

Networking

What is Networking?

Networking is an essential tool in your career exploration and job search processes. Simply put, networking means talking with people who are working in jobs, organizations, or career fields that interest you. In doing so, you will learn what they do, what it takes to succeed, what skills and knowledge the work requires, and receive more names to add to your contact list. Whether you are researching career options or launching a job search campaign, you will want to be as effective in your efforts as possible. Networking is a crucial component in the career development process.

A Note For Skeptics

Students sometimes resist networking because of shyness or the mistaken belief that networking is disingenuous.

Don't let either of these keep you from using this highly effective tool! This process of meeting people and building relationships is the major pipeline to jobs and to high confidence in career decision-making. Sophisticated professionals use it regularly and know its immense value. When done well, it is neither sleazy, manipulative, nor an imposition. If a contact doesn't have the time or inclination to help, s/he will tell you so. Most people you approach will be happy to help. Keep in mind, most people love to talk about what they do, how they got started, and to offer advice.

If you are shy, start with contacts you know personally or were given to you by those you know. Once you conduct a few meetings, it will get easier. Prepare your introduction in advance and bring questions with you as a short "script".

If you are still hesitant to begin this process, discuss your concerns with a member of the Career Development staff.

Informational vs. Targeted Networking

Informational Interviewing is most appropriate when you are unsure of your career direction and want to learn more about different fields and the jobs within them. It can also help you find an internship where you can get first-hand experience to help you decide if this work is for you. It is a time to ask broad questions about topics such as:

- What skills are needed?
- Who is successful?
- How many hours a week are expected?
- How might this kind of work fit into my overall life plans?
- What is the starting salary range?
- What are the satisfactions and rewards of this work?

Once you have made a decision about career direction and have a specific field or job target in mind, you are ready to conduct "**targeted networking.**" This is a job search tool that savvy job seekers use to gather deeper, insider information to increase one's odds of targeting a great organization or position, or for developing job leads. That information could be about:

- The organization (products, services, strategy, competition)
- Potential job openings
- More contacts within the organization with whom to discuss your job objective
- More contacts outside the organization with whom to continue networking
- Advice on how to improve your job search techniques or targets



Resources & Opportunities

Six Degrees of Separation

You are only six people away from anyone. Want to talk to the Marketing Vice President for Chase Manhattan Bank? Ask one person you know to help make that connection, that person will ask another, who'll ask a third, etc. Within six people you can find whomever you want to meet. How to start? Ask a few people!

You will build the list by adding names you obtain from your initial contacts. At the end of each conversation, ask each contact for at least two more names - referrals you can contact to further discuss this kind of work. Within a few months, you can attain a goal of having 50 names on your networking master list.

Holy Cross Alumni

An excellent resource for networking is the Career Advisors Network. It is an online database of Holy Cross alumni/alumnae around the country who have volunteered to talk with students and other graduates about what they do for a living. You may access the Career Advisors Network on the Holy Cross Center for Career Development website. Add those contacts to the names you get from your own circle of friends and acquaintances and you will have completed the first step of networking, namely, creating your initial contact list.

Career Fairs

One of the primary benefits of attending a career fair is meeting new people -- recruiters, other job seekers, career professionals -- to add to your network of contacts. Regardless of your reason for attending a career fair, keep in mind that one of the biggest benefits is the addition of contacts to your career network. Of course, your first priority should be to network with recruiters, but don't discount the other participants at the fair. Be sure to network with fellow attendees. Some of the attendees are your competition, but many are seeking other positions, and the sharing of information and resources can be beneficial, not only at the fair, but also beyond. So, take time to chat with other fair-goers. And, also network with fair organizers who may have inside information on upcoming recruitment events, organizations that are recruiting but could not attend, etc.

Don't leave the Career Fair without a collection of business cards. After the fair, take time to write a quick thank-you note to any new network contact you made. One of the keys to keeping your network strong and invested in your career is by keeping in touch. As with the recruiters, remember to thank them for their time and acknowledge any help they have provided.

Make a List!

- Holy Cross alumni
- roommates
- friends
- faculty
- sport coaches
- fellow team players
- people you know from volunteering
- summer job co-workers
- bosses
- clergy and church members
- your doctor, dentist, hairdresser
- friends of your siblings
- your parents and siblings
- friends of your parents
- high school teachers and friends
- internship supervisors/peers

Informational Interviewing

What is an Informational Interview?

An informational interview is a conversation in which you gather information from an individual who is or has been employed in a career field of interest to you. It is not an employment interview!

