NETWORKING & INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

NETWORKING

One of the most effective job search strategies is networking. Networking is essentially utilizing and building relationships to expand upon career and social opportunities. Statistics show that 75% of jobs are obtained through networking. As many of you have heard before, "It's not what you know, it's who you know." Networking can be overwhelming and intimidating, but you don't have to be a schmoozer to gain results from networking. You can start by talking with people about your skills, interests, and career goals.

So how do you network? You may think your network is limited right now, but you probably have more network contacts than you realize. The first step is to create a list of networks that you already have:

Friends, relatives, neighbors

Professors, major department staff, school administrators

Co-workers, customers, supervisors (past & present)

Religious, alumni, professional associations or student organizations

Community and political groups, volunteer organizations

Personal business connections (doctor, dentist, coach, banker, broker, CPA, etc.)

Your spouse's/partner's network

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Once you've determined some network individuals, you can make contact with them via phone, letter, or email. Any of those options are acceptable. Before you contact them, be prepared with the following information:

- introduction about yourself and your intentions—why are you contacting them?
- information about your skills, career interests and career goals
- specific strategies or suggestions on how the network individual might be able to assist you (i.e. questions they can answer, potential contacts with whom they may be able to connect you, general career development advice)

It is important that you be positive and courteous to the network and also be aware of the demand you are placing on the person's time.

Important Tips for Successful Networking

***Don't assume you're being a pest**
Keep in mind that at the beginning, you already know most of your network contacts and if you have a good relationship with them, they should be willing to help you. Also keep in mind that your network contacts probably had to network at one point in their lives to get where they are today so they understand the process you're experiencing.

***Assume that everyone is good at something**
Practice active listening in your networking and be flexible and aware with how someone might be able to assist you that you may not have expected at the beginning. Someone might spark your interest in something new that you had not thought of before.

***Follow up**
Show your appreciation to your network contact by sending them a personal thank you note after your conversation. Follow up with your contact and let them know how your job or internship search is going. Be persistent with your contacts, but try not to be annoying. Do what you say you're going to do.

***New Contacts**
To build your network, ask your contact if they know of anyone else you should speak to in relation to what you're trying to accomplish. Make sure it is ok to use their name when contacting people they recommend to you.

***Stay Motivated, Positive and Persistent**
Networking can be challenging and you may not get the results you want right away. Assume that people are busy and it's not that they don't want to talk to you. Try

Important Tips cont.

to remain confident and with enough hard work and determination, something will eventually come along.

***Business Social Events**
In formal business social event settings, it is important to have your 60-second introduction speech ready.

Here is an example:
I am a senior at Seattle University and am majoring in Management. When I graduate, I would like to work in the human resources department of a small growing business. I am interested in a position where I can apply the knowledge that I gained through courses such as Human Resource Management at Seattle University as well as my communication and professional skills.

At formal business social events, collect business cards from individuals you meet and follow up with them after the event to pursue potential opportunities you may have discussed.

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

Informational interviewing is a great tool to utilize when networking. Informational interviewing involves talking with people who are currently working in your field of interest to gain a better understanding of an occupation or industry as well as to build a network of contacts in that field. Informational interviewing can help you focus your job search on the type of industry or job in which you are interested and the people who can help you get to that position. This can be a great way to gather "insider" information to be able to make more informed decisions about your career goals.

The Steps for Informational Interviewing:
1. Identify people to interview

- Review the list of network contacts you made in the previous section of this guide. Contact these people if they are in your field of interest or if you think they might know someone else who is in your area of interest.
- Inquire with Career Services or the Albers Placement Center to see if the career services staff members have any contacts at a certain company or in a certain position who they may be able to contact on your behalf to get you connected.
- Call the Human Resources department or other contacts within a company to inquire about speaking to someone of a certain job title.

