

NETWORKING

It is not what you know, but who you know! Approximately 90% of open positions are never posted; networking is your key to accessing this hidden job market.

WHY NETWORK?

- Inform others of your job search and career plans
- Open lines of communication in the job market to discover hidden opportunities
- Learn more about your career field or industry
- Research potential employers
- Possibly create a job where none currently exist
- Help others achieve their career goals

THE RULES OF NETWORKING

1. *Never ask for a job! Ask for information and advice*
2. *Be brief and respectful of time*
3. *Do not do all of the talking*
4. *Ask for suggestions on how to expand your network*
5. *Always follow-up*
6. *Send a thank-you note*
7. *Reciprocation is a must*

IDENTIFY YOUR NETWORK

Your network consists of anyone and everyone you know. Start by making a list of everyone you know and include information about what they do for a living and where they work. This list will include your friends, family, family friends, instructors, colleagues, and anyone else who might be willing to help.

If you are looking to expand your network with other professionals–

- Attend networking events
- Join alumni groups
- Participate in career-related conferences

When attending these events, exchanging business cards is necessary in order to contact individuals later. Alumni often are very willing to help students/new professionals, and you already have a connection through Missouri State University. Using online networking tools is becoming more essential in today's market to identify local, national, and even international professional contacts (see Social Media handout for more information):

- **LinkedIn:** www.linkedin.com
Professional networking site that allows you to build a professional profile (résumé) online and connect with people around the world
- **Visual CV:** www.visualcv.com
A free website that allows you to build a profile (résumé) and portfolio online. You can claim your URL and include it on your résumé for employers to see what you are capable of doing.
- **Google Sites:** <http://sites.google.com/>
Set up a free website to post whatever you think will help an employer decide to hire you. Use the URL on your résumé.

Mentors

Finding someone who works in your career field can be the most valuable resource you have. Developing a relationship with this person and asking him/her for information and advice can be very helpful in planning your career path and making connections in the community. If you need assistance finding a mentor, visit the Career Center for help. Once you get started in your career, remember to “pay it forward” and offer to mentor someone else.

INITIAL CONTACT AND INTRODUCTIONS

It is natural to be a little nervous about contacting professionals to ask for help, but try to relax. Because every career person was once a student starting a career, most are happy to share their story and give insight and advice to new professionals. Making the initial contact can be uncomfortable but can show a lot of confidence and genuine interest if done professionally. You will never have a second chance to make a first impression, so plan ahead and be courteous of their time. It is common to share information in the work world, so many professionals would be

happy to speak to you. Prepare a 30-second commercial, which helps you decide what you want to tell others about yourself. (See 30-Second Commercial handout for more information.) The key is to NEVER ask for a job; ask only for advice and information. Most people enjoy talking about themselves, so draw in your contact with questions. Requesting an informational interview can be beneficial in getting the information you seek and expanding your network. (See Informational Interview handout.) Creating personal business cards to exchange with other professionals you meet during networking can be very useful. These business cards can be made at home with the proper kits or can be ordered from companies such as VistaPrints.com. You may be creative in the design, but remember to keep it professional. Your business cards should include–

- your contact information: name, address, phone number, and email
- a link to your personal website/online portfolio/LinkedIn profile
- qualifications

Personal business cards will let others know how to contact you and refresh their memories of your career goals; they are much more professional than writing your name and number on a piece of paper.

EXAMPLE INTRODUCTION MESSAGE

Following is an example of a message for initiating contact in writing. With some alterations, it also could be used if your initial contact is via a telephone call.

Ms./Mr. _____,

Hello, my name is _____ and I am a student at Missouri State University. I am writing you in hopes to add you to my network and ask you a few questions regarding the _____ recruitment process.

As an admirer of _____, I was excited to come across the _____ internship. I recently applied and feel that I would be the perfect fit for this position. However, I am nervous about being overlooked in a sea of résumés. Do you have any suggestions on setting myself apart?

I am very interested in _____ at _____; therefore any insight you could offer me would be greatly appreciated. Thank you for your time.

FOLLOW UP ON LEADS

When you receive a contact referral, be sure to follow that lead. Contact the new person and let him or her know that someone referred you to them. Being introduced through a mutual contact is the best way to build relationships, and these contacts are more likely to help you than a stranger. Remember to be respectful of their busy schedules and keep these emails and conversations brief.

SHOW GRATITUDE

Be grateful to those who are willing to assist you, and send thank you notes. Within 24 hours of meeting with contacts or receiving a referral or job lead, send a letter thanking them for their contribution to your professional growth. These letters may be hand written, typed, or emailed, depending on the situation. Be sure to mention how they have helped you specifically, and be genuine. Showing gratitude is appreciated and demonstrates respect for the professional.

RECIPROCATION

You are not likely to continue to help someone who has never offered to help you, so why would anyone else? If you want people to help you find a job/internship, you must be willing to help them in some way. This may include connecting them with someone who could help them, volunteering at their charity event, or even being a reference for an article. Find a way to help others, and they will be more likely to help you.

KEEP IN CONTACT

What is the point of doing all of this hard work if you do not maintain these relationships? Send emails or make phone calls every so often to check in with your contacts, update them on your current situation, and offer your assistance on their current project. Just like friendships, professional relationships need to be nourished and maintained.