Through informational interviewing you can:

- Seek knowledge about careers to help you make informed career decisions.
- Learn about job opportunities and career paths.
- Begin or expand a “network” of contacts.
- Visit and evaluate a variety of work settings and environments.
- Become more confident about your interpersonal skills.
- Establish the first link to your potential job targets.

How Does it Work?

Prepare, Research, and Plan in Advance

Prior to your meeting, do some research to get a basic understanding of the industry, profession, position, etc. Also, know your interests, skills, and values and how these relate to the career you are investigating. You can meet with a staff member in the Center for Career Development to clarify these.

Contact Someone

Initiate an informational interview by emailing or calling the individual. Let that person know that you are a student who is gathering information to assist you in career decision-making. Explain how you obtained the person’s name. Mention your hope of arranging a meeting to discuss the industry/job description/company/etc. Make it clear that you are not asking for a job. Follow-up your email with a phone call to request an appointment. Be sure to convey genuine interest and enthusiasm!

Prepare for the Interview

Generally, you will be expected to lead the conversation, so prepare a list of questions (see page 4). Be sure to select questions that will elicit the information which will be most useful to you. During your conversation, listen carefully and ask for additional information when necessary.

During the Interview

Always present yourself professionally. Even if your job search is several years away, an informational interview can be a great opportunity to make a positive first impression. Be prompt and do not take up too much of the person’s time. Dress appropriately for the setting. Usually, conservative business attire is the norm. Be enthusiastic, shake hands confidently, and be polite. Bring a copy of your resume. A resume will offer an overview of your background. Consider asking your contact for advice on preparing an effective resume for an entry level position in a specific career field.

Follow-Up

Send a thank-you note in which you refer to any especially interesting or useful information. Also, keep notes of your meeting including helpful comments and the names of any referrals.

Stay in Touch

Through short notes or occasional phone calls, you may be able to establish an on-going relationship in which the person you spoke with becomes a mentor or key member of your network. How do you keep contacts alive? Write a postcard or send an email every couple of months. Cut out articles that might be of interest to your contact and send them along. Keep them apprised of your progress and efforts. If interested, ask if you could “shadow” and spend a day at work with the professional to learn through observation.

More Tips

Target individuals at various levels of responsibility and length of work experience. Talking to those at the entry-level will give you current information about how to get that job and make the transition from college student to new professional. Those at higher levels and with years of experience have a broader perspective and can often speak about management's point of view on the industry, organizational strategy, and work expectations.

Try to meet your contact in person. That way you can see the work space, check out the environment, assess it in terms of whether it appeals to you, gather company literature, and possibly meet others in the organization. If a face-to-face meeting is impossible (i.e., the contact is across the country), a phone appointment is fine. Mark it on your calendar. You should always offer to be the one to call. If your contact prefers to call you, so be it. If going in person, arrive a few minutes early. If you are running late and will arrive more than a few minutes late, call and let your contact know.

Listen carefully to what you are told. Allow yourself to hear the negatives as well as the positives. Try to read between the lines. Some contacts will be unwilling to say anything negative but there's always a downside to every job and organization. It won't help your cause to only hear the good side. Develop your ability to elicit the whole story from your sources.

Follow your contact's lead. If he/she offers to give you a tour or have you speak to someone else there, great! If he/she seems harried and wraps up a bit early, don't take it personally. He/she may have been given a pressing assignment just before you arrived and needs to get working on it.

Ask for feedback. Show your contact a draft of your resume if you want a critique. Ask questions like "How easy is it to read", "How competitive am I", "What skills or knowledge am I missing if I decide to work in this occupation", "Would you interview me if you had an entry-level job opening", etc.

Don't overstay your allotted time. Get the person's business card before you go. Thank your contact for his or her advice, referrals, and time.

Evaluate the meeting. First, how did you do? Were your networking skills up to par? How can you do better the next time? Second, did you like what you heard? Do you have a better understanding of what's involved, the organization, your potential to fit in it, etc.?

Sample Questions To Ask

1. What do you do as a...?
2. How do you spend a typical day/week?
3. How did you enter this field of employment?
4. What was your career path to this position?
5. What aspects of your job are most/least satisfying?
6. What are the major responsibilities of your position?
7. What types of decisions do you make?
8. What training/education/background is required?
9. What are some current issues in your field?
10. How would you characterize your work environment?
11. What is the mission of your organization?
12. What kind of individual would be best suited for this type of position?
13. What are the job prospects for someone entering this field now?
14. Are there any field specific resources you might suggest?
15. Could you offer the names of one or two other individuals with whom I should speak?
16. What is the organizational structure of your department/organization?
17. What advice would you offer to someone about to begin a career in this field?