2. Initiating Contact

- There are several appropriate ways to contact someone including calling, writing letters or sending emails. Introduce yourself, let the person know how you got his/her name, and explain why you are contacting them. Explain to them that you want to learn more about their position and would appreciate the chance to meet with them or interview over the phone for about 20 to 30 minutes. Clarify that at this point you are just seeking information—not a job. Try to meet with them in person as people tend to be more open this way and then they can get to know you better as well.
- Asking for an informational interview with someone can be intimidating. Keep in mind that people like to talk about themselves so most people will be willing to provide you more information about what they do. Also keep in mind that they had to use similar strategies to get where they are today so they understand the importance of networking.
  If the person refers you to the Human Resources department or says they are currently not hiring anyone, clarify that you are not looking for a job, but would just like to gather more information about his/her career field. Be conscious of the impression you are making because these can be very important contacts.

Example of an introduction:
"Hi, my name is (first/last name) and I'm a student at Seattle University. (Name of person who referred you if applicable) gave me your name and encouraged me to contact you. I'm in the process of exploring career options for after graduation and would really appreciate the opportunity to speak with you about your career and organization.
I realize you have a very busy schedule, but would there be an opportunity to speak with you either in person or over the phone for about twenty to thirty minutes in the next couple of weeks?"

3. Prepare for the Informational Interview

- Do some preliminary research. Read about the job or occupation of the individual you are interviewing as well as the organization of which they are a part.
- Dress as you would for a real job interview. Remember a good first impression is important.
- Prepare questions to ask. Here are some good examples:
  - ◊ How did the person get into the field? Have the person describe his/her career path.
  - ◊ What does the person like most/least about the work?

Prepare for the Informational Interview Cont'd

- ◊ How is the field changing or what can be expected in the next couple of years?
- ◊ What does a typical day look like in the job?
- ◊ What education/training/experience would the person recommend to get into the position or field?
- ◊ What key skills or characteristics does the individual look for in a candidate for openings in the field or job?
- ◊ What is the culture or the environment of the company or industry like?
- ◊ What advice can the person provide you in your own job search?
- ◊ Does the individual have any additional contacts in the field?

4. Conducting the Informational Interview

- Be prepared, concise and interested.
- Arrive at the interview at least 10 minutes early. Bring a pen and portfolio or notepad to take notes. You may also want to take a copy of your resume in case the person wants to see it or is willing to hold on to it in case an opportunity arises.
- In general, the interview should take about 20 to 30 minutes. Be mindful of the interviewee's schedule and stick to the allotted time unless the interviewee suggests otherwise.
- Remember that you are gathering information not asking for a job (yet).
- Be a good listener and take notes as the individual is providing information.
- Be alert to lines of questioning that emerge from your questions (don't necessarily be rigid to your original list of questions).
- If you meet with the individual in person, observe the environment of the organization including how people are dressed, the facility, the level of formality, how people treat one another and the general atmosphere. Think about if you would be comfortable working there.
- Ask the individual if it would be alright for you to follow up with him/her to see about any job opportunities or to answer any questions you may have in the future.

5. Following-Up

- After the interview, be sure to send a thank you note to the interviewee.
- Nurture and respect the contacts that you make through this process because they are helping you build your professional network. When you get a job, you might want to contact them and thank them again for their advice and support in your job search process. Invite them to call upon you if they need anything as well.
- After the interview, consider what you learned and how it might impact your career goals. Does what you discovered about the job fit you? You might have more questions that you need answered that hopefully another informational interview can help with or you may want to meet with a career counselor to discuss what you learned.

TIP: You can get more information or additional suggested questions for informational interviewing by searching on the Internet.

Networking and Informational Interviews Assistance

Career Services and the Albers Placement Center are both available to help you prepare and practice for your informational interview as well as to help you with networking. Both offices try to provide networking events and opportunities throughout the year as well so be on the lookout for those. To receive guidance on networking or conducting an informational interview, make an appointment today!

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Albers Placement Center
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JOB SHADOWING

Job shadowing is similar to informational interviewing in that it is another strategy for gathering information from someone in your field of interest. It involves accompanying a professional in his/her day-to-day duties. It is different from an informational interview, however, in that it can last a few hours or a full day.

Job shadowing is more common at the high school level. We recommend that at the college level you focus more on informational interviewing and internships to learn more about a job and what career best fits you.

Notes