

Networking for Career Success

What is networking?

It's about being proactive! Making contacts and building relationships with people to increase your career/employment prospects through gathering of relevant information.

Why do networking?

Networking is essential if you want to **achieve a career in your chosen field**. Talking with people who are currently working or researching in the areas that you are interested in is the key to getting a job in the 'hidden job market', discovering new research opportunities, and forming collaborations for the future. Networking is often the only way to get the information and advice about your specific area of interest. This will then enable you to start taking the right steps to achieve the best career for you.

Many career opportunities are never advertised so if you wait for advertisements you may miss a lot of opportunities. To become aware of any openings in your field you need to make yourself known to potential employers or research collaborators and to people who may know of any opportunities as they arise. If they don't know you are looking, they won't think to tell you!

How do I network?

Networking really involves talking, listening, being pro-active in following up people, and keeping in contact. It is not difficult and, no doubt, you do it in other parts of your life – for example, just staying in touch with friends is networking. To network for career development, begin with the people you know and tell them that you are seeking information about the career or employment field that's of interest to you. These people may have useful information and opinions themselves. Many will be able to give you the names of other people they know who can provide you with the information you seek, because they work in a field connected to your career/employment interests. Building up your network this way will help reduce any fears about networking and also start you planning your future.

Once you feel more comfortable with networking – start meeting people you don't know. When you are at conferences or seminars introduce yourself and talk to other people. You may also want to approach relevant employers/researchers directly about the possibility of working with them (short-or longer-term). Your research should have given you lots of names for this! The trick is to get contacts that are right for you i.e., with people who can give you the advice that you need to make good steps in your career/employment search.

Who can help me start?

- Fellow students/UNI staff
- Relatives/friends
- Employers/colleagues
- Professional associations
- Industry organisations
- Hobby or sports clubs
- Interest groups (Amnesty, Forest & Bird, AIESEC)
- Student organisations
- Voluntary organisations

Other sources for finding people to network with

- News media reports via library databases
- Internet search engines
- Business directories
- Yellow pages
- Industry magazines
- Book of Lists (available at Careers & Employment offices)

What are the steps to building a network?

- Make a list of the people/places you would like to contact
- Research related organisations/companies/industries, to be reasonably informed on the field
- Contact the people who might be able to help you by phone, letter, or email.
- Explain the reason you'd like to talk with them: that you are researching your career area of interest and would appreciate if they could give you a little of their time to talk about their field
- If they can't spare any time, ask if they can refer you on to someone who can
- Aim to agree on a time that's convenient for them to meet you
- Prepare well and rehearse what you want to say.
- During the meeting ask for a referral to someone else who knows about their field
- When you're networking, remember you are **not asking for a job!** You are conducting an information interview – see next section
- Don't forget to send a thank you note without delay.

Information Interviewing

When networking to develop your career, much of what you'll be doing is information interviewing. This is exactly what the name says – interviewing someone for information and involves talking with many people who are working in areas similar to the one that you seek to enter. Doing lots of information interviews as part of your research in the field that you plan to enter -

- Helps you to decide whether this is really a good career choice for you
- Helps to ensure that your career exploration and subsequent job search go well
- Enables you to speak knowledgeably about the career that you want
- Provides you with explicit information to develop a well focused RESUME.
- Gives you valuable personal contacts for your future employment.

What to do

- State clearly that you seek career information only, not a job
- Remember it's not a job interview
- Be courteous and business-like
- Try to make an explicit appointment for a short period of time (say 20 minutes)
- Be on time and leave on time
- Arrive well prepared with your questions ready

- Request at least two referrals to other people in the field for you to talk in the same way
- Write notes immediately after the interview on the important things you learnt
- Send a thank you note right away.

The idea is to get information, contacts, and experience. Be creative - it's a subtle process. **DON'T ask for a job** but be prepared in case one is mentioned!

What kind of questions do I ask?

About The Work Role

- Can you tell me some of the things you do in a typical week?
- What are your main responsibilities, your actual tasks and priorities?
- What are the skills needed?
- What are the most and least satisfactory aspects for you?
- Is it different from what you expected?
- How long do people stay in this area?
- What sort of jobs do people in this field move on to?

About Getting Started

- How did you start your career?
- What has changed?
- What qualities and qualifications do people look for?
- How do I find out about opportunities in this area?
- What advice would you give me about getting into this area?

About Research Opportunities

- Where do you see your research going in the next few years?
- What knowledge would I need to research in this area?
- How do you think we could collaborate together?
- What are the misconceptions people have about working here.

And Finally

- Who else would you suggest I talk to?

Essential preparation:

Do prior research! Find out -

- What jobs/research interest you?
- What do these roles actually involve? (Look for information on e.g. career structure, qualifications, professional organisations to contact.)
- What is your potential contact's area of research/work?
- Read any publications or attend conference presentations by the potential contact to give you as much up-to-date information as you can get.

Approaching your contacts with a letter or email:

Devise a strategy. One good way to approach people is to write a letter/email first, then follow up with a phone-call. You should–

- Make the reader want to talk to you. Be business-like, ensure your purpose for writing is clear
- Let them know your relevant background including where & what you are studying
- Include a RESUME
- Specify what you are asking for, e.g.
- “...to find out more about the work of your company” and/or
- “...to discuss which skills people need to enter your field” and/or
- “...to learn more about your research”

Following up with a phone-call:

When making your first contact by phone or following up an initial approach by letter:

- Before you approach a contact or employer think carefully about what it is that you want to achieve from the contact
- Tell the person whom you're phoning how you got their name, and refer if appropriate to your letter
- State briefly your background and the purpose of your contact: Ask if you can have some of their time to obtain information you need for your career planning or decision-making
- Check if it's a good time for them to talk to you. Ask about another time if necessary
- Make clear that you are not asking for a job at this stage
- Try to explain how your skills and experience could make you suitable for this sort of work or company
- If they won't or can't give you any time in person ask if they could answer one or two questions on the phone, or suggest another person to contact
- Rehearse what you want to say, and always try to make a good impression!

POSTGRADUATE CAREERS

Face to face:

Remember you're seeking information and advice NOT asking for a job!

- Be business-like, focused and clear about what information you seek
- Think about which questions are best, but use words that are right for you. There are no "right" questions to ask. Prioritise the questions that you think are most important for you. Don't expect one person to answer all your questions!
- Watch out for any opportunities that may arise. (E.g. vacancies coming up)
- Whenever you can, get a personal introduction to somebody whom they suggest you talk to, and get more contacts from every visit that you make
- Always write and thank the person
- Be persistent and keep at it, remember it's not always a fast process so achieving your ultimate target may take some time
- Keep a record of the people that you saw, their contact information and important things learned
- Keep in contact – send an email if you come across some research that might interest them or when you are looking for work.

Stop and Think:

- Am I finding out the information that I really need? If not, re-think what it is you need to ask.
- Does what you are finding out show that the job you are researching really suits your aims, skills and interests?
- Be prepared to change the focus of your career development activities to a different field if you find that the field that you first started to research is less suitable than you thought it would be

A final word

Most people are nervous about networking! But with practice it gets easier.

- So start small and build up
- Practice what you are going to say – develop a 30second pitch
- Practice asking open questions – what, how etc – most people like talking about themselves
- Look interested in what the person is saying
- ALWAYS follow-up!