



Getting Started with Networking

Networking is a process of building relationships with people who can assist with your career as well as the other areas of your life in which you seek success. Common benefits within the career sphere include learning about job openings before they are advertised to the general public and getting advice on building a stronger resume. According to many job search experts, 60-70% of people find employment through networking! Beyond career needs, you can reap the riches of others' experiences via networking to find a trustworthy car mechanic, discover "student friendly" landlords in the campus area, etc.

How Do I Begin?

Start by defining networking objectives: What do you want to accomplish? Consider these examples of career related objectives:

- Get feedback on your resume from someone who works in your target career field...is it strong enough for the positions you'll be applying for?
- Obtain information from people working in the fields that interest you...compare your understanding of the occupation with what they do on a day-to-day basis.
- Find out who manages the units you'd like to work in at target companies so that you can send them your resume and inquire about current/anticipated job openings.
- Find someone who works where you'll be interviewing to hear about their likes/dislikes about working for that particular company.
- Obtain different points of view about a career field, graduate program, etc.

Keep in mind that setting goals for networking will allow you to identify the types of connections you need to make, develop questions that will likely yield the information that will be most helpful to you, and help your networking contacts better understand how they can assist you.

Whom Should I Contact?

The worksheet on the last page of this document can be used to help you determine people in your network and how they may be able to assist with your various networking objectives. You may discover that the people in your network are able to provide all of the support and information that you need, but chances are you'll need to also reach out to "cold contacts" – those who you haven't met but who are good prospects for helping with your networking objectives. To identify cold contacts, refer to the *Networking Resources* tip sheet found at www.ascareerservices.osu.edu/ guides.

How Should I Make Contact and What Should I Say?

Depending on the person and your relationship, you might call, text send an e-mail, write a formal letter, chat in-person when you next see the contact, or use a combination of these methods. However you reach out, keep in mind that you are asking for the contact to help you – so, focus on doing the following:

- First, indicate what it is you are seeking from that person (reflect on your networking objectives!)
- Listen closely – you may not get another chance to communicate with them
- Be mindful of the time – cut the small talk short if your contact is pressed for time; prioritize your information needs: which questions are most essential to ask? Alternatively, if the contact has arranged their schedule to assist you, and is not rushed, you shouldn't rush the interaction. Many folks invest time into networking because they value finding points of connection and social reciprocity. Remember, you may be in a place to assist them – directly or through the other people in your network. Cutting the interaction off after you've obtained the information you are seeking may give the signal that you are a selfish networker.
- Making a good impression (keep your style professional, check spelling and grammar in any written communications you send)
- Express appreciation for their time!

Consider the sample networking communications on the next page and determine which format is best given your particular situation. Many recommend using the phone to make initial contact since it's a more personal approach.

If you leave a message on voice mail, make it brief and to the point. State your connection to that person, i.e., "Joe Smith, a friend of mine from your organization, suggested I contact you."

If you can't reach the person on the first call, the rule of thumb is to call again 2-3 days later. A third call can be placed 3-4 days after that.

Sample e-mail requesting an informational interview

Dear Ms. Carson:

My name is Brutus Buckeye, and I got your name from my aunt, Kathy Chestnut. Kathy suggested that I contact you because I'm interested in exploring career options in advertising. I understand that your firm manages the advertising for my aunt's real estate company. I'm a sophomore English major at Ohio State and am fascinated by the creative side of advertising, including how strategies are developed to appeal to diverse audiences. It would be wonderful to hear about your background in advertising as well as any pointers you might have for a second year college student who is new to the ways of the business world. Are you free to meet with me within the next few weeks? Kathy mentioned that your office is near the Starbucks on East Broad, which is very near where I volunteer on Friday mornings. Maybe we could meet for coffee at some point?

I look forward to hearing from you.

Brutus Buckeye
buckeye.1@osu.edu, 614-222-1111

Sample e-mail requesting consideration for a job opening

Dear Dr. Brown:

During a recent discussion with Mark Winslow, a Behavioral Specialist at University Hospital, I discovered that your smoking cessation program has been awarded a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Mr. Winslow shared that you are planning to hire a Case Manager who will focus on outreach to the Hispanic community in Cleveland. I am writing with an interest in opening discussions with you about this employment opportunity.

