

Networking and its importance

A working definition of “networking” includes developing connections with other people or groups, exchanging information, and forging mutually beneficial relationships.

Networking is:

A way to gain information about different jobs, companies, and careers

A way to uncover job opportunities that might not yet — or ever — be posted on job sites or even create an opportunity that did not previously exist

A way to develop relationships that could enhance your future career or your potential job search

A way for you to contribute to others’ job searches

A career-long process

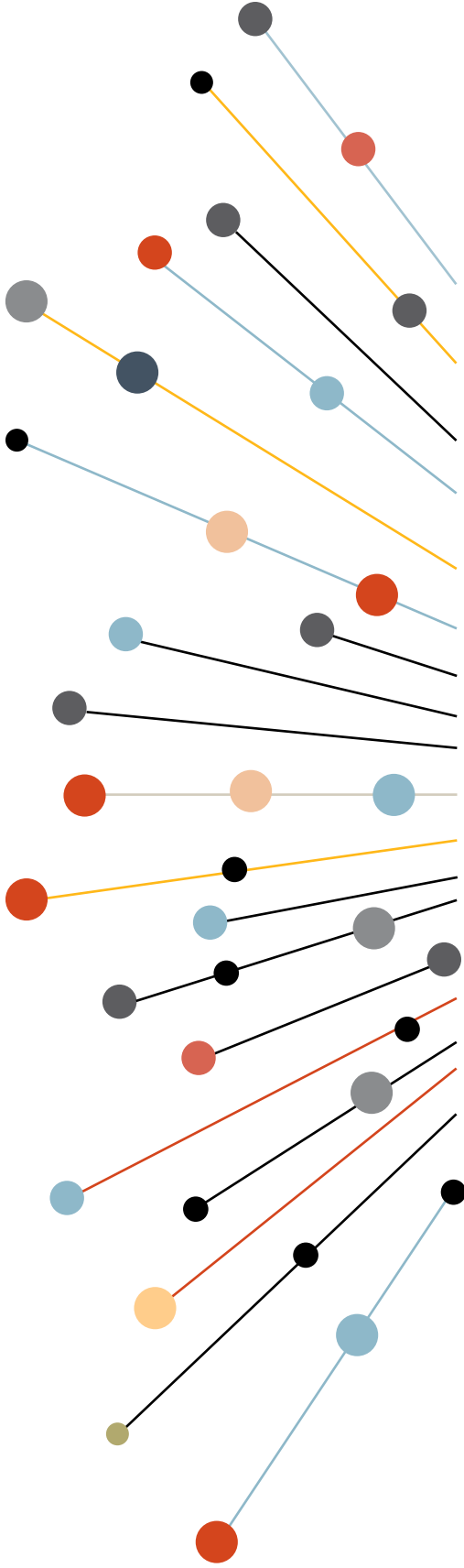
Networking is not:

“Schmoozing”

Asking for a job or internship

Something that can only happen through social media

Networking is considered to be a crucial piece in a job search. Consider this: 75% (or more) of positions are obtained via networking. Therefore, you should be spending a significant amount of time on this important activity when you are looking for a job or internship. We recommend having an online networking presence as well as establishing a personal relationship with your connections. Online, we recommend using LinkedIn, the largest online professional networking site. As a member, you can join the Lehigh University Alumni Group.



Building your network

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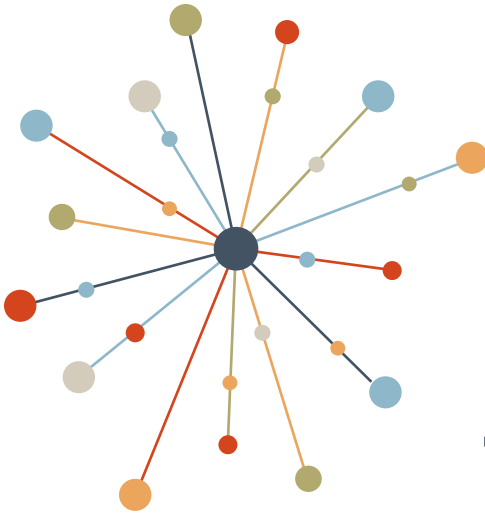
Identify your network

Decide on the individuals with whom you want to connect. Think broadly about who might be able to facilitate your job search. Start with people with a similar educational background as yours or who are currently employed in an area that interests you.

