



Career Networking

You often hear “It’s all in who you know!” and it’s true. A high percentage of all job seekers find their positions through referrals. Networking is not only a strategy in your job search; it’s a necessity.

Your network will introduce you to people and possibilities that may lead to a professional opportunity. Your network is not only the people you know; it’s the people they know!

Most people are not born to be networking experts. It takes mental preparedness and practice to start to build your professional network and image. Your attitude often guides your behavior, so you have to start believing that you have something to offer. Below are some tips and ideas to get you started in building your network:

Brainstorm Your Contact List

Identify everyone possible that could serve as a contact either to your field of interest or who may have a connection for you.

- Employers – People you have met through career events, professional meetings, your internship and work experience, etc.
- Family Friends – People who know your career background and interests and may be of assistance in their profession or organization.
- Faculty Contacts – Faculty members who may maintain relationships with alums or have other professional contacts.
- Alumni – Recent alums that you may know, alums who attend career events, etc.
- Professional Associations – Alums from your professional organizations or professionals in local professional organizations.
- Social Networking sites – Connect with professionals and alumni on LinkedIn and Facebook.

Get Prepared

Just like an interview, you should prepare for approaching one of your contacts. It’s time for you to develop a game plan. If you are going to a professional or social event, do your homework. Who is going to be there? Whom would you like to meet? What is your goal of this meeting? When you have a list, research their background and then develop questions that reflect your research.

- Develop a brief introduction of yourself and identify what interest you about your contact’s background, position or organization. What you say about yourself will depend on the event but it shouldn’t take longer than 10 seconds.
 - **Career Event:** “Hi, my name is Sara Student. I’m glad I have a chance to meet you to learn more about your management trainee program. I have a degree in psychology and have worked in retail for 5 years. I think my skills would fit nicely with your program.” **OR** “Nice to meet you. My name is Sara Student. This May, I will be graduating with a degree in mathematics. I would be interested in learning more about what opportunities your organization might have that fit my interest in statistics and research.”
 - **Social Event:** “Hello, my name is Steve Student. I was an intern at Mayo Clinic. I understand you work as a Med Tech. I would be interested to know more about your career path and any advice you might have for a new professional.” **OR** “It is nice to speak to a UW-La Crosse alum, Mr. Smith. I understand that you are the Vice President of Marketing at the ABC Company. I would be interested in talking to you further about your role and what skills you look for in new college graduates.”

Reach Out to Your Contacts

A good strategy is to ask the contact about themselves and their experiences, including college experience. Most people enjoy talking about themselves and you can use that to get conversation started and to general questions. As a result, most people will reciprocate your interest and ask about your background and skills.

In-person Networking

- Get moving! Take initiative to approach others, introduce yourself and share a piece of information that could reveal a common connection between the two of you. You can't work a room when you are sitting down.
- Be as specific as possible about what kind of help you might like "more information about a career in public relations", "types of entry level positions that will lead to a career in finance", "skills needed for a successful career in medical research" or even "job resources for the Greater Milwaukee region". Emphasize that you are looking for information about the career field, not that you expect them to get you a job.
- Consider sharing information that you learned in classes, internships, professional organizations and jobs that might be interesting to your contact.
- Ask for a business card to remember their name and how to reach them. Write conversation details on the back.
- Give people your undivided attention.
- When the conversation lulls, move on – "Excuse me, I see someone I need to greet. It was very nice to meet you."

Virtual Networking

Consider developing a network of professionals through online connections including email and social networking sites (i.e. LinkedIn and even Facebook). It does have more of a social aspect to it but it's a way to connect with colleagues, send messages or just keep your friends up-to-date on your employment/intern status.

- Be patient but persistent. Remember working professionals have demanding schedules and may not respond immediately. If you do not get a response within two weeks, contact them again reiterating your original message and ask if there is a better way to contact them.
- Remember every communication must be professional and to the point. Do not use online abbreviations and proofread every communication.
- Be as specific as possible about what kind of help you might like, for example, "more information about a career in public relations", "types of entry level positions that will lead to a career in finance", "skills needed for a successful career in medical research" or even "job resources for the Greater Milwaukee region". Emphasize that you are looking for information about the career field, not that you expect them to get you a job.
- Consider joining the UW-La Crosse Alumni Network on LinkedIn. Alumni are very loyal to their alma mater and might have some really valuable advice for you.

Work Your Network – Stay Connected

Do not just contact those who can help you when you are job hunting; keep in touch with them regularly. This includes brief emails every few months to say hello and ask them how they are doing. People are more willing to help when they feel like they know you.

- Make it easy on your contacts and ask detail-oriented question. For example, "Do you know anyone that works for the La Crosse School District? May I use your name when I introduce myself to them?" Avoid general demands such as, "Do you know of any good jobs for me?" The question is too broad and may make your contact feel overwhelmed.

The Thank You

After you meet a contact, it is absolutely necessary to write a thank you note. Tell your new contact how nice it was to meet them and also refer to particularly helpful advice they provided you. Everyone likes to be appreciated. In addition to an immediate thank you note, keep in touch with your contact. Remember the network can go both ways; offer your assistance when your contact needs assistance. Lastly, don't always call or email just for help, people enjoy getting good news too. Let them celebrate with you!