

NETWORKING GUIDE

Who do I network with?

You can network with almost anyone, the possibilities are endless.

Conferences

As a research student, conferences deserve a small section on their own. You will hopefully be given the opportunity to attend a conference (hopefully internationally if not only locally). While you can network with almost anyone, it is to good an opportunity to miss if you are able to attend a conference. The conference is a key opportunity, not only for you to become visible in your field but to meet face to face with people who could be potential collaborators, mentors and even a potential employer.

During the course of your studies it is important that you identify a useful conference to attend. Similarly to all the networking advice detailed in this section, it is important that you do your homework on those attending the conference prior to your arrival.

- Read conference abstracts
- Examine delegate lists
- Read up on people who are working in a related field who are attending
- Attend their keynote/workshops/sessions at the conference
- Introduce yourself

Attendance at a conference also will give you broad overview of what is happening in your field at a local/national/international level. It will also give you the opportunity to present your own papers and ideas at this level. It may, as a result, give you some material that may be useful for publication.

The following is also not a bad starting place:

- Friends
- Family
- Fellow
- Students
- Staff Members
- Employers
- Alumni
- Professional Associations
- Conference delegates
- HR Professionals
- Librarians
- Career Practitioners
- Former employers

In your workbook on page ** is space for you to start writing out all the details of those who you think you could contact as a starting point.

What do I ask?

Often the people you will be contacting will be very busy people. It can, therefore, be somewhat frustrating when an individual contacts you but has no clear idea about what they want from the interaction.

- Be clear what your objectives are

It could be as simple as finding someone who works in an area, or as detailed as finding out directly about the occupation and opportunities available.

- Have a list of well researched questions

Do some preparation work prior to meeting with the person. This is a professional interaction so you want to make sure you have an understanding of what the person does so you can talk with them at a reasonably knowledgeable level.

Potential Questions

About Getting In

- How did you find your job?
- Is it different now from when you started?
- What qualities and qualifications do people look for?
- Are there any useful stepping stone jobs or voluntary experience I should look for?
- If you had to overcome any barriers (age/gender/ethnicity) ... and how?
- Where are the vacancies advertised?

The 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 organisation?
- What additional responsibilities can staff take on?
- How is the work changing?
- What sort of jobs do people in this field move on to?
- What do you need to be, or do, to get on?

Employment

- From reading my Resume, can you suggest anything I could be doing now to improve my chances of being employed by your organisation or in the field?
- When there is a vacancy, where does your organisation advertise (through an agency, through the newspaper, which web-site(s) etc.)?
- How often do openings come up that someone like me could apply for?
- Are there other jobs that you think I could apply for in your organisation with the kind of skills or qualifications that I have?

The Organisation

- Is the structure of the organisation changing now?
- Can you tell me about the organisations equal opportunities policy (job sharing, promotion, development, etc.)
- What about its attitude to older graduates and/or postgraduate qualifications?
- What salary might I expect upon entry and progression?
- What are the misconceptions people have about working here?

And Finally

- Do you have any other advice?
- What books, trade or professional bodies should I consult.
- Can you suggest other people I can talk to?
- Thank them.

After your meeting

- Remember to call the person back after the agreed time period if discussed
- If in the meantime you get a job, call them and let them know
- Email or write to thank them for their assistance without delay!

The Hidden Rules

Common courtesy applies, but the following will give you an idea of the Do's and Don'ts:
(adapted from Ali & Graham, 2000, Moving on in your career)

Do

- Write a letter of introduction prior to calling (not always necessary but is useful)
- Use the person's name who referred you (if appropriate)
- Be clear about what you want to gain from talking with them
- State that you are looking for information at this stage, NOT A JOB.
- State clearly how much time you are asking for (20 to 30 mins normally is enough)
- Fit around their time plans
- Arrive on time (or be able to call if delayed)
- Prepare appropriate questions
- Ask for another contact who might be able to help you
- Write a thank you letter

Don't

- Be unrealistic about the time you ask for
- Be unrealistic about amount of information they will be able to provide
- Keep cancelling and rearranging
- Stray over agreed time unless they volunteer to do so
- Ask intrusive and personal questions.