

Network Your Way Through College and Beyond

What is Networking?

- Developing relationships or contacts
- Building partnerships that support you while you map out your career goals
- Sharing information
- Ongoing and reciprocal in nature

What it Isn't:

- A process of making cold-calls
- Using people to get jobs

Why Bother?

- Networking is not just about who you know but who knows you, you already have contacts who can become the basis for your network.
- Networking can build your base of contacts for future reference and provide a support network as you explore and pursue career goals.
- A single personal connection can lead to multiple opportunities for professional and personal growth, from job leads to lasting friendships.
- Networking helps you explore new career options and can help you keep up with changes in your field.

How to Network Effectively

Ideally, networking starts long before a job or internship search. Contacts are not only relatives and friends, but also your neighbors, former high school/college classmates, Penn State faculty/staff members, and Penn State alumni. For those of you who have been working or interning—other contacts can include current and former co-workers and supervisors. In essence you are already networking through your daily interactions with others. When looking to expand beyond your existing network, consider these steps:

1. Establish Your Goal

Before contacting anyone, decide on what kind of information or assistance you would like and can expect from the people you meet. For instance:

- Information on a career
- Referrals to specific job openings
- Advice on the best strategies to break into a career
- A secondary contact

2. Do Your Research

Interviewing and networking conversations are less stressful if you are prepared. By doing this, you will feel more confident, you'll not be at a loss for words, and you will make a positive impression.

- Make sure you do your homework on a company before you meet with one of its employees.
- Before you meet with someone make sure you know what questions you'd like to ask (see Informational Interviewing on page 10 for ideas).
- Remember, the more prepared you are, the more productive the networking experience.

3. Make Contact

When you contact someone, give them some information about you. For example, let them know that you'll be graduating soon, what your specific skills are, and the type of position/organization that you are seeking. During your conversation you might:

- Ask for information and advice for someone seeking to enter their field or find employment with their organization.
- Seek suggestions for other colleagues to talk to who have a connection to the industry or position that you are seeking. Ask them if you may use their name as a referral.
- Offer to send them a copy of your resume and ask them to keep you in mind if they should hear of any openings.

4. Send a Thank-you Note or Email

The person that you have spoken with has given you their time; a valuable resource. Express your appreciation for the meeting/interview with a note of thanks and include any actions that you will take as a result of the meeting. This step should not be overlooked, it is one tangible way that you'll begin to build your network of contacts.

5. Develop a Contacts File

Using a database or index cards, develop a contacts file in which you maintain all pertinent information about that individual. Record information from your meeting with that person as well as your anticipated next action. Through this step, you are building your relationships with contacts who might be able to help with future career opportunities.



6. Set Goals for Ongoing Networking & Follow Up

The Penn State Alumni Association offers many opportunities to connect with alumni including LionLink and Nittany Networking Events in key cities. Think about how many people you will try to call in one week, how many meetings you should attempt to schedule, and how many networking events you'll attend. As part of your goal setting, make sure that you follow up with existing contacts. Be sure to let your initial contacts know of the outcomes of your meetings. In other words, keep your contacts informed about your progress and any success you have had.

7. Always Reciprocate

When you ask others for help, be prepared to return the favor.

Successful Networkers Are:

- Open-minded and willing to meet new people
- Prepared and persistent
- Informed and up-to-date on current events (i.e., news, industry, etc.).
- Respectful of everyone they meet and thank their contacts for their time
- Able to set clear, realistic, and achievable goals
- Not afraid to ask for the information they need

I'm Ready, How Do I Find Contacts to Talk to?

- Use LionLink – a database of alumni who have volunteered their time to serve as a networking resource for students and other alumni, ready to answer questions about what they do and where they work, and serve as a career resource. For more information on LionLink, please visit studentaffairs.psu.edu/career/alumni/LionLink.shtml, or email lionlink@psu.edu.
- Engage professionals with LinkedIn and/or other social media - remember to keep your profile and interactions professional. Any information that is posted is fair game for employers and the public at large to view.
- Attend information sessions hosted by various organizations.
- Watch for events featuring guest speakers within certain fields through your academic department or student organizations, etc.

Sample Contacts File Entry

Contact Person: _____

Title: _____

Organization: _____

Address: _____ City: _____ State: ____ Zip: _____

Preferred Phone Number: _____ Email: _____

Date Contacted: ___/___/___ by phone by email in person

Date Thank You Sent: ___/___/___

Additional Recommended Contacts: _____