I will be receiving a Bachelor of Science degree in psychology, with a minor in Spanish, this June from The Ohio State University. Related to your hiring needs, my qualifications include:

- Successful completion of an internship with The Breathing Association's *Quit for Good* program
- Fluent in Spanish, with language skills developed through growing up in a bilingual family and coursework in high school and college
- Sensitivity to the personal challenges of giving up cigarettes

I will be able to empathize with the frustrations and setbacks that are typically associated with the smoking cessation process. I chewed tobacco from ages 14-17, and was able to eventually kick the habit after an eight-month course of nicotine replacement therapy. Living tobacco free for four years and my academic success at The Ohio State University are points of personal pride.

It would be great to have the opportunity to meet with you to discuss more specifically how my interests and experiences might be beneficial to the wellness programs at University Hospital. I will call your office this week so that we can discuss the possibility of meeting.

Sincerely,

Stew Dent
dent.1@osu.edu, 614-222-1112

There are many opportunities on campus for you to meet people working in the career fields that interest you. Before you start attending such events, which include employer information sessions and networking events with alumni, you are encouraged to have your commercial ready. See the *Writing Your Commercial* document at www.ascareerservices.osu.edu/guides; practice your commercial so that it sounds natural.

Common Networking Blunders

Expecting too much too soon. Networking is best done throughout your time at Ohio State. Compared to other job search activities that can be done quickly (e.g., updating your resume), networking cannot be rushed. For instance, it may take a couple of months before your networking activities lead you to a contact who has the information or ability to assist with your particular objective. It's also possible that some contacts may limit their initial assistance to giving information, but over time as you develop a closer relationship they may provide more instrumental support, e.g., referring your resume to one of their network contacts.

Focusing exclusively on job openings. The people you connect with may not be in the loop about job openings, so focusing on this topic too early may put your contact on the spot. If they cut the dialogue short, thinking they cannot be of assistance because they don't know of specific job openings, you will miss out on learning general job search tips. It's also possible that they know about a job opening, but are hesitant to share such information until they know you better. Therefore, start off by talking about why you are interested in a particular career field or industry as this will allow them to learn more about you as an individual, including your skills, experiences, and level of professionalism.

Ignoring others networking goals. When at networking events, keep in mind that most in attendance are looking to add more contacts to their network. The goal is to keep chats brief – don't monopolize another's time or otherwise keep them from meeting others at the event. A five-minute chat will be long enough to determine if someone can possibly help with your objective(s) and, in turn, for them to discover how you can possibly assist them.

When following up with the new contacts you have met, and have more time for dialogue, remember to manage the talk in a way that allows for an even exchange. You are seeking to understand their networking objectives while also asking the questions at the forefront of your job search or other quest.

Interrupting at networking events. This is a challenge because such events typically include mix and mingle time – when people tend to pair off in conversation. To be effective, you need to know when and how to break into a conversation. Consider the following scenarios: which conversation would be appropriate to join?

- (A) Two people are chatting amidst the large group, but both often look around and smile at others standing close by. You are able to overhear tidbits of their chat, which is focused on the campus eateries they each like. They seem to be running out of things to say to one another.
- (B) Situated away from the large group, two people are standing close to one another and seem to be enjoying their chat. They are facing one another and are not looking at the others around them.

These situations represent opposite ends of the continuum. It would likely be okay for you to break into chat A if you did in a way that was inclusive of both parties (e.g., "Hi, I'm Brutus Buckeye, and this is my first club meeting. How long have you each been members?") Breaking into chat B and any other types of one-on-one chats is not advised, as your behavior would likely be viewed as intrusive.

Being impatient. While building relationships is key to effective networking, you need to start out slowly and let communications with a new contact evolve. After the initial introduction, the typical sequence of communications is to:

1) make a follow-up call or e-mail to propose a longer in-person chat – meeting for coffee or lunch is generally a good option, 2) sending a thank-you e-mail to acknowledge the time and tips the contact shared with you, 3) call or e-mail to update them about anything you volunteered to do for them (this will hopefully prompt them to do the same if they offered to assist you in a specific way), and 4) periodically touch base, which can take the form of checking in to see how they are doing with reaching their objectives and sharing information that relates to their objectives - or constitutes a “just for fun” item that fits with their style of humor.

