

8.2 CAREER NETWORKING SKILLS

Knowing how to network and practicing your networking skills will open many doors with people who can help you throughout your career. The following basic networking skills can be applied to most networking situations. Whether you plan to network person to person, through networking events, or online, show that you are prepared, can connect effectively, and can follow through with the connections you make.

PLAN

Know what you want. Are you looking for advice, a better job, a change in career, an introduction to a contact, perhaps someone at a higher level than you whom you can't connect with on your own?

- Be confident.
- Build a list of e-mail addresses.
- Plan your career networking message.
- Practice your presentation.

CONNECT

- *Call or write directly.* Even though your communication may be screened, there may be times when you will be able to reach the person directly. Some people will be impressed with the personal effort you make to connect.

- *Attend the same professional events as the people you want to network with.* Being seen regularly at these events provides an opportunity for you to get noticed and for you to establish ongoing contact.
- *Shake hands and introduce yourself.* Take the lead.
- *Work the room when attending networking events.* The following tips for working the room at a career fair explain how to use your time well at networking events and ensure you leave a positive, lasting impression.

ENGAGE

Engage the other person in a conversation about why you are interested in connecting with him or her. Ask questions that show you are interested in the person you are speaking with. Try to ask questions that are open-ended.

Open-Ended Questions Invite the other person to take the lead in the conversation. You can ask open-ended questions that prompt the other person to talk about his or her personal interests, career, or the company he or she works for.

Here are examples of open-ended questions:

- “Tell me about . . .”
- “What do you think . . .”
- “What was your experience. . . .”
- “What do you do . . .”

There might not be a lot of time for small talk, and you want to be sure that you achieve your networking goal. Use your career networking card to shift the focus of the conversation to why the other person should be interested in you.

“So build rapport with your contacts—by listening, seeking common ground, and helping out where possible.”

Judith Perle, co-author,
The Network Effect,
Director, Management
Advantage, Ltd

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

Not all networking is a one-time activity. Some of the contacts you make will be important to grow and develop. Relationships are not built in a day. They take time and effort. Follow-up is key to deepening your relationship with key contacts.

- Make a list of the people you want to develop and maintain long-term relationships with.
- Create a schedule of activities that you initiate with them periodically.
- Call or e-mail them, inviting them to lunch, or plan to meet them at an upcoming social or professional event.

NETWORK AT A CAREER FAIR

You can increase your success with connections you make at a career fair by following this simple, step-by-step action plan:

1. *Update your networking goals.* Are you looking for an internship or a full-time job? Are you interested in career or company information? Do you need job search advice or an introduction to an employer?
2. *Research participating companies.* Research as many companies as you can prior to the event. This will help you manage time by weeding out those that do not match your career goals. Having some knowledge of companies you are interested in will make it easier to initiate conversation with them.
3. *Prepare a list of questions.* Develop a list of questions that cover three areas: company or industry information, job leads and referrals, and introductions to other companies.

4. *Update and print your resume.* Have printed copies of your resume to leave behind. Some companies do not accept printed resumes, and you need to apply online first before an interview can be scheduled. Be prepared to make an online copy of your resume available.
5. *Prepare and print your career networking cards.* Use your cards as leave behinds. It is a reminder of your meeting and provides company representatives easy access to you. The company representative will have something with your name on it and can write brief notes about some things to remember about your conversation at the career fair.
6. *Dress professionally.* Look serious about your career. This is probably your first introduction to these companies. Proper dress may vary according to industry and company culture. It is best for both men and women to wear a suit. If it turns out that business casual dress is appropriate for some companies, you can adjust your presentation once you have had one or more interviews with the company. Review the information in Chapter 4 on interview and workplace dress to create a great first impression.

“Every interaction is a potential job interview. The best way to get that call for a great new position is to be the first person someone thinks of before they post that opening.”

