

## What is Networking?

Networking is a process of building relationships. Successful networking is about building your personal brand, learning about best practices in a career field or industry, and identifying and making meaningful connections with individuals with whom you can engage in mutually beneficial exchanges of information. *Ultimately, networking is one of the most effective ways to find a job.*

Throughout your career (including while in college), you want to build relationships so people know who you are, what you are capable of, and what you have to offer. By networking you will gather information about career fields or industries that interest you, individuals who are industry leaders, and organizations that may be potential employers.

Even when you have a job you want to always continue networking! You network to sustain and grow your professional connections and to benefit your existing organization. Networking is NOT only about finding a job; however, the more networking connections you have, the better position you are in for your next career move.

When done well networking is not “schmoozing” – a commonly used term that implies that networking is fake, phony, or completely motivated by self-interest. It is true that some people will quickly introduce themselves at an event, hand you a business card, and then a moment later move on to another person. *This is not a good practice.*

In order for networking to be effective, you have to find mutually interesting or beneficial topics of conversation. You might feel like you have nothing to offer someone in return, but you might be surprised how you CAN be of assistance to others once good conversation starts happening.

## Process of Networking

- *Establish a Goal* – Think about what you want and why you want to make a connection.
- *Develop a List of Contacts* – Be creative in your brainstorming, start with people you know.
- *Make Initial Contact* - Via phone, email, or LinkedIn enables you to plan your first outreach (when you meet someone at an event the initial interaction is different).
- *Prepare for Meeting* – Develop a list of questions, conduct some background research.
- *Send a Thank-You Note*
- *Follow Up & Take Suggested Action Steps* – In addition to a thank-you note, check back in with a contact to update them on how things are progressing or to ask more questions.

## Tips for Effective Networking

- *Be clear about your career goals* and where you are headed professionally. Start by thinking about what drew you to your major. What career options are related to that major?
- *What is your style?* Are you comfortable approaching people over email, as part of a group, one-on-one? Build on your strengths and challenge yourself to try new ways of reaching out to people. Get

feedback from friends about what your strengths and positive personal qualities are - those are qualities to take advantage of as you network with people.

- *When you attend a meeting or a group*, have a goal of talking to at least three people before the end of the event. Volunteer to read the announcements or take minutes at student group meetings; pursue leadership positions. Attend sponsored events on campus regularly.
- *Be genuine*. If you are talking to people without a genuine interest in who they are, and are rushing to give them your resume, they might question the sincerity of your interest. Why should someone help you out? What do you have to offer them in return for their time and energy spent on you?
- *Be respectful* of other people's time and what they have to offer. Talking about yourself at inappropriate lengths will not open doors. Be sure to send a 'thank you' for referrals or any time a contact invests in you. Ask if it is okay to send a copy of your resume as a follow up to your conversation.
- *Observe* or talk to people who you think are great at networking and think about what skills or qualities they possess. Consider adapting their style to work for you!
- *Get in the habit of asking for business cards*. Make a note on the back to jog your memory about the person or event where you met. Use a professional networking site such as LinkedIn ([www.Linkedin.com](http://www.Linkedin.com)) to connect with individuals and groups.
- *Don't get discouraged*. If someone says that they don't know of anything pertinent to your current goals or don't have any current opportunities to share, ask them when might be a better time to contact them to discuss possibilities.
- **DON'T STOP NETWORKING** just because you are not seeking a job or are happy in your current position! It takes work to maintain relationships and it is easier to do that when you are not asking for help.

### **Who to Contact – Where to Make Networking Connections**

- *Friends of family members, family members of friends*  
Start with who you know most: parents, aunts and uncles, siblings, friends of siblings, colleagues of family members.
- *Classmates and fellow students*  
Your classmates are your future colleagues - and they have probably had some interesting jobs, internships, and volunteer experiences. Share ideas and build your network together.
- *Professors and administrators on campus (e.g., Student Affairs staff, advisors)*  
Similarly, have you had a professor who inspired or challenged you? Let them know that! Introduce yourself in class or during office hours. Volunteer to help them out with any research. Ask them questions related to your professional areas of interest.
- *Current or past supervisors from your work, internship, or volunteer experiences*  
Volunteering is a great way to help the community and build your network. You can sign-up for courses with a service learning component or visit the Service Learning Office in Killinger Hall to find opportunities to get involved.
- *Alumni*  
WCU Online Community, LinkedIn, Facebook (be certain to focus on building a professional online brand!)
- *Sorority, fraternity, athletic team, and other student organization members and alumni*  
Look into joining a campus club or organization; a complete listing of organizations is available on OrgSync ([wcu.orgsync.com](http://wcu.orgsync.com)).

