

Networking



THE LONDON SCHOOL
OF ECONOMICS AND
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CareersService

What is Networking?

Networking can get bad press. Phrases like 'schmoozing' and 'working the room' suggest a rather insincere and unpleasant experience. However, the idea of networking can be more daunting than the reality. If approached in the right way networking can be both a fun and powerful career management tool.

Why Network?

Networking has a number of important benefits for your career:

- Gain access to the hidden job market (vacancies not advertised or created by your enquiry– especially through volunteering).
- Increase your visibility in a particular sector.
- Provides the opportunity to demonstrate your skills.
- Help to build rapport and trust with a potential employer.

In addition to many positive reasons for you to network remember that networking has some very important benefits for employers. Recruitment is a costly business and employers are keen to gain access to hidden talent without paying high recruitment fees.

Generating Contacts

The main thing to remember is that you already have a wide range of contacts and belong to number of different networks. Here is a list of potential targets for contacts:

- Neighbours, friends and family
- Industrial professional bodies
- Newspaper articles
- Employer websites

Brainstorm all the networks to which you belong. Expand the list to include other networks that might be attached to those listed e.g. university friends and the alumni associations. Make a list of all the individuals you know within the groups you have identified. Many of the individuals you note down will not be able help you directly but will have access to additional networks who may have people who can help you. In addition to listing contacts that are known to you consider people with whom you have no connection but are still potential sources of advice and information (e.g. professional associations) . Think creatively about where and in what context you could potentially meet such contacts. Don't just consider the obvious places like recruitment fairs ; career forums and networking evenings. Attend conferences and trade fairs especially if its possible to get an attendance list in advance.

Asserting yourself positively

- Be clear about what you want – bearing in mind people generally want to help if they can.
- Be positive about the reasons you are contacting them in particular - people like to be flattered
- Don't apologise for asking for help, open the conversation with a firm handshake and a warm smile.

Ask good questions

- Consider what kind of information you require
- Ask questions that the individual is likely to have an answer (not too random or off the wall)
- Make your questions short, simple and specific

Asking open questions beginning with 'what?' 'how?' 'when?' etc are best to elicit the most information.

Tips on listening

- Listen to what is spoken and unspoken
- Concentrate on the speaker and listen for mutual interest (what value might you offer them?)

Making effective use of contacts: before you make the initial contact be it in person; on the phone or via email run through the following checklist:

Self Awareness: be clear about how your contacts can help you. Do you need support in reflecting on your strengths for particular career? Do you want to gain knowledge about a particular sector?

Research each contact : you will make a strong first impression if you already have some relevant knowledge or some insight in to your contact's work or interests. If you are attending a careers fair make sure you have done thorough research into the organisations and if you are attending a conference try to get hold of a list of attendees well in advance so that you can consider your best approach to the individuals you target.

Prepare a list of questions for each discussion. You won't need all of them but it will get you started and demonstrate that you are a serious candidate.

Consider your approach for each contact A particular method of approach might not be acceptable to all the contacts on your list. Some may prefer an initial email dialogue before agreeing to a face to face conversation. Similarly its important to play to your strengths. What is the best method for you to be at your best? Face to face and telephone enquiries tend yield more immediate feedback.

Be methodical After each conversation with a contact note down any follow up action that is required. As a minimum its important to thank the contact for their time. A polite email sent after the initial discussion thanking the employer for their time can often transform what appeared a fruitless discussion into a potential job lead

Networking activities

One of the best ways to make contacts is at career events. Employers are there to meet you so the foundations for any encounter are already established. In order to make the most of these events:

- Always try to get a list of attendees before in advance
- Attend drinks receptions and mingle! Be bright, positive and forthright!
- Practice how to initiate a conversation and how to end a conversation
- Affirm the value of the person / organisation you are speaking to.
- Politely ask if there is any one they would recommend you speak to about....

Useful questions

- Can you describe what the job involves ?
- What do you like least / most about your job?
- Where do you advertise vacancies?

When a conversation is going well and you have their attention and interest consider taking the questions to the next level:

- Do you have any work experience or volunteering opportunities?
- Would be possible to contact you again for a follow up discussion...to expand .. ?
- Do you mind if I contact your colleague directly , is it ok to mention your name?

Some final tips for effective networking

- Be approachable: start each encounter with a warm smile and a firm hand shake.
- Say that you will value their advice.
- Let the conversation develop before asking for help outright.
- Make it clear you are not ask for a job at this stage.
- Watch your body language (eye contact, facial gestures no yawning if they are a bit dull).

Further resources

Books in the Information Room

What colour is your parachute? Richard Nelson Bolles
The art of building windows Peter Hawkins

Video

Can I have a few minutes of your time ? AGCAS
video

Sources of contacts

In a addition to the informal ideas mentioned above check out Prospects – www.prospects.ac.uk

General

- Visit the Careers information room to review contacts lists.
- Attend career service and employer led networking seminars