



NETWORKING AND INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

NETWORKING DEFINED

Networking is a process of building *mutually beneficial* relationships that provide you with knowledge, advice, information and further contacts, all of which can help focus your career goals and may allow you to tap into unadvertised job vacancies. Networking involves:

- Contacting people you know (as well as those you may not know) in order to obtain information about an industry, organization, or job/internship.
- Asking individuals for additional relevant contacts in order to build your network and find further information.

Networking can be highly effective and powerful. Speaking with people who are currently working in a field of interest provides you with the opportunity to engage in a substantive dialogue. Networking allows you to:

- Obtain answers to your questions about the industry or organization.
- Be put in touch with individuals who can give you insider information on vacancies, industry or organizational culture, required skills, etc.
- Receive feedback on application documents such as resumes and cover letters.
- Be forwarded as a candidate for a job opening.

Remember, recruitment is an expensive and time-consuming activity for employers; it takes staff time and valuable budgetary resources to advertise vacancies, screen resumes, interview candidates and negotiate offers. Thus, a word-of-mouth recommendation, which serves the same purpose as recruitment, saves the employer resources. It is therefore no surprise that *60 to 80% of all jobs are found through networking!*

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

Informational interviewing is the process of learning about jobs and career fields by speaking directly with professionals who work in fields of potential interest to you. It is also a great way to develop a network and learn about possible job openings. You are the one driving the interview so you must come prepared with questions to ask. Most often people will be forthcoming and gladly share information and experiences. **You should NOT ask directly for a job**, but rather approach this activity as career research—research leads to information which can lead to identifying opportunities.

Getting Started

There are several important steps to take in order to get started:

- Have a clear idea of what industries or career areas are of interest. If you are still unsure which industries interest you most, speak with a career counselor.
- Research the industry. An informational interview is not an opportunity to “pick someone’s brain,” but rather an opportunity to ask informed questions. Remember, you are aiming to impress; therefore, you should be able to demonstrate your knowledge and preparation.
- Develop a list of contacts and a strategy by which you will make contact. Start by telling people that you are considering a career in “x” and would welcome the chance to talk to professionals in this field. Ask them if they have any suggestions for you.

Finding Contacts

You should consider not only the people you know, but also the people that they know, as part of your existing network. These may include:

- Relatives
- Friends
- Relatives' friends and friends' relatives
- Former employers or colleagues
- Shul members
- Neighbors
- Professors / Administrators
- YU alumni
- Members of professional associations (groups of individuals in a given industry who meet for networking, education and professional development; often there are discounted student membership rates available)
- "Cold Contacts" (those individuals you do not previously know, but locate online, through industry research, or at networking events)

In addition to brainstorming and speaking with friends, family members and school acquaintances, you should also begin to develop your online network. Professional networking sites such as LinkedIn.com, Doostang.com and even social networking sites such as Facebook.com can serve as valuable methods for cultivating relationships with former or newly established contacts. Proceed with caution, however, as employers can visit these sites at any point. You want to represent yourself in a professional fashion at all times.

Preparing for the Informational Interview

Once you have names of individuals, you are ready to prepare for and schedule the information interview. Here are some guidelines to begin the process:

- Approach contacts, either in person, via email or by phone, to schedule the informational interview. Begin by introducing yourself, telling the individual how you found his/her contact information, and stating your interest or reason for meeting. Try to arrange for an office visit whenever possible, though some people may prefer a phone conversation.
- Before the interview, devise a list of questions. Be clear about what information you need from each individual. From some, you may simply be seeking referrals.
- Practice your introduction OUT LOUD so you feel confident when you speak with the contact.
- Know as much as you can about your contact and his/her position in the organization before the interaction takes place.
- Ensure you have a resume ready for meetings to e-mail or send upon request. Do NOT offer the resume up front unless you are explicitly asked by the contact; remember, you are only seeking information initially.
- If the informational interview is in person, be sure to dress formally in a business suit as if it were a regular job interview.

The interview generally lasts 30 minutes, but that can vary. Remember to respect the person's time as they are doing you a favor. Towards the end of your conversation, always ask your contact if they can recommend other individuals with whom to speak. Networking is all about extending your list of further contacts. You should make developing relationships your primary goal, rather than getting a job. **Always send a thank you note after every exchange and meeting.** Maintain the relationship by contacting the person every month or so to report progress, but do NOT harass them with multiple calls or emails.

Sample Questions for an Informational Interview

- How did you become interested in this field?
- What are the skills/qualifications you think are critical to excelling in this field?
- Would you describe a typical work day?
- What aspect of your job do you find most challenging? Most rewarding?
- What is the necessary training to enter the field?
- Does your career relate to your major in college?
- What do you think of the experience I have so far in terms of getting in to _____?