- *High school teachers and coaches*
- *Professional Associations*  
Professional organizations exist to foster ongoing education, development, and connections; many have websites with valuable career information. Research student memberships as well as online networks of professionals in fields of interest to you.
- *Career events and employer presentations on campus*  
Career fairs, information tables and recruiting events bring employers to campus to attract new talent to their organizations, for internships and full-time jobs. Many organizations bring WCU alumni to represent them.
- *Day-to-day (e.g. on the train, community centers, apartment community)*  
Think about your life and people you interact with every day or week. Do you attend functions sponsored by your residence hall, apartment or condo community? Do you belong to a community organization or club?

### **How to Connect – How to Approach People**

There are numerous options for connecting with people: phone, email, LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, etc.! What is the best way to reach out? There is no one right answer other than, “It depends.”

In general, you will have the best success if you do some advance planning and research. If a professor suggests that you contact someone, ask your professor if that individual is most accessible by phone or email; also ask your professor about what this person does, how long they have been in the role, and what types of topics this individual might best address. Look at the Web site of the organization where the person works to learn a little more before you make contact.

Most people opt first to send an email of introduction (given that email is fast and considering that most individuals read their own email). In the email, explain your interest in the person’s career field or company as well as your interest in talking with her/him about it. If you were personally referred, mention who referred you. Write that you plan to follow up with a telephone call in the next few days to inquire about the possibility of meeting.

If you find the name of a person to contact but were not directly referred to them by someone you know, at least mention how you came across this person’s information: “I read an article recently in The Daily Local that talked about your business in West Chester. I found your new venture intriguing as it is similar to my future goals, so I am writing to see if we might speak some time?”

Before making your phone call, have a clear idea of what you want to say.

*“Hello. My name is Jane Doe. I am a senior at West Chester University of Pennsylvania and I sent you an email a couple of days ago. I got your name from Professor Jane Smith, who suggested you would be a good person to ask for advice. I was hoping we might get together for a short meeting sometime soon. I would like to speak to you about the advertising field and the typical entry-points into an organization such as yours.” (adapted from The Smart Woman’s Guide to Interviewing and Salary Negotiation, p.44)*

If the individual declines your request, offer a gracious and polite, “Thank you for your time. I appreciate you taking my call.” And then simply move on to the next person you would like to try to contact.

There are many books that delve deeply into other networking communication strategies, so be sure to visit the Career Center’s resource room in Lawrence 225 for more resources!

## Your “Elevator Pitch”

If you were on an elevator and someone that you really wanted to meet stepped in, how would you introduce yourself between floors to make a positive impression and connection? A brief yet informative introduction of you is what is known as an “elevator pitch” (sometimes also referred to as a 30-second commercial). Having an introduction of yourself prepared in advance is particularly useful when attending special events, career fairs, and other group functions.

- Start with your name, major, and a brief description of your career/educational interests.  
*“Hi, I am Jane Smith and I am a junior in marketing. I am most interested in consumer products but I am open to other options at this stage in my education.”* (10-15 seconds)
- Give an example of something you are involved in – a club, volunteer work, athletics.  
*“In addition to my classes, I am a resident assistant in Tyson Hall, where I have developed good mediation and conflict resolution skills, as well as plan social and educational programs for my hall residents.”* (15-20 seconds)
- Be clear on your objective. Networking is about gathering information, so ask other people for their opinions, guidance and coaching.  
*“I am exploring internships for the spring to gain experience and learn more about marketing. In your career, what has been your exposure to marketing? What is your opinion about avenues for gaining experience or what industries would you recommend I investigate?”* (15-25 seconds)

## Sample Networking / Informational Interview Questions

- How did you choose this career field?
- What types of experiences are essential to be successful in this field?
- What are typical entry-level opportunities in this field?
- Describe a typical work week and a typical day.
- How would you define the culture of your office? Is that common throughout the industry?
- What are the toughest problems you must deal with?
- What is the most rewarding part of your job?
- What obligations at work affect your personal time?
- Tell me about the growth of this career field – where is it going?
- What different types of work can you do long term with this background?
- How do people find out about job vacancies in this field?
- How does this organization compare/differ with its competitors?
- What is a reasonable salary range for these positions?
- Can you recommend organizations for me to research further?
- Is there a person within this organization that I should contact to pursue employment?
- May I use your name when I contact them?