



# Networking: 101

*Creating career connections through communication and contacts.*

## What is networking, and why should you network?

The step from classroom to workplace, or working up to the next corporate rung, can be a big one. Learn to network and broaden your prospects—you'll be proactively managing your career.

Simply put, networking is the process of expanding your circle of contacts for the purpose of achieving more than you could on your own. By sharing information, experience, and resources, recipients and contacts alike establish connections and build relationships for greater personal and professional advancement. Networking may lead to a referral, new business, or even a job. The more quality people you know, the better your chances of broadening your world and bettering your career.

## It's not what you know, it's whom you know.

Networking is about connecting with people, and opportunities are all around you, many of which are free sources: family and friends; professors; mentors; college clubs; sororities/fraternities; former employers; community organizations; religious groups; non-profit and volunteer societies. Class reunions, lectures, career fairs, cultural events, conventions, and cocktail parties also offer networking opportunities, as do industry guilds and professional associations.

Your counselor in your school's career or employment services center is a great start. Even after graduation, he or she can provide reviews, direction, and leads for job openings, job fairs, and other employment opportunities.

Stop at the alumni/ae office or career services offices to inquire where recent grads have found their jobs. Tap into the alumni database or your school's mentor program for names and contact info of grads or individuals currently working in your field of interest, or for a company you admire.

Make networking phone calls to anyone who might help you land a job. Politely ask if they know of any companies that might have openings.

## The rules of engagement.

Like any in-person interaction, networking involves etiquette, awareness, and professionalism.

Networking is not interviewing, so don't focus on yourself. Instead, the most successful networkers often give generously of their knowledge, resources, and experience.

Here are some basics for attending networking functions:

- determine what you hope to achieve and whom you'd like to meet;
- dress appropriately for the function to create the right impression;
- arrive early; you'll have more time to make connections; turn off your cell.
- wear your name tag on your right for easy visibility when shaking hands;
- make eye contact, smile, introduce yourself, and give a firm handshake;
- ask questions, show interest, and be positive; be friendly and don't criticize;
- talk less, listen more; don't interrupt or monopolize the conversation;
- don't sell; instead, focus on your goals and what you can do for others;
- be brief; make your 30-second elevator pitch specific and interesting;
- devoting 8 to 10 minutes per person so you can mingle is acceptable;
- carry professional-looking business cards to exchange with others;
- be genuine, sincere, and respectful;
- follow up immediately on leads and new acquaintances.

## People invest in people.

The truth is people like to work with people they like. Use common sense. It's a small world: You never know who knows whom.



## **i** n a nutshell:

Remember, networking is about the quality of contacts, not the number:

- **Determine your goals. Then act professionally when interacting**
- **Listen and give honest answers**
- **Ask questions: The purpose is to learn and make contacts**
- **Ask for and give referrals**
- **If you're shy, start with a friendly face and small talk**
- **Don't apologize. People attend functions to network, so it's not an imposition to ask**
- **Be conversational and genuine**
- **Always follow up immediately**

The more you network, the easier it will become to develop your career.