Laurie D. Battaglia, career and leadership coach and co-owner of Living the Dream Coaches, LLC

NOTES

How to Work the Room at a Career Fair

1. Target people you want to meet.
2. Introduce yourself.
3. Get information that pertains to you.
4. Get them interested in what you do and who you are.
5. Make friends—find common ground.
6. Take notes to remember key points.
7. Try to schedule a time for another appointment.
8. Offer to leave your resume.
9. Thank the person.
10. Move on to the next person.

Follow-Up after a Career Fair

1. Follow up within 24 hours or at the time you were asked to.
2. If you were referred to someone else in the company, follow up promptly and introduce yourself. Let the person who referred you know that you followed up.
3. Send a thank-you note to the company representative you spoke with.

Progress Check Questions

1. Can you think of other ways to use your career networking card other than at a career fair?
2. What is the hardest part of career networking for you? What can you do to develop more confidence in that area?

8.3 PERSON-TO-PERSON CAREER NETWORKING

Person-to-person networking involves direct contact one on one or in a group situation. Record a list of the career network contacts you already know and those you would like to develop. Some career network contacts might include the following types of people.

CAREER NETWORK CONTACTS

Instructors. Many schools require instructors to stay current in their field by developing and maintaining industry contacts. Stay connected with them after you graduate.

Alumni often seek career advice or connections to contacts, from former instructors, that help them make successful career moves.

Alumni. Former graduates of your school are a great resource of connections within their company or through professional and personal networks they have built. Many alumni return to campus to speak in the classroom or participate in career fairs. The hiring manager at the company you are interested in could be an alumnus of your school. Check your online alumni center to find alumni in hiring positions.

Counselors. Check to see if you have access to a career or academic counselor or advisor at your school. They may have industry contacts to share with you as well. Professional career counselors can also be a good resource. Their network may include people with career experience in your field willing to share career information with you.

Coworkers. The people you work with can provide valuable insight into which individuals at your company are best to connect with for career advice.

Community members. Within your local community, you may be a member of different social and professional groups. You probably became a member because you share common interests with the group. The community members you interact with are good sources of information that may result in job leads or new networking opportunities. Staying connected with your community is one way to build important networking relationships.

Relatives and friends. We often overlook relatives and friends as networking resources. If none of your relatives or friends are working in the field or at a company you are interested in, they may know someone who can help you. Don't forget to tell people about your job search. People you meet at church or other place of worship, the gym, the beauty salon, sporting events, and through volunteer work might make connections for you.

“Smart hiring managers will use technology to their benefit, but recognize the need for in-person meetings and phone calls to discover who the candidate behind the computer is.”

Michele St. Laurent,
HYPERLINK, Insight
Performance

ACTIVITY 8.2

Create a List of
Career Network
Contacts

Names	Phone Numbers	E-mail Addresses

NETWORKING EVENTS

Networking events create opportunities to connect one on one with individuals who can help you in your job search. Three of the more popular types of career networking events

include career fairs, professional association meetings, and professional conferences and workshops.

Career Fairs Career fairs are excellent networking opportunities. If the list of participating companies is published, research in advance to determine which companies might best fit your career interests. Jot down notes about the company, and create a list of questions to ask. You may be most familiar with career fairs at your school, but you should also consider career fairs in your local community or on a regional or national level. The Internet lists career fairs held in different states or major cities.

Professional Association Meetings, Conferences, and Workshops One-on-one contacts can be developed with members of professional associations you join. Belonging to professional associations is an effective way to connect with influential people in your career field. Through members you meet at conferences or workshops, you can explore job leads or career advice or obtain referrals to other helpful contacts. The *Career Directions Handbook* has lists of professional associations by career field to help you decide which organizations might benefit you most. Be sure to ask about student rates for memberships and conference attendance.

ACTIVITY 8.3

Create a Calendar of Career Networking Events

Date	Event	Location

“Your virtual handshake is just as important in making an initial impression as meeting someone face to face.”

