

Networking: Building Career Connections

Networking is one of the most important job search tools. Most job openings aren't advertised and even if they are, many are still filled through personal contacts and referrals. If you aren't networking with professionals in your targeted industry, you're missing out on job opportunities and the chance to learn about trends and topics in the field.

Myths about networking keep people from using this important job search method. Which of these myths do you believe?

Myth	Reality
Professionals won't want to talk to me.	They will if you present yourself professionally. People who enjoy their job or company enjoy talking about both with others who share the same professional interest.
The goal of networking is to land a job.	Networking means learning about career paths and trends in an industry or particular company. Job openings aren't discussed unless the person you're speaking with mentions them.
Networking is superficial.	When you successfully network you develop and maintain professional relationships with others throughout your career. Meeting with one person only once isn't the goal.
If I haven't worked in my industry yet I can't network.	It's critical to begin building career connections early. Remember that professionals you're speaking with were once in your shoes and will appreciate the opportunity to pass along knowledge they've gained to someone breaking into the field.
Networking only takes place at "networking events."	Networking takes place anywhere - in formal situations like conferences or any informal setting where conversations occur.

How to Network

Setting up a networking meeting is similar to scheduling an information appointment because you're seeking information from the contact person. Review the information presented here that highlights items unique to networking.

1. Identify people to meet and set up an appointment. Use personal contacts, professional organizations and social media. Reach out to the person via email or phone. Clearly identify yourself and state how you obtained their contact information and what your purpose is for contacting them. Do not say that you are looking for job openings.

2. Research and prepare a list of questions. Questions asked during a networking appointment focus on the person's progression in the industry and tips he or she might have.

- Can you tell me about your career path and how you got to where you are today?
- What do you know now that you wish you'd known when you were entering this field?
- Could you talk about the work culture at your company?
- Are you a member of any professional groups or associations? How can I get involved?
- Based on our conversation, do you have specific recommendations for me on how to proceed in my search?
- Are there other people in the profession or this company that I could speak to?
- Would you be willing to provide their contact information and can I mention that you referred me to them?

3. Meet with your contact. Bring copies of your résumé, but don't present one unless asked to. The person you're speaking with may ask you some questions you'd anticipate in a job interview. This is entirely their decision (you shouldn't initiate specific job search questions). If they do ask such questions, be prepared (review the "Common Questions Asked in an Interview" section).

Being able to present your skills, qualifications and interests as they relate to the profession or company is important. Review the "My Elevator Pitch" section to develop a way to market yourself.

4. Send a thank you note. Promptly send a thank you note within 24 hours thanking the person for their time. Email or handwritten is appropriate. Use your judgement as to what style would be best. Refer to the "Thank You Letter Examples" section.

5. Keep track of who you talk to. Develop a system that helps you manage your networking contacts. For each person you meet with, note their name, title and contact information as well as the date you spoke, what you discussed and any referrals to other people.