:

- Focusing your choice of major or career direction
- Validating your choice of career
- Getting advice about your job search
- Refining your interviewing skills
- Uncovering specific employer information or job leads

## How Do I Make Contact?

Making contact can take place in several ways:

**IN PERSON:** First while looking for referrals and leads among the people you already know well; later when meeting face-to-face with

contacts you've developed through referrals (after an interim step in which you call or email those individuals).

**EMAIL:** A good choice when you know the contact; less intrusive than a phone call. Should be well-written, concise, and followed up by a phone call to your contact.

**PHONE:** Essential tool of networking—most paths ultimately lead to phone conversations. Practice your technique with scripts, friends, and video/voice recorders if you're nervous.

**START SLOWLY:** Force yourself to chat with people you don't know—in elevators, in line at the store, just about anywhere. Set a goal to talk to at least two people you don't know at the next event you attend.

**FLATTERY WILL GET YOU EVERYWHERE:** Make a list of people you admire. Write each of them expressing your interest in their work. You might be surprised what happens! Start a conversation with a genuine compliment. Be nice and respectful to all administrative staff. These are the people who get you in to see the person you want to meet in the future.

## Who Should Be Part of My Network?

Your first tier of contacts doesn't necessarily contain individuals who will lead directly to a job. Rather, the initial, **developmental networking** process involves contacting readily available people you may already know:

- Classmates
- Alumni (especially recent grads)
- Parents and other family
- Parents of classmates and friends
- Faculty and staff
- Current and former employers
- Guest speakers and job fair reps
- Members of professional associations
- Members of student organizations to which you belong
- Online discussion groups, etc.
- Anyone else you know (e.g. high school teachers, family doctors, clergy, coaches, etc.)

Your first-tier contacts may lead to a hiring opportunity, but most likely will garner referrals to second-tier contacts who are more closely involved with your targeted industry, field, or position. Be

sure to keep your first-tier contacts informed of your progress and send thank-you notes!

When you get referrals to second-tier contacts, **strategic networking** begins, laying the foundation for possible hiring. These are the contacts with whom you will have more in-depth discussions about your career development, get advice and job leads, and possibly interview for a position. Practice your “sound bite” (brief introduction) and “commercial” (longer introduction) before initiating contact through phone, email, or in person.

## Where Can I Network?

You can network everywhere you go. Examples include:

- Professional organizations
- Volunteer organizations
- Charity and fundraising events
- Civic and community groups
- Religious communities
- Golf course, tennis/racquetball court, health club
- Political campaign events
- Chamber of commerce
- Your hometown
- Airplanes
- Your dream organization’s favorite hangout (e.g. bar)
- Toastmasters
- Weddings
- Convention and trade shows
- Book clubs
- Continuing education programs
- Alumni associations, reunions, and networks
- Online (PirateConnect, LinkedIn and other social media)

## Networking Etiquette

**KNOW YOUR PURPOSE FOR NETWORKING:** Don’t waste contacts’ time by being unsure of how you want them to help.

**DO YOUR HOMEWORK:** Be prepared to ask questions that can’t easily be found through a little research.

**DON’T ACT DESPERATE:** Be positive and upbeat. Smile and have fun. Fear and negativity are turn-offs to contacts.

**RECIPROCATATE:** Offer help to your contacts and supply needed information whenever possible. Follow through!

**BE INTERESTING TO OTHERS:** Stand out by the quality of your questions, the confidence in your handshake/posture/eye contact, or the fact that you’ve done your research and it shows.

**LISTEN:** Don’t monopolize or rush the conversation but contribute when appropriate. Use active listening skills (lean forward, lift eyebrows, nod, “um-hmm,” etc.).

**RESPECT YOUR CONTACTS’ TIME:** Remember time zone differences, be brief and to the point, and always ask if a contact has time to visit with you.

**GET PERMISSION AND GIVE CREDIT** when sharing a referral’s source.

**BE CAREFUL USING THE WORD “NETWORKING”:** The overuse of this word makes some contacts wary. Reframe “networking” as seeking advice, making connections, and building relationships.

## The Informational Interview

Informational interviews are basically extended conversations with your network of contacts that help you gather information firsthand from people who work in fields that interest you. To prepare:

**RESEARCH:** Assess yourself, your purpose for contacting your network, what you have to offer your contact, and your goals. You may be asked questions about yourself, your career interests, your experience and skills, and your coursework. Also, research your contact’s career field, specific employers, and background in preparation for asking well-informed questions. Look contacts up on LinkedIn or other online sources.

**RESUMES:** Bring some copies to your interview to provide background information to your contact, reinforce points of your introduction, and potentially get a critique.

**ATTIRE:** Dress on the conservative side and be clean and presentable. When in doubt, a business suit is recommended.

Always ask your contact for more referrals! For more information and specific questions to ask your contact, see our Informational Interviews handout.

## Networking Tools

Being organized keeps your network productive. Keep updated, targeted resumes handy. Have business cards or create networking cards (for seekers currently not employed) with your name and contact information.

**PIRATECONNECT:** The exclusive virtual networking and mentoring community for SU Pirates provides easy access to SU alumni, parents, faculty, staff and friends who are ready and willing to provide career development advice and resources. Visit <https://pirateconnect.southwestern.edu/>.

**LINKEDIN:** The largest professional networking site, with more than 830 million users, 58 million companies, and 20 million jobs worldwide. Visit [www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com).

## Follow Up with Your Contacts

All of your preparation can be undone if you fail to thank those who help you. Acknowledge everyone in your network—not just those in a position to hire you—with thank-you notes. In addition, send follow-up notes keeping your contacts informed of your progress and the results of the advice they gave you.

## Getting Help with Your Search

The Center for Career & Professional Development team as well as numerous SU alumni are available to help you in the search process for jobs, internships, and graduate/professional school.