Networking Guide

Networking is the process of connecting with people who work in a certain field, hold a particular job or attend schools in which you might be interested. It allows you the opportunity to gather information, establish contacts and referrals, and acquire “inside” knowledge about a specific career, job type or graduate program. Networking is NOT asking someone outright for a job or internship. Networking can be done via phone, email or letter; however, the most effective way to network is generally in-person.

What Are the Benefits to Networking?

You learn what it’s really like to work in a specific career field or for a particular company. You can, and should, research online to understand what a typical day for a high school teacher is like or what it would feel like to spend 12 hours a day working at a top law firm; however, speaking with someone who has that job or works for that company is the best way to get the real scoop on a career field and to determine whether or not you would enjoy it.

Meet individuals in the career field you are interested in and possibly make connections that could hold the key to your dream job. You may also obtain their advice.

Learn what it takes to be a success. Networking allows you to hear the personal stories of how people succeeded in the exact career field that you are hoping to enter.

It really works. Surveys show that the majority of job hunters who successfully find a job credit their success to networking.

How Do You Identify People to Network With?

USJ’s large base of alumni/ae will prove to be a wonderful networking resource for you. Meet with a Career Advisor to receive direction on how you might use LinkedIn to network with alumni. You may be able to contact alumni/ae to ask questions and set up informational interviews. It is important to remember that you are not allowed to ask alumni/ae for a job or internship! Other potential networking contacts include:

- Relatives
- Friends
- Friends of friends and family
- Professors and coaches
- Internship supervisors, co-workers and former co-workers
- Speakers at meetings you have attended

How Do You Contact Them?

The next step is to reach out to your potential contact and is often done via email. You should include:

- A short introduction of yourself
- Why you are writing to this person and your connection to them. For example, your connection may be a personal one (i.e. my Uncle Bob suggested I contact you).
- A short explanation of your interests or experiences in the contact's career field, company or location.
- And finally, a short statement about why you want to talk. Make it clear that you are asking him or her for information and advice - do NOT ask for an internship or job!
Sample Text Requesting Advice and Possible Internship

Subject: College Student Seeking Advice

Dear Mr. /Ms. Last Name:

As a rising junior majoring in English at the University of Saint Joseph, I am interested in a career in journalism. Our family has long read the RiverEast to update ourselves on local news and activities finding it informative and well written. Given my respect for your weekly paper, I wonder if you might be willing to meet with me for an informational interview and to consider the possibility of a volunteer/internship position with the RiverEast this summer.

At the University of Saint Joseph, my liberal arts education and role on the school newspaper allowed me to develop outstanding writing, editing and proofreading skills. My contributions and writing skills were recognized by the paper’s faculty advisor as I was promoted from Special Features Writer to Associate Editor after just one semester. Last summer as an intern at the Hartford Advocate, I gained experience proofreading and editing the Editorial section, learning the importance of attention to detail and the dedication needed to create a high quality magazine.

I have attached my resume so that you might review my background and experience. I look forward to hearing from you and will contact you in a few days to follow up on my interest. In the meantime, I can be reached at cell phone xxxx or email xxxx. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Sample text requesting advice and industry information:

Dear Mr. /Ms. Last Name:

I am a junior at the University of Saint Joseph and understand that you also graduated from USJ. I am interested in exploring a career in environmental science and am writing to you because of your experience in this industry. I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to meet with you regarding your career path and to obtain any advice you might have for me at this point.

I am majoring in Biology and had the opportunity to intern at the Connecticut Council on Environmental Quality last summer where I completed a wide array of field assignments. My coursework and internship experience have confirmed my interest in the environment and I plan on applying to graduate school following my graduation from Saint Joseph.

I would like to arrange a time to discuss your background, experiences and any advice you could offer a student trying to enter this career field. I understand that your time is valuable, and I would be grateful for any advice you may have for me. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

How Do You Prepare for Networking Opportunities?

1. **Research yourself.** Identify your strongest skills and think about how they apply to a specific career field. Consider what factors are important to you in a career – is it being able to use your creativity; is it working in a team environment? To network successfully, you need to have a basic understanding of your own interests, needs and skills.

2. **Research the contacts.** Before speaking with someone, you should know as much as possible about his or her career path, background and company. This research will provide you with a framework for networking. Read about specific career fields and companies websites. The more information you have before networking, the more you will take away from the conversation. You will also impress the person with your knowledge and preparation.
3. **Develop an elevator speech**
An elevator speech is a clear, brief message or “commercial” about you. It communicates who you are, what you’re looking for and how you can benefit a company or organization. It’s typically about 30 seconds, the time it takes people to ride from the top to the bottom of a building in an elevator. It is important to have your speech memorized and practiced. Rehearse your 30 second elevator speech with a friend or in front of a mirror. The important thing is to practice it OUT LOUD. You want it to sound natural. Get comfortable with what you have to say so you can breeze through it when the time comes. This elevator speech is: absolutely no longer than 25 to 30 seconds, in words, approximately 80 to 90 words, in sentences - 8 to 10 sentences

**Describe who you are**
- Begin with a hook to get the listener interested in what you have to say
- What would you most want the listener to remember about you?

