

KEYS TO SUCCESS

NETWORKING



Lebanon Valley College

CENTER FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT

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Networking

One of the most successful and powerful ways to develop your career path.

Defined as developing a collection of people you can call on for help with various aspects of your job search, sharing information and building trust as part of a two-way process to build an interconnected web of individuals. Essentially, it is tapping into your connections for information or advice and then maintaining that relationship. If done correctly, networking is the most successful job search tool.

What do you hope to achieve through networking? Networking is an often used word, but it raises many questions:

- What is it?
- Why do it?
- How do I start?

What is networking?

- It is the least understood, yet most effective job search strategy
- One of the most effective tools you can employ in a job search
- Crucial to the success of your career

Why do I do it?

- It is the best way to enter the hidden job market (60-75% of jobs are here)
- To get the inside story on an occupation, employer, or job function
- To learn how to effectively find a position in your chosen field
- Develop a “name” – this might be someone you could cite in a cover letter or call on your behalf

How do I start?

Develop a Plan:

- Define your field of interest. Consider your values and interests, career areas, and work environments.
- Determine what kind of information you want to obtain. What are you looking to achieve?
- Utilize the resources available to you to help you research employers/organizations, conducting industry research.
- Create questions that can help you gather information about the careers you are exploring.

Identify Potential Contacts:

Create a list of 10-30 individuals you already know, or would like to get to know. Listing their professions will likely be helpful to you as well. You may be surprised by the size of your list!

- Friends and relatives
- Faculty
- Alumni – you can find alumni who are involved in the Career Connections Mentor program through [Handshake](#).
- Formal employers and colleagues
- Members of professional organizations
- Members of your fraternity/sorority/student organizations

- Contacts found in directories, professional magazines, journals
- LinkedIn and other social media platforms

Make a Connection:

Once you have identified a good prospect, take the next step and ask for an informational interview. You can do this by phone or email. Assume that the person is busy, but will enjoy giving you advice. Below is an example email to a potential contact.

Dear Mr. LastName,

In order to gain some additional information about the Global Studies field, I recently searched the Lebanon Valley College Career Connections Mentors listing in Handshake for alumni volunteers. Your name was amongst those listed. I am hoping to learn more about your profession as I am researching and considering potential future careers.

My interest in global studies stems from my experience as an intern with Global Times Co. in Annville, PA. I was able to participate in planning events and programs. Through this experience, I developed skills in written and oral communications. I also had the opportunity to develop relationships with colleagues and community members.

I would enjoy the opportunity to ask you a few questions about your experiences. By talking with professionals like you, I hope to verify that my career goals are realistic. If you are able to meet or talk on the phone, please let me know your availability. I have enclosed my resume so that you may have a broader understanding of my experiences before we talk. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Your Name

Conduct an informational interview:

- Recognize that your contact is busy, so keep your request for meeting time reasonable and then stick to your requested time limit. Prepare questions ahead of time (a list of questions can be found below). Do your research on your contact, his/her field, and current position so that you are prepared for the conversation.
- Be courteous and express appreciation for your contact’s time. Describe your background and interests – you want to learn more about their career path, the industry, their current company, and you also want to build your professional network.
- Ask for further referrals, do not ask these individuals about job opportunities with their company.

Follow-up:

- Create a positive impression through prompt and effective communications
- Write a thank you email or hand-written letter expressing your appreciation for their time and consideration. Be sure to include details from the informational interview that you found interesting or helpful.

Evaluate and Reflect:

- Use the information that you gathered to help develop and refine your career interests and goals. Be sure to maintain contact with your network. You never know what opportunities may come from that relationship!

Create a tracking system:

- Keep track of your contacts – whatever way works best for you (keeping business cards in a desk drawer, keeping an electronic document that includes their information, etc.) you may want to reconnect with one of them at a later date, and it's a good idea to provide updates on your progress!
- Remember that networking is a two-way street – your contacts may want to ask you for help in the future. Be sure to continue to follow up and maintain the relationship.

Sample Informational Interview Questions:

- What is a typical day like?
- How did you start with the company?
- What skills do you need to do your job?
- What are the most satisfying aspects of your work? What are the most frustrating?
- What has been your career path?
- How have you put your education to use?
- How would you describe your work climate?
- What are the upward and lateral moves at your company, and how difficult is it to advance?
- What are some of the decisions or problems that you face each day? What skills are required for handling them?
- What trends affect your company's direction?
- What opportunities do you have to influence or direct policies/procedures?
- Would you describe the people you interact with in your department, organization, and outside the company?
- What advice do you have for me as I continue my education and move into my first professional role?
- Do you know someone at another company within this industry who would be willing to talk with me as you have?
- What is management's philosophy toward the employee?

Networking Through Social Media

Your professional brand: *your online presence is YOURS, so be sure to know your privacy settings before you start posting. Even with heavy privacy settings in place, you should be careful with the information you share online. One in three employers reject candidates based on information they find online, so remember, all it takes is one inappropriate post to scare off a potential employer, so be wise in all of your social media activity. Your profiles, posts, pictures, etc. shapes other's early impressions of you. Always make a good first impression!*

- **Twitter:** for sending and receiving short messages. You can follow friends, colleagues, companies, organizations, etc. Twitter's default setting is for tweets to be public and viewable by anyone – which means your audience is large as is your reach. Twitter is becoming increasingly popular for recruiters.
- **LinkedIn:** a social media site designed for professional interactions and networking. You would add colleagues and other professionals, professors, as well as classmates and friends. You can add experience education, skills, accomplishments, and interests. Your connections can write references and endorse your skills. LinkedIn also has a job search feature, and the ability to follow employers/organizations.

