

NETWORKING

Approximately 65-75% of jobs are filled through networking, which is one of the most effective means of finding employment and tapping into the “hidden” job market. Networking involves building and maintaining professional relationships as a way to mutually share information and advice. Visit the career development office for more tips on networking as part of your job search.

Networking FAQ

Why is networking important?

- Networking is essential for:
 - Exploring career fields.
 - Identifying leads in your job search.
 - Building and managing your career over time.

How do I get started?

- Be yourself.
- Initiate conversations with people you interact with on a regular basis.
- Ask people about their career paths or if they can offer any advice.

Who do I contact?

- Brainstorm a list of anyone and everyone you know!
- Never underestimate how valuable each person’s assistance might be or what connections he/she may be able to help you make.

When should I start networking?

- Networking is a continual process that you can start NOW.
- Get into the habit of talking about your future career goals with people you meet.

Keys to Effective Networking

1. Develop a “networking statement” that you will use when introducing yourself to new contacts.

- Clearly identify your educational background, the type of position(s) you are seeking, and your unique skills and accomplishments.
- Example: “I am a recent graduate of Tennessee State University, where I majored in business and completed an internship in the marketing department at (Name of Company). I’m interested in finding a position in sales or marketing, where I can use my strengths in communication and problem-solving.”
- Practice your “networking statement” with family, friends or a career counselor.

2. Generate a networking list.

- Include: friends, family, TSU alumni, current and past supervisors and co-workers, classmates, teammates, professors, neighbors, advisors, church members, acquaintances and members of professional associations.
- Add individuals to your networking list as you meet them or as others recommend.
- Pay attention to the individuals in your network who have been responsible for introducing you to several other people or who have helped you get a job or internship in the past. Invest in these relationships, as these people have already demonstrated that they want to help you connect.

3. Begin contacting your networking list.

- Start by contacting the people you know best in order to practice and gain confidence in your networking skills.
- If you do not personally know the individual you are contacting, introduce yourself and identify the person who made the referral (e.g., “Dr. Smith, professor at TSU, suggested that I contact you”).
- Share a version of your “networking statement.” Be sure to tailor your statement to the circumstances of the situation; the goal is to initiate a conversation and not sound rehearsed.

4. Ask questions.

- Questions demonstrate an interest in learning about the other person. Possible questions include:
 - Can you describe your current role and path to getting here?
 - Do you have any advice for someone who is interested in entering this career?
 - What do you enjoy about your role? What is most challenging?
 - So far I've tried _____ in my job search. Do you have any ideas of other tactics I should try?
 - Do you know of others in this career who might be willing to share advice with me?
 - May I follow up with you in a month or so? What is the best way to keep in touch?

5. Look for ways to add value to others.

- Remember, it's not just about you! Networking is not only about attempting to find a job; it is an ongoing process of building relationships and exchanging information. Be aware of ways in which you might assist others:
 - Volunteer for a project.
 - Share news/articles that may be of interest to someone in your network.
 - Think of two people in your network who would benefit from knowing each other and introduce them.

6. Keep records and follow-up.

- Organize your networking list into a database. Include names, titles, company names and contact information. Keep track of correspondence with each person on your networking list.
- Write a brief thank you note to each person who offers advice and provides leads.
- Keep the individuals on your networking list informed of your job search progress, and keep in touch once you accept a position.

Expanding Your Network

In addition to completing the steps outlined above, you can also naturally build your list of networking contacts by doing the following:

- Utilize online networking tools, such as LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com) for TSU alumni (<http://www.tnstate.edu/alumni/alumniassociation.aspx>).
- Volunteer in the community.
- Join a club, organization or professional association.
- Attend workshops and seminars related to your career objective.
- Participate in career fairs and other events sponsored by the career development office.
- Take advantage of unexpected encounters and initiate conversations with others while standing in line at the store, sitting in a waiting room or other locations conducive to casual conversation.

Other Networking Resources

The following books provide additional networking tips:

- *Networking for Job Search and Career Success* by Michelle Tullier
- *Perfect Phrases for Professional Networking: Hundreds of Ready-to-Use Phrases for Meeting and Keeping Helpful Contacts – Everywhere You Go* by Susan Benjamin
- *Networking for People Who Hate Networking: A Field Guide for Introverts, the Overwhelmed, and the Underconnected* by Devora Zack