

Networking: What is it?

Networking is the process of making intentional, career-related contacts through personal acquaintances and their referrals. The purpose is to gather information, advice and referrals that will ultimately lead to interviews and employment offers. Since most job vacancies are not advertised and most people find their jobs through personal contacts and referrals, networking is a process that is key to career success.

- Most job vacancies are “hidden,” or not advertised by means of newspapers, the Internet, job bulletins, etc. This is true for approximately 70-80% of entry-level positions and 90% of non entry-level vacancies.
- Studies note that employers and employees prefer informal and personal methods of job searches. Both groups believe personal contacts produce more in-depth, accurate and current information.
- Individuals who use personal contacts to find jobs are reported to be more satisfied with their jobs and tend to have higher incomes.

The procedures to follow in networking are based on common sense and courtesy. A good measure of persistence and hard work is also essential to success. You might start by composing two lists. One list should include all questions you would like to have answered and the other should include all people who may know some of these answers.

Let’s consider these lists. Before making the list of questions, decide whether you are seeking career information or job search information. The question, “Could you tell me what you like best about your work in environmental consulting?” relates to career exploration. The question, “Can you think of any employers similar to your organization who may be hiring at this time?” relates to the job search. It is important to define the types of information and referrals you really need before starting to network. You can’t expect others to understand your information needs until your understanding is strong enough to send a clear message. See a CEAT Career Services staff member, academic advisor, or professor if you need help with this process.

Developing the list of initial contacts may be difficult if you are hesitant to ask others for assistance. Start by contacting those with whom you already have a strong relationship. It’s great if you have friends or relatives who are employed in a field that interests you, but a list of such persons may be very short. Keep in mind that people whose work is different from your own interests may still be able to refer you to others who would have relevant information. For example, the family physician or neighbor may be able to provide several great referrals. Add your other acquaintances to your list. Try to create a list of at least 50 people.

Networking: What to do?

PRIOR TO THE NETWORKING SITUATION OR OPPORTUNITY

- Identify your potential network – family, friends, coworkers, etc.
- Decide what you need to learn.
- Assess what you have to offer your next employer.
- Prepare a TERRIFIC resume and have it reviewed by CEAT Career Services.
- Summarize your resume qualifications onto a job search business card.
- Prepare questions for formal networking sessions. Topics may include:
 - Career Paths
 - Realities of the Working World
 - Job Responsibilities
 - State of the Industry
 - Money and Advancement
 - Education and Experience
 - Career Preparation
- For informal situations, prepare a one-minute commercial and have several key conversation points in mind.

DURING THE NETWORKING SITUATION OR OPPORTUNITY

- Be explicit about your purpose – to obtain information, not a job.
- Discuss your qualifications, but focus on the information you are receiving.
- Be courteous and concise.
- Ask clear questions.
- Distribute your personal business cards to your contacts, but be selective.
- Ask for additional referrals.
- Have a copy of your resume available in the event that it is requested.

AFTER THE NETWORKING SESSION

- Always follow up promptly with a thank you note.
- Keep in touch with your contacts with periodic phone calls or e-mails.
- Maintain records about all of your contacts with people in your network indicating who, what, why, when, where, and how.
- Make notes on the back of business cards that you receive for later reference.