The sample communications in this document illustrate the professional tone to strive for with new contacts.

Professional Networking Through Social Media

LinkedIn is the single best social media resource for career development. Over the past few years LinkedIn has developed content specifically targeted to college students. In addition to finding contacts through your immediate network, there are two other ways you can identify potential networking connections. From your LinkedIn home page go to the Network tab in the top navigation bar. Select “Find Alumni”. As long as you have identified Ohio State as your current school, you will be directed to the Ohio State alumni directory where you can search current and former students based on criteria such as major, geographic location, or company affiliation. Another way to find contacts with similar career interests is to join LinkedIn groups. Select the Groups options from the Search box drop down menu and use key words such as “financial consulting” or “creative writing”. You can also search on “Ohio State University” under the Groups option and browse to find OSU groups relevant to your major or department. Once you have joined groups you can follow online discussions, learn what professionals in your interest area are talking about, and apply classroom knowledge to join these discussions. The greater your level of meaningful participation the more you may get recognized as an emerging professional in your field. Keep in mind that before you begin using LinkedIn for networking you need to complete your profile! For additional tips on using LinkedIn go to <http://students.linkedin.com/>.

Other Tips

- Stay organized. Keep track of names, e-mail and postal addresses, phone numbers, dates and outcomes of interactions, information about where the contacts work – including their job titles, etc.
- Always send a thank-you note/email/text even if you know the person very well.
- Inform your main contacts when you have achieved your networking objective (this could be part of your thank-you note).
- Consider everyone you meet to be a potential contact. Don't overlook the power of the serendipity factor: impromptu, chance encounters with people can become rewarding networking opportunities. Position yourself in spots where chance meetings are more likely to occur. Envision the type of people you would like to encounter “by chance,” and then plant yourself in their “habitat.”

• Keep in touch with your contacts to nurture and possibly grow your network. Techniques for doing this include:

• Sending birthday messages/cards

• Contacting them when you hear news that they are likely excited about (e.g., when their alma mater wins a big game)

• Connecting your contacts to people who have similar interests, career goals, etc.

• Actively expand your network by setting aside 1-2 hours a week for networking activities, allocating time for meeting new people as well as tracking information about your contacts, and following up on communications.

It's either networking or notworking!

Networking Worksheet

My networking objectives are to:

Record the names and e-mail addresses of people you know that can likely assist with your objectives, by either helping you directly or referring you to someone who can possibly help.

Family Contacts

- Mother, Father _____
- In-Laws _____
- Brothers _____
- Sisters _____
- Uncles _____
- Aunts _____
- Other Relatives _____

Job/Internship Contacts

- Former Supervisors _____
- Former Co-Workers _____
- Current Supervisors _____
- Current Co-Workers _____
- Customers/Clients _____
- Internship Coordinators _____
- Mentors _____

Ohio State Contacts

- Professors _____
- University Administrators _____
- Resident Hall Advisors _____
- Student Organizations _____
- Sorority/Fraternity _____
- Classmates _____
- Career Counselors _____
- Alumni _____
- Academic Advisors _____

Whom do I know from my hobbies?

- Club Members _____
- Special Interest Groups _____
- Team Sports _____
- Intramurals/RPAC _____
- Others _____

Whom do I know from my social interactions?

- Neighbors _____
- Friends _____
- Online Acquaintances _____
- Friends of my parents _____
- Friends of family members _____
- Others _____

Whom do I know from services I regularly purchase?

- Doctor _____
- Dentist _____
- Hair Stylist/Beauty Care _____
- Lawyer _____
- Insurance Agent _____
- Others _____

Community Contacts

- Volunteer Sites _____
- Places of Worship _____
- Food Co-op _____
- Neighborhood Association _____

TIP: Start reaching out to the contacts that you think are most likely to be able to assist with your objective(s).