- **Facebook:** a more casual social networking tool that allows you to share messages, photos, videos, and links with your friend list. Facebook is most often used for personal contacts, but many recruiters admit that they use Facebook to research potential employees. Be sure that anything viewable by the general public is professional looking and appropriate and that you check your privacy settings.
- **Google+:** a social network powered by Google. Your posts can be viewable to a wider audience, as on Twitter, but they can also be limited to specific groups called circles. Having a profile that lists your top skills and work history can be an important part of your online job search and brand.
- **Be active online:** if you want to make valuable connections online, you have to be active on at least one social media channel. Interact with other's posts (like or comment on a link, re-tweet, or share content) to show that you are aware and involved. You also need to post some of your own content, but keep in mind that everything you post leaves an impression.
- **Maintain professional relationships:** networking through social media gives you the ability to continue professional relationships without needing to live near your contacts. Keeping in touch with people in your industry is an essential part of growing your network.

Myths & Excuses About Networking

Networking is just using other people and being pushy

FACT: networking, done correctly, in an honest, relaxed, and mutually helpful way can be very beneficial. Remember, it is a two-way street – you will likely be called upon to help someone within your network.

I know enough about my field, so I can just send out 20 resumes and cover letters to get an interview/job.

FACT: most companies, small or large, prefer referrals from employees and business associates to applications from strangers.

I'm too shy to talk to strangers.

FACT: You network with colleagues and friends, not strangers. You can call, email, or write if you feel awkward speaking face-to-face with someone you do not know well.

I don't know many important people.

FACT: Remember, the strongest contacts are often "weak ties" who can give you information or find opportunities for you. They are your family, friends, and social acquaintances.

Sample Networking Questions

Career Exploration and Industry

- How did you become interested in this line of work?
- Does your work relate to any experiences you had in college?
- Can you suggest additional research/materials that might give me further insight into this field?
- What might I expect as a salary range for an entry-level position?
- What is a typical day/month like in your role?
- Can you recommend any activities for me to get involved with while still in college?
- What do you see as upcoming trends in your profession?
- Can we stay connected for future conversations?

Interest in a Specific Job/Internship

- What is the necessary education or training?
- What are the prospects for advancement?
- What separates a strong candidate from the competition?
- Is there anything, in particular, that you think I should stress in my application materials?
- May I reference this conversation in my application materials?
- What might the training look like for this role?
- Are you aware of the hiring manager for this particular role? Would you be willing to share his/her contact information so that I may apply directly to him/her?
- Can we stay connected for future conversations/opportunities?

Interest in a Specific Organization

- How would you describe the working atmosphere/culture and the people with whom you work?
- What do you like and dislike about the organization?
- What qualities/skills would make someone a perfect fit for your profession/organization?
- What are the different departments in this organization and how do they interact?
- What are the mission and values of the organization?
- How has your job affected your lifestyle?
- How is success measured here?
- Can we stay connected for future conversations/opportunities?

Key Guidelines for Networking Success

The more you give, the more you'll get

One of the biggest misconceptions about networking is that you are always asking for something, which for many people, leads to feelings of discomfort. It does not always have to be this way, however. As stated previously, networking is a two-way street, most effective when it has mutual benefits. You may not feel you have anything to offer a seasoned professional in this regard, but keep in mind that an alumni might be very interested in what you have to share about things happening on campus, classes still being offered, and your experience as an undergraduate, along with tips or wisdom from experience in and knowledge about their field or occupation. Never use a networking connection to simply ask for a job – build a relationship.

Be future focused, with long term goals in mind

Far from one-time interactions, networking relationships are an investment of your time and energy. Establishing these relationships early and maintaining them overtime as both your personal and career goals change as well as those in your network will help you not just in the moment, but far into the future as well.

Quality over Quantity

Every day, we have the opportunity to meet new people – in classes, online, at a coffeeshop, in the dining hall. Perhaps you are meeting people at career focused events as well. It is what you do with those connections that matters. Building, maintaining, and expanding those relationships takes time and effort.

Dos & Don'ts of Networking

DO

Exchange contact information – with a purpose. Jot down a note or two about the person or your conversation. This helps to personalize a “nice to meet you” message or request on LinkedIn.

Ask questions – take a genuine interest in getting to know other people. If you ask, the person with whom you are chatting will feel comfortable sharing a bit of information, removing the fear or notion of “talking about themselves too much” – this can help to identify mutual interests and move the conversation forward in a more interesting manner.

Have a plan – arriving at a networking event without a plan is similar to showing up to a party having missed the “costume” part of the invitation. Consider what it is you hope to get out of the event, why you are going, and who you hope to speak with. Don't forget your business cards at home.

Take good notes – most individuals would love the opportunity to continue a productive, meaningful conversation.

DON'T

Be shy – make a goal of handing out 5 business cards and have a genuine conversation with those 5 people. If you go with your friends, don't stick together.

Use your phone as a security blanket – today, a normal practice when we feel uncomfortable or shy can be to divert to our phones. Try to avoid this practice. Having your eyes glued to your phone is a clear indicator to anyone who may have been trying to approach you that you are busy or otherwise occupied.

Enter the conversation with a “how can I help?” mentality vs. a sales pitch – while a well-developed elevator speech is essential, remember to focus on others too.

Talk only about yourself. The most interesting people in a networking setting aren't those who focus only on themselves. Instead, focus on listening and adding relevant/interesting information.