**Describe what you do**
- How do you make an impact/difference and add value?
- What is unique about you?
- What do you do and/or have you done that is different and/or better than others?
- What are your specific skills?
- What makes you stand out?
- What are you most proud of (skills, accomplishments, etc.)?
- Why should the listener be interested in you and take notice of you?

**Describe your immediate goal(s)**
- What are you hoping to get from the conversation?
- What is your action request?

4. **Create a list of questions to ask.** You do not want to appear as though you are reading from a script when networking, but you do want to make sure you have questions prepared ahead of time. Here are a few examples:

**Personal Background Questions:**
- What was your undergraduate major? How big a role did it play in your career choice?
- How did your college education prepare you for this job? What would you have done differently at college to help you obtain and succeed in this job?
- What types of jobs have you held since graduation?
- How did you first get interested in this line of work?
- What do you enjoy most and least about your work in this field and why?
- What is your typical day like? What kind of hours do you work?
- What skills do you use most on a daily basis?
- What are your major responsibilities?
- What accomplishments in your career have been most rewarding?
- Do you enjoy your job? Why?
- What sort of stresses are there in this job?
- What are your career goals for the future? What are the future career opportunities in this field?

**Company Questions:**
- How would you describe the work environment at ___?
- How does your organization compare with other organizations in this field?
- What is a typical career path in your company? Does your company offer any training programs?
- What is your organization’s mission?
- How is the hiring done at your company? What qualities are looked for in an applicant

**Career Field Questions:**
- What credentials or educational licenses are required for entry into this kind of work?
- What kind of work experience would employers look for in a potential job applicant? How can I obtain this work experience?
- What are the most important characteristics and skills needed to be successful in this field?
- What changes have occurred or are occurring in your field?
• What is the best time of year to apply? What job search approaches or strategies do you suggest? What types of resume, cover letter or other materials are preferred by employers in the field?
• What challenges do you see evolving in your industry?
• Can you recommend specific publications or resources that would be helpful for conducting research about this field?
• Could you refer me to resources that might help me learn more – professional organizations, etc.?
• Would you suggest others who might be valuable sources of information or job contacts for me? May I have permission to use your name when I call or contact them?
• If you were me, what would you do next to pursue my interest in this field?

You should also have a few final questions you can ask when you feel as though the conversation is wrapping up. Questions such as these provide you with a reason to keep in touch with a networking contact and help you build a relationship with a contact, rather than simply having a one-time conversation.

**During Networking Events or Informational Interviews**

1. **Dress to impress.** If you are attending a formal networking event or visiting one of your contacts at his or her place of work, dress professionally – just as you would for a formal interview. Remember… “You never have a second chance to make a first impression.”

2. **Use the research and questions you have prepared.** You’ve done your homework, so don’t forget to use it. Find ways to mention things you know about the job, company or industry during your conversation to illustrate that you are well-prepared and motivated. Also, ask some of the questions you have prepared – show the person that you are interested in what he or she has to say.

4. **Listen closely.** It is often easy to start thinking about your next question while the person is still answering your first one. Try to avoid thinking too far ahead and really listen to the information this person is providing you with – that is the point of networking! If you are speaking with a person on the phone, take notes. While it is important to maintain eye contact during face-to-face meetings, taking notes when possible shows that you are interested in what the person is saying. It also allows you to follow-up on some of the key points.

5. **Create a reason to stay in touch.** When networking, you want to establish a relationship – not simply have a single conversation. To create a reason to remain in touch, ask your contact for suggestions regarding what else you should be doing – Who else should you speak with in the field? What publications and sites should you follow? Are there conferences you should be attending? By asking these types of questions (and then following up on what he or she suggests), you provide a reason to keep in touch with your networking contact!

6. **Thank them!** At the end of every conversation – whether it is via the telephone or an in-person chat – thank the person for his or her time. No matter how well (or poorly) the conversation goes, you want the person to know that you are appreciative of his or her advice. Within 24 hours of speaking with someone, you should send a note thanking him or her for his/her time and advice. This is important for any business relationship - You never know if you will need assistance again, and you will leave an outstanding lasting impression.

**Sample Email to Thank Networking Contact**

Dear Mr. /Ms. Last Name:

I greatly enjoyed speaking with you on June 19th about my interest in pursuing a career in advertising. I know that you are extremely busy, and I sincerely appreciate you taking time out of your schedule to speak with me.

Your advice on how to use my liberal arts education to enter the advertising field was extremely helpful. I have already begun to edit my resume and cover letter accordingly. It was also wonderful to hear about your day-to-day work as a creative director – it gave me a clear understanding of those skills necessary to succeed in this competitive field.
I will follow up with the contact you provided me and keep you updated on the progress of my job search. Our conversation was truly instructive and deepened my desire to pursue a career in this field. Thank you again for your time.

Sincerely,

**Follow-up on all leads and contacts.** If your original contact referred you to someone else or another resource, make sure to follow-up on those leads quickly. It is important to show your original contact that you value his or her advice by acting on it promptly.

**Keep in touch with contacts.** As mentioned before, make sure to keep in touch with your networking contacts even after the initial conversation – let him or her know how the suggestions and leads they provided work out for you. Give your contacts updates as your job or internship search progresses – networking contacts are sincerely interested in what happens to you and your career.

**Networking will prove to be a powerful tool throughout your career – not only when looking for your first job or internship.** With proper preparation and follow-through, you will become a professional “networker” in no time!