
What is Networking?

Networking can get a 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; it can help you:

- Get advice on what your best approach should be for a particular job.
- Gain access to the hidden job market (vacancies not advertised, or a vacancy actually created by your enquiry).
- Get feedback on your CV .
- Learn the 'inside story' - on a job, organisation or sector.

And, for many, the proactive networking approach often leads to an actual job.

How to develop a strategy

Consider your networking goals:

- Do you want to find out more about what a particular career involves?
- Are you hoping to meet someone who can offer you a job?
- Are you looking for a career change?
- Do you want to develop new skills, knowledge, experience?
- Are you seeking support?

Do you want to increase your professional contacts?

Once you have established your networking goals, consider the individuals (or organisations) that are best placed to help you.

How to generate 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:

Peers, neighbours, friends and family, departmental, academic and careers staff, industrial and professional bodies, trade journals, vacancy pages, careers directories, newspaper articles, employer websites & conferences

Step 1

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.

Step 2

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 to help you directly, but will have access to additional networks with people who can help you.

Step 3

In addition, 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. Be creative, attend conferences and trade fairs.

How to develop networking skills

Effective networking is more than generating a list and then making contact. A successful networking campaign needs to combine good communication skills (especially interpersonal skills) and planning.

There are a number of skills needed for effective networking, including:

Listening skills, initiation skills (e.g. initiating a conversation with a stranger), Presenting yourself well, being focused (on the networking goal in the middle of a drinks evening!), asserting yourself positively, asking good questions & the ability to listen to spoken and unspoken messages.

We don't have the space consider all these skills, but here are some tips:

Assert yourself positively

- Be clear about what you want – bearing in mind that 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

- Make your questions short, simple and specific.
- Open questions beginning with 'what?' 'how?' 'when?' etc are best to elicit the most information (see below)

Useful questions

Here are some useful questions to think about:

- Can you describe what the job involves ?
- What do you like least / most about your job?
- My masters looked atdo you have any views on the best way to promote my skills to....
- How did you get started?
- Your website describes the culture at KLP aswhat has that meant in practice for your work there?
- Last week I was reading in the FT that thesector is going to go through its own 'Big Bang.' What might the implications be for your firm / department?
- I was wondering whether you could spare me a few minutes so that I could get some advice about how to break into the field of?

Present yourself well

- You only have one chance to make a first impression
- What messages are you giving with how you present yourself?
- How do you walk, sit, stand or shake hands?
- How do you use your voice?
- Remember the old adage dress for "where you want to get to."

Further resources

Books in the Information Room

What colour is your parachute, Richard Nelson Bolles

The art of building windows, Peter Hawkins

Vault Guide to Schmoozing, Vault Career Library

Job seeking strategies, AGCAS takeaway leaflet

Video

Can I have a minute of your time? AGCAS video

Other

Prospects Job hunting: Networking:

www.prospects.ac.uk/networking