Networking Guide: Making Connections

Essential resources for long-term career planning
Networking: Making Connections

The positions advertised through the internet, newspaper, employment agencies, or the Bates Career Development Career Center represents about twenty percent of all the jobs that are available. Statistics consistently show that most people who are successful in securing employment do so through making connections (also known as networking or contact development).

What is “networking”?

Networking is simply getting information or developing contacts from people you know. People you already know are A–Level Contacts. The process is no different than trying to find out about a movie or a good place to go for dinner. You ask around, and sooner or later you find someone who knows someone who can provide the information you seek. This is a B–Level Contact.

In the same way, everyone knows someone who can help him or her in the job search process. No matter how thoroughly you develop and use your network, you can always do more.

Networking is an appropriate professional activity. It is also an exchange of information; the most successful networkers view the process as relationship building and not a transaction. When you develop a networking contact, you may not have any pertinent information to share with them immediately, however, you can always offer your help in the future.

Who do I contact?

The following is a list of possible networking sources:

- Family, friends, and neighbors
- Alumni (see Bates Online Community at http://community.bates.edu)
- Professional, community, religious, political, or social organizations
- Faculty, advisors, staff members
- Your classmates and former classmates
- Former employers and co-workers
- Your friend’s parents and your parent’s friends

How do I “network”?

- Decide what market, function, and industry you are going to target; make sure you can clearly explain your objectives.
- Make a list of your A–Level Contacts. Do not eliminate people because they do not seem to be in the right industry or field. They might know someone who is. These referrals will be B–Level Contacts.
- Call or email your contacts, be specific about what you’re looking for, and ask if they know anyone who could help you with advice, information, or referral. **Caution: See first point under Networking tips.**
- Keep adding to your network list. Your goal is to talk to anyone who is in a position to influence your job search.
- It is critical to move from your network into your contacts’ networks.
Networking tips

- **Remember…you are not asking for a job.** Some contacts may be resistant if you approach them with the singular intent of obtaining a job in their company. They may not be in a position to offer you a position. Instead, your goal should be to secure advice, information and referrals in the industries or organizations you have targeted.

- **Leverage contact names as a door-opener.** Use names you are given to get to a contact in your chosen field or a decision-maker; but first you must ask for permission. Then, you can lead with, “Pat Shulman suggested I contact you…”

- **Do not worry about offending or intruding on people.** Most people are flattered by requests for help or guidance.

- **Use the opportunity to learn as much as you can.** This process will prepare you for actual job interviews. Spend time preparing questions. See “Informational Interviewing” handout for suggested questions to ask.

- **Always ask for other contacts.** The name of the game in networking is to talk to as many people as possible. Ask your contacts if they are willing to refer to you to people in their network to continue your research and information gathering.

- **Be certain to follow-up on every lead you get and acknowledge your appreciation for the assistance that you have received.**

- **Develop a tracking system** (i.e., Excel spreadsheet) to keep yourself organized. Use it to plan additional follow up and outreach to new contacts.

Telephone tips

- **Remember… the purpose of your call is simply to obtain an appointment or information.** The following might help you get past likely obstacles:

  - Carefully consider what you wish to say before you make a call. If necessary, write yourself a brief script and practice it.

  - Know what results you would like from the conversation. If you have a clear idea of what you want, you are less likely to be side-tracked or hang up before you have accomplished your goal.

  - Be as presentable over the phone as you are in person. Always identify yourself before speaking and sound enthusiastic. It is also important to be polite and reasonable. Do not be dismissed because of arrogance.

  - Use an affirmative and articulate manner. If you sound tentative, it’s easier for the listener to dismiss your request.

  - Follow up on leads as soon as possible. Opportunities have a way of disappearing very quickly.

Overcoming phone obstacles

- **If the person with whom you need to speak is never in the office, ask an assistant when the person will return or if there is a better way to contact him or her.** Sometimes a clear, concise voicemail is the best way to introduce yourself. Often, calling before 9am or after 5pm is a good time to reach someone.

- **If you have to leave a message, be specific about where and when you can be reached.** Be sure your own outgoing message on your phone is professional in tone and content.

- **If following up on a contact, here are some responses to “May I ask why you are calling?”:**
  1) “I’m calling in response to a letter from Mr. Smith.”
  2) “Mary Jones suggested that I call/follow up.”
  3) “This is about the information that I recently sent.”

  **Note:** Always be sure to be respectful to the staff that may be answering the phone or greeting you before a meeting.
Prepare a brief statement about your background that you think will be of greatest interest to the contact.

Be very specific. “I found your name and contact information through the Bates Online Community and would like to arrange an informational interview.”

When are you available? Have some times in mind. “How is Monday or Thursday after 2:00 or Wednesday before 12:00?”

Whenever possible, meet your contact in person so that he or she can get to know you and your unique strengths.

Five Steps to Successful Networking

Develop a firm grasp of job search basics. Your basics should include researching industries and positions, writing effective resumes and cover letters to highlight your related work experience and projects, and brushing up on your interview skills.

Conduct a self-assessment. Talk to your career counselor about exercises and tools that are available. Research job descriptions and industries to see what’s out there and what appeals to you. Remember, you need to be able to communicate what you want and what you can offer when speaking with your contacts.

Decide how to organize your network. Create a spreadsheet and filing system to keep track of names, addresses, titles, emails, resumes sent, responses received, and contacts made.

Communicate with your network. Initiate contact and be sure to follow up your meetings with a thank you note! Remember to be assertive, not aggressive, and always be clear about your reasons for contact.

Initiate informational interviews. One of the best ways to gain more information about an occupation or industry -- and to build a network of contacts in that field -- is to talk with people who currently work in the field. The purpose of the informational interview is to obtain information, not to get a job.

The Dos and Don’ts of Networking

Do realize why networking is so important. Only 5 to 25 percent of jobs are advertised, so you can find out about all the unadvertised openings only through talking to as many people as possible and telling them you are looking for a job.

Do think creatively about where to find networking contacts. Friends, family, peers, previous employers, others -- you can find people to add to your network almost anywhere.

Do join a professional organization in your field. Most organizations have student memberships, and some have job listings or networking events.

Do volunteer or consider a temporary position. Sometimes you can get a great view of the inner workings of an organization, or several, without the commitment.

Do find a mentor. A mentor -- that one person who can guide you, help you, take you under his or her wing and nurture your career quest -- can be the most valuable kind of network contact.

Do come up with a system for organizing your network contacts and documenting outcomes of those meetings.

Don’t forget to thank everyone who has been helpful to you, preferably with a nice thank-you note.

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Suggestions for Creating a Tracking System

On your path to developing a job search strategy, you will build an extensive network as you connect with a growing number of people through informational interviews and networking. An ideal way to manage these contacts is to create a customized tracking log that helps you to stay organized. Consider including the following categories:

- Name of contact
- Job title
- Name of organization
- Address, phone and e-mail address for contact
- Address, phone and e-mail address for organization
- Class year if Bates alum
- Dates of contact
- Type of contact: e-mail, call, etc.
- Type of activity: networking, interview, etc.
- Thank-you note: date sent
- Recommendations
- Referrals to other contacts
- Next steps of action
- Outcome of contact