Develop an expansive list of contacts. This list can include:

- Family and friends (even parents of friends)
- Social network connections (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn)
- Classmates
- Professors
- Alumni
- Former employers
- Current and former coworkers
- Professional contacts (doctor, dentist, lawyer, veterinarian, hairdresser, etc.)

After you have developed your list of potential network contacts, start thinking about how you can make the most of these connections.



Reach Out to your network

An effective way to reach out to your network is to email the persons in your list. Your goal is first to establish a connection. On the basis of this relationship, you may be able to ask for advice or conduct an informational interview to learn more about that individual's career.

5 tips for writing effective networking emails

1

Be human. Never start your email with "To whom it may concern." You are trying to establish a new relationship, so be friendly and personalize your approach.

Ex: Hi Sarah, Thank you for connecting with me on LinkedIn. It is a pleasure to meet you! (You can take the opportunity to personalize your message, for example: It is a pleasure to meet an Lehigh Alum who also majored in IDEAS)

2

Highlight an accomplishment or something that you admire about your contact. This is a great way to demonstrate that you have done some research and that you are interested in building a genuine relationship.

Ex: Hi Sarah, Thank you for connecting with me on LinkedIn. It is a pleasure to meet you! I saw your article published on LinkedIn about career development for millennials and thought it offered some great advice, especially about challenging yourself to lead. I was wondering if we could speak further about your thoughts on job search tips for millennials.

Reach out to your network

5 tips for writing effective networking emails *continued*

3

Be concise.

- Introduce yourself and explain your purpose for reaching out.
- Mention the contact's interests/job and why you want to get to know him/her.
- Ask if you could set up a time to speak over the phone or meet.
- Express gratitude for the contact's time and politely close your email

Ex: Hi Sarah, Thank you for connecting with me on LinkedIn. It is a pleasure to meet you! I saw your article published on LinkedIn about career development for millennials and thought it offered some great advice, especially about networking. I was wondering if we could speak further about your thoughts on job search tips for millennials. Would it be possible to set up a phone conversation in the next few weeks? I appreciate your taking the time to read this. Sincerely, Jane Lehigh

4

Grab attention with your subject line. Include both a sense of urgency with a personal touch:

*Ex: Lehigh University Student Seeking Job Shadow Experience
Ex: Informational Interview Request – Jane Lehigh*

5

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Ex: Hi Sarah, Thank you for connecting with me on LinkedIn. It is a pleasure to meet you! I saw your article published on LinkedIn about career development for millennials and thought it offered some great advice, especially about challenging yourself to lead. I was wondering if we could speak further about your thoughts on job search tips for millennials.



Informational interviews

Informational interviews are meetings you request from your network contacts to gather information about jobs, companies, and careers. What kind of information? The information you need to choose or refine a career path, learn how to break in to a career, and find out if you have the skills necessary to succeed. Spending time in a highly focused conversation (usually about 20-30 minutes, but sometimes longer) with a person at a more advanced level in his/her career can provide you with key information that you need in your career process.

After an informational interview (whether in person or over the phone), remember to send a thank you note to your contact (email is fine). Express your gratitude for the time they took to share their expertise with you and for their suggestions

Sample Questions for an Informational Interview

Preparing for the position:

- What credentials or degrees are required for entry into this kind of work?
- What types of experiences are essential to be prepared for this kind of work?
- How did you decide to go into this career and how did prepare yourself?
- Are advanced degrees useful in your company? Which ones?

Understanding the industry:

- What are the professional organizations in this industry?
- What trends affect your company's direction?
- Who are your company's competitors and how are their actions predicted or handled?

Learning about job function:

- Please describe how you spend your time during a typical work week.
- What skills or talents are most essential for effective performance in your job?
- What are the most satisfying aspects of your work? What are the most frustrating?
- What are some of the challenges and decisions you face in your position?
- What skills are required for handling them?