Sheryl Johnson, founder of BD-Pro Marketing Solutions

8.4 ONLINE CAREER NETWORKING

VIRTUAL INTRODUCTIONS

Virtual introductions have some advantages over face-to-face introductions. The biggest advantages are the ability to connect with contacts in different geographic locations and time to plan and review your message before sending it. One challenge is how to achieve the same feeling of personal connection as in a face-to-face introduction.

Virtual Handshake A handshake is an important part of most introductions, often creating a lasting impression and connection between two people. In a physical handshake, nonverbal impressions such as eye contact, facial expression, and overall appearance influence the power of the handshake. How do you create a lasting impression and feeling of connection off-line? How can words and images in your online introduction bring you to a virtual handshake?

E-mails, Texts, and Tweets Most online introductions start with an e-mail. The e-mail may refer to an online networking card, resume, portfolio, or website, but the content

of the e-mail is what will draw someone to want to take a next step with you. A strong e-mail introduction rises to the top when it conveys you are the best fit for that specific job and company. Your career networking card is a good place to start. The skills and expertise in your e-mail should be consistent with those on your career networking card. Write to a specific person targeting the job and company. Find ways to convey your individuality and make a personal connection. Make the person feel comfortable with digging deeper to find out more about you. The trick with e-mails is conveying the strongest message you can concisely. Examples of strong e-mail introductions can be found in Chapter 11.

Be careful using texts or tweets to introduce yourself to an employer. If these are the tools a company uses to communicate with candidates, you will want to be sure to be professional in your text messages or tweets. Don't be hasty. Think beyond the informality and instant responses usually associated with these tools, and take time to think about what you say and how you say it.

MOBILE PHONE CAREER NETWORKING TOOLS

Mobile phone applications to manage your career networking activity save you time and make access to your contacts easier. These applications can help you design and send mobile career networking cards, make virtual introductions, and save career networking leads.

Design and Send Mobile Career Networking Cards There are applications for designing and sending digital career networking cards directly from your mobile phone. You can create your digital card with a provided template or picture and can e-mail it directly to your contacts.

Make Virtual Introductions You can introduce yourself online by allowing people to view your card. You can also ask selected contacts to use your card to introduce you to others online.

Save Career Networking Leads Some applications allow you to take a picture of your contacts' business cards and read them using text recognition technology that automatically adds the information to your mobile phone's contact list.



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LINKEDIN AND FACEBOOK CAREER NETWORKING TOOLS

LinkedIn Tools LinkedIn is one of the most widely recognized social media sites for career networking. There are a number of career networking tools on LinkedIn that can help you build quality connections.

- *Connections and endorsements.* Click on a person you are connected with, and be invited to endorse that connection for multiple skills. Your connections can endorse your skills to help build a strong profile, but be sure the person you endorse and who endorses you is reputable.
- *LinkedIn groups.* You can access LinkedIn groups for the college(s) you attended and companies you have worked at by searching for the name of the school or organization so you can reconnect with selected individuals and check their current status. Some may become helpful new members of your career network. Some LinkedIn groups provide notifications and announcements, while others have a Jobs section that posts job opportunities.
- *"People You May Know"* tool. This tool displays potential contacts you might want to connect with on the top right of the screen where you log in. These contacts have something

**"Surround yourself
with only people who
will bring you higher."**

Oprah Winfrey

in common with you professionally that qualify them as potential members of your career network. You can choose to connect with them or not.

