

It's not who you know, but who knows you

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'Networking is not a numbers game. The idea is not to see how many people you can meet; the idea is to compile a list of people you can count on.' -Harvey Mackay

Whoever said: "It's not what you know, but who you know," only told half the story. I know who Bill Gates and Donald Trump are, but unfortunately they have no idea who I am. So what really does matter is not who you know, but rather who knows you.

The Basics

In order to be adept at networking, you need to stop thinking about yourself and start thinking about other people. In his book, "The Art of the Start," Guy Kawasaki said, "You accomplish this by helping other people - especially folks who seemingly can't do anything for you. And do this without expectations of return."

The basic idea of networking is to focus on quality vs. quantity. I have been to networking events where people rush around the room collecting and passing out as many business cards as they can in two hours. In theory, this is networking, but in reality, people are just wasting paper.

Savvy professionals will go to these events and focus on collecting only a few business cards, but engage in long and meaningful conversations with key people, hoping to establish long-term relationships.

There are many things you can do to develop your network, but there are key starting points that will help you develop long-term relationships.

The Informational Interview

Informational interviewing is simple: Set up an appointment with any professional in your major to discuss how they were able to achieve success. Then, narrow down a career that you may be interested in pursuing upon graduation, and send letters to executives at these companies. If you make it clear that you are a student and have no hidden agenda except to learn from their expertise, you will be surprised by how many executives will be willing to meet with you. Once you do set up an appointment, show up with one objective - to listen.

San Diego State Career Services has a great guide on informational interviewing in their office.

Take on leadership positions

Many students immediately understand the importance of networking in college and decide to join one of the numerous organizations that are offered through this university. However, joining an organization is just the beginning. In order to truly develop valuable long-term relationships, it's essential that you take on a leadership role. More importantly, you must follow through and be effective in your role to earn credibility.

Most organizations have already formed their executive boards for the fall semester, but that should not be a barrier if you are determined to get involved. Instead, approach the president of the club you are interested in joining and tell them that you would like to help them. Every club I've participated in will gladly find new members a role.

Go to absc.sdsu.edu to view the different business clubs.

Develop relationships with professors

Many students treat professors as a valuable source of educational information, but fail to realize the huge networks that they've compiled over the years. Many SDSU professors have been, or are still, very active in the local business community. Some have great relationships with high-status alumni.

Networking in the online world

Last year, a small group of SDSU students were invited to a luncheon with a famous venture capitalist. At the end of the meeting, the man pulled up a MySpace picture of one of the students doing a keg stand.

Before the students left, he said, "Whether you like it or not, people will judge you from the impression you put forth, and if there is incriminating information about you on the Web, employers will gain access to it, and make decisions upon it."

If you have a MySpace or another social networking page, set it to Usuch as LinkedIn and Doostang, where students are finding jobs, internships and building professional relationships.

As simple as it seems for one to implement these words of advice, few students will actually take advantage of them. Between balancing work and school, there are simply not enough hours in the day to network with professionals, take on a leadership position in a club, cultivate relationships with professors and add another online network to the list.

However, if you found enough time to read to the bottom of this article, you probably care enough about your future to take advantage of these suggestions and expand your circle.