Balancing work/life:

- What obligation does your work place upon your personal time?
- What hours do you normally work? Is overtime common and, if so, is it regular, seasonal, or sporadic? Is there flexible scheduling?
- Please tell me about the stability within this line of work?

Managing your career:

- If things develop as you'd like, what sort of career goals do you have for yourself?
- How rapidly is your present career field growing?
- How would you describe or estimate the future prospects of this line of work?
- If the work you do were suddenly eliminated, what different types of jobs do you feel that you could do?
- How versatile is your educational and professional background? What are some other types of jobs that people with your background can be hired for?

Searching for positions in the field:

- How do people find out about available positions? Are they advertised on web sites (which ones?), by word of mouth, or by the human resource department?
- If you were to hire someone to work with you today, which of the following factors would be most important in your hiring decision and why? Educational credentials; past work experience; specific skills and talents; knowledge of your organization, your department, or your job; anything else.

Advice for professionals new to the field:

- How well suited is my background for this type of work?
- Can you suggest other related fields for which my background prepares me?
- What educational preparation do you feel would be best for this kind of job?
- What types of experiences, paid employment or otherwise, would you most strongly recommend?
- If you had to do it over again, what would you do differently to prepare for this occupation?

Learning about the employer:

- Please provide more details about the focus and organizational structure of your company.
- How would you describe the work climate?
- What is the average length of time employees stay with the organization?
- What types of formal or on-the-job training and professional development support does the organization provide?
- Please describe the process of performance reviews.
- What are the arrangements for transferring from one division to another?
- Please discuss any new product lines or services that are being developed.

Networking in the field:

- Based on our conversation today, can you suggest other people who may be able to provide additional information?
- May I have permission to use your name when I contact them?
- Would you share my information in the future with anyone you learn is hiring?

HOW TO CONDUCT A SMART NETWORKING MEETING

The SMART meeting includes five steps:

Summarize Your Background – Briefly summarize your background (include your major, class year, and any related minors). Be prepared and know what you want to get out of the meeting. After summarizing your background describe your objective - whether it be learning more about a specific position or field, learning if you would be qualified for that type of a job, if you are looking for insider tips for how to get a similar position, etc.

Map Your Plan – Introduce the main focus of your career plan. Move to a description of your targeted positions, companies, and/or industries. You can also include specific information about your geographical and organizational size preferences, and explain why you have made these decisions. Introduce the list of targeted companies that meet your criteria. “Some of the positions/organizations that I am particularly interested in are _____, _____, and _____.”

Ask Questions – Move from identifying target positions and organizations to asking questions. Prior to the meeting, research the person you are speaking with, their position, and the company; make a list of questions. These questions will direct the conversation and allow you to collect valuable information about target positions, companies, including the names of any relevant contacts, as well as the company’s strengths, challenges, culture, and people.

Referrals – After you have asked your questions and gathered information, you’re ready to request referrals. This step is easier if your contact has already mentioned names. When concluding your meeting take the next step and ask for introductions to others who might have more information on the organizations you discussed. Here is an example of how to frame your request for a referral:

“Thank you for taking the time to meet/speak with me today! I really enjoyed learning about your role at GE as well as your previous experiences. As you know, I am targeting (insert name of companies, positions, and industries you are targeting/interested in). Can we talk more about my target companies? Do you have any contacts at these companies, and if so, is there someone that might be willing to do an informational interview with me? Any introductions you could make would be greatly appreciated.”

Thank You – Be thankful and make sure to take time to thank your new networking contact. Go above and beyond a generic cookie-cutter thank you e-mail and personalize your message. Think of this networking meeting as the beginning of a great professional relationship and express your gratitude for the time they have taken out of their schedule to assist you and the valuable information they have provided. Consider including information on how you will use the advice or information they have offered. Beyond the thank you, make sure to give an occasional update as things progress in your career plan or job search to keep the relationship going.

Source: Adapted from Lee Hecht Harrison LLL, The Muse, Quintessential LiveCareer