- “*Signals*” section. Signals tracks your contacts that are still active on LinkedIn. Review it to reconnect with individuals you may have lost touch with. Reconnecting with contacts keeps you up to date on what they are doing and reminds them you are actively networking on the site.
- “*Get Introduced*” section. This feature helps you get introduced to new, targeted contacts with the help of current contacts in your career network. You can send a message and ask your current contact to introduce you to a professional in his or her network that you want to know.
- *Recommendations* feature. You can receive and give professional recommendations on LinkedIn. A LinkedIn recommendation can interest an employer to dig deeper into your qualifications and pursue more detailed references. Be sure that those you ask for a recommendation are reputable and can be trusted to provide an accurate account of your qualifications. Be careful making recommendations online. You want to be sure what you say accurately reflects the person you are recommending. If you embellish or falsify a recommendation for someone, it can reflect negatively on you. Do not agree to make a recommendation for someone you don’t know or someone you can’t honestly support in a positive way.
- “*Groups You May Like*” feature. You can also click on “Groups You May Like” to get group recommendations from LinkedIn. This feature provides you with a list of groups automatically selected for you based on similarities you may have with members of the groups. Similarities may include companies, schools, or industries common to both of you.

Facebook Tools

- *BranchOut*. BranchOut was the first Facebook application that enabled Facebook to be used for professional networking. Facebook users can develop a professional profile enabling them to do career networking through Facebook relationships. On BranchOut, you can search a company by name and connect with Facebook friends who work there. One of the basic premises of BranchOut is the ability to jumpstart a professional network through “friends” you already know on Facebook.
- *BeKnown*. BeKnown is a Monster.com application for Facebook. Users can connect with professional contacts as well as Facebook friends. Personal and professional

Real Life Stories

Tom’s Career as a Chef

With a new degree in culinary nutrition, Tom’s career goal was to work as a chef preparing creative, healthy-choice spa menus. His dream job was to eventually work in a test kitchen for a large international hotel chain with resort properties featuring spa cuisine. Tom provided LinkedIn and Facebook profile links with his online applications. After receiving no responses, Tom asked his instructor for advice. Tom was embarrassed to learn that his Facebook public profile included photos of him on vacation playing at a club with his band. He had forgotten to apply the privacy setting for information he wanted to share only with friends and family.

Once a week, Tom spent 30 minutes online updating his profiles.

Tom’s sister connected him with a chef manager she knew who told Tom about an online job site hosted by a leading culinary professional association. She told Tom to use the advanced search feature on the site. Here Tom could tailor his application to include position title, zip code, and his culinary-specific skills and specialization. Now, his revised online profiles and applications led to matches for several jobs that were the right fit for Tom.

profiles are separate. Friends and work information help identify where you have inside connections. BeKnown is user-friendly to entry-level job seekers, making it a popular choice for career networking among college students. BeKnown has been key to bringing Facebook from a strictly social networking site to a popular option for professional networking.

ONLINE CAREER EVENTS

Virtual career fairs, podcasts, webinars, and chat rooms are types of online career events. Online sites, including Facebook's built-in events application, are available to help you find and track conferences and events. Professional association websites post upcoming podcasts, webinars, and chat rooms. Be sure to combine your participation in both person-to-person and online career events to ensure you have a strong presence among a variety of prospective employers.

Progress Check Questions

1. Can you name online career networking sites that are targeted to your career field?
2. Do you feel more comfortable with networking online or in person?

Virtual Career Fairs You can build your career network online by participating in virtual career fairs offered in a wide variety of career fields. It is not difficult to participate in a virtual career fair. The process usually involves accessing registration information for students and employers, a hot links page for companies that have preregistered, and examples of how the virtual booths might work. Booth information might contain job descriptions, company information, web page links, and e-mail links. You can search the Internet for listings of virtual career fairs that pertain to your career interests.

Podcasts, Webinars, and Chat Rooms A podcast is an audio broadcast on the Internet that allows you to listen or watch an audio or visual file. The most popular format of a podcast is your MP3 player; however, podcasts can also be accessed on your computer using certain software such as Media Player.

“Attend the virtual event sneak preview to eliminate any potential computer problems or company firewall issues before the virtual job fair begins.”

InXpo

“By using connections and networks, you differentiate your name from the thousands of other online applications.”

Dr. Lee Bowes, CEO,
America Works of New
York, Inc.

