



Making Professional Connections

Essential resources for long-term career planning

Making Connections: Networking, LinkedIn and Exploring

You may be surprised to learn that the job opportunities that are advertised online or through the Bates Career Development Center represent **only 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, which is also known as networking.

What is “networking”?

Networking is simply getting information or developing contacts from people you know. 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. In the same way, everyone knows someone who can help him or her in the job search process.

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 connect with?

Possible networking sources include:

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

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.

- 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.

Five Steps to Successful Networking

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. 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 and explore career ideas, not to get a job.

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" section 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.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is an online social media platform and an expansive professional database. Even students with limited work experience should have a profile to gain access to the vast information and research opportunity that LinkedIn provides.

Create a LinkedIn profile by including your education (Bates College and high school), your summer and on-campus work experience, plus any other volunteer or work activities. By adding these details to your profile you will become associated with other professionals who have also been involved at those same organizations. Use the Headline, Summary and Skills areas to demonstrate your unique areas of interest. Highlight details about your academic experience by including courses, projects and on-campus organizations.

Five tips for Your LinkedIn Profile

1. Include a professional, high quality photo.
2. Craft a professional summary that highlights your unique skillset and interests.
3. Join affinity groups on LinkedIn for Bates and other groups of interest.
4. Proofread everything.
5. Always keep your activity on LinkedIn professional.

How to Use LinkedIn for Networking

Once you have a LinkedIn profile, you will have access to up-to-date information that can help with your job search. LinkedIn can be used for conducting employer research, searching for jobs, and especially for networking. Research Bates alumni by using the Alumni Finder section under My Network. Sort the list of Bates alumni by where they live, where they work, and what they studied at Bates. This is the first step to finding potential contacts for networking or informational interviewing.

Once you have identified interesting Bates alumni, send a request to connect via LinkedIn. Explain the shared connection – Bates College – and your reason for reaching out. Ask if you can follow up to schedule an informational interview to talk more about their career path and your career exploration.

What is Informational Interviewing?

Informational Interviewing is a very effective tool used for career exploration. It literally means that YOU interview someone to gather information that will help you choose a career, refine your career path, or break into your chosen field. This type of networking will help you gather information about different careers, clarify your career goals and expand your professional network.

Once you have arranged an informational interview, prepare a list ahead of time that includes the questions that are most interesting and helpful for you. For a typical 30 minute informational interview, choose 10-12 questions to ask.

Examples of Questions to Ask

ABOUT THEIR BACKGROUND

- Can you tell me about your background and career path?
- How did you get started in this type of work?
- What do you like best about your career/job/employer?
- How well did your college experience prepare you for this job?

ABOUT THE JOB, CAREER PATH & INDUSTRY

- Can you describe a typical day or week on the job?
- Why did you decide to work for this company?
- What can you tell me about the corporate culture?
- What skills/abilities are utilized in this occupation?
- What other career areas do you feel are related to this work?
- What is the salary range for various levels in this field?
- What trends do you see for this industry in the next 3 to 5 years?
- What can you tell me about the employment outlook in this industry?
- What is a typical career path in this field or organization?

HOW TO GET A JOB

- How did you get your job?
- What is the best way to enter this occupation? What are the typical entry-level job titles?
- How important are grades/GPA for obtaining a job in this field?
- When I am ready to apply for a job, who should I contact?

ADVICE & REFERRALS

- Do you have any advice for someone interested in this field?
- Considering what you know about my skills and education, where might I fit in this field?
- What experience, paid or volunteer, would you recommend?
- What other careers would you suggest I research further before I make a final decision?
- Based on our conversation today, what other people do you believe I should talk to? May I have permission to use your name when I contact them?

Tips for Networking

- ✓ Do realize why networking is 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. Send a hand written or email thank-you note within a day of any informational interview or networking conversation.