- I already read _____ every week. What else would you recommend to help keep me abreast of developments in this field?
- Do you have a recommendation of whom I should speak with next in the field? May I use your name?
- What are the entry level opportunities in this field?
- Are there particular associations/organizations I should join to meet more individuals and learn more about the industry?
- What else should I know to make an intelligent decision about choosing a career in this field?
- What do you feel is the future of this field? Do you see any trends?
- If you could do it all over again, would you choose the same path? Is there anything you would change?
- Would you say the information you've provided to me is pretty typical of the industry in general or quite specific to your organization?

Further Tips

- Never ask for a job/internship—it is the easiest request to respond to in the negative.
- Never ask about an individual's salary. It's completely inappropriate. However, you can ask about the salary range for typical entry-level positions in the field.
- Ask several open-ended questions. These encourage description and dialogue, as opposed to closed questions, which can be met with a one-word answer. For example, asking, "Can you tell me what elements of your job you enjoy?" is better than asking, "Do you enjoy your current job?"
- Offer flexibility in your schedule. You should always fit your agenda around the interviewer's schedule. Remember, they are doing you the favor.
- Respect the interviewer's time, and if they cannot help, politely ask for other contacts.
- Act confidently. Networking and informational interviewing are respected means of career exploration and job searching. It is likely that your contact will be applauding your initiative. They are likely to have networked themselves so they will be empathetic to your situation.
- Do not assume immediate results. Networking takes time, and you should have a positive attitude about developing relationships rather than believing you will instantaneously receive an opportunity following one networking meeting.

NETWORKING RECEPTIONS: TIPS FOR "WORKING THE ROOM"

Part of networking involves "shmoozing" with colleagues and potential employers in different settings, including career fairs, panels, alumni networking nights, professional association meetings and other events. Keep the below information in mind for keys to success.

Preparation

- Get organized and do your research before you attend an event. Know who will be there and what information you want to obtain.
- Practice your introduction out loud. Include your discipline, intended career goal and a specific question for the individual. Practice versions of this introduction that are 10, 30 and 60 seconds long.
- Skim headlines in a paper or related periodical before the event so you can speak intelligently about what's happening in the industry.
- Find out what the attire is and dress appropriately. When in doubt, err on the side of formality—better to be overdressed than underdressed.
- **TURN OFF YOUR CELL PHONE!**

Food and Drink

- Eat before you arrive! Going hungry will make you focus on the buffet table, not the contacts.
- Leave one hand free so you can shake hands and exchange cards. Hold drinks with the left hand so your right hand is dry.
- Do NOT chew gum.
- Eat in small bites so you can quickly swallow and answer questions if someone approaches you.
- Avoid alcohol generally. If you do drink, do so in moderation.

Conversations

- Start by approaching someone you know or know something about.
- Join groups by subtly walking up and making eye contact with one person. Do not interrupt—wait for a natural pause and then introduce yourself and shake hands. Don't give the "limp fish" weak handshake or the "bone crusher." Medium pressure is ideal.
- Do not just speak with one person for the entire event. Avoid talking to those you already know for long periods of time. The purpose is to develop new contacts.
- Smile. It exudes confidence and enthusiasm.
- If you see someone else standing alone, try approaching them. They might feel awkward and will be relieved to have someone else in the same boat.
- If you've met someone before but cannot remember their name, simply ask. Say, "I believe we've met before, and I'm sorry but I've forgotten your name. I'm Jon Smith. You are...?"

Pitfalls

- Do not directly ask for a job or internship.
- Avoid controversial topics such as politics, religion, health problems, etc.
- Do not monopolize the conversation, be aggressive, or try to "one-up" others.
- Even if the room is noisy, try to avoid invading others' personal space. No one likes a close talker.

Exiting

- Politely exit by telling the individual (or group) that it was nice to meet them. Ask for a business card so you can follow up.
- Do not announce the need to use the restroom.
- There are many graceful ways to exit a conversation. Try the following, "I see a colleague of mine across the room whom I haven't seen in a while. I'm going to try to catch him before he heads out. It was very nice to meet you." Or, "It was nice chatting with you. Might I have your business card so we can chat further at a later time?"

10 NETWORKING TIPS

1. **Know exactly** what it is you want from others. Prepare questions in advance of a meeting or telephone conversation. Be succinct, courteous and appreciative.
2. **Have a positive** attitude when you network.
3. **Talk to strangers** and mingle with people you don't already know at meetings and events. Introduce yourself!
4. **Share information**, ideas, resources and contacts with others. Networking is a two-way process.
5. **Don't ask** for too much at one time. Limit the amount of assistance or information you seek from one person.
6. **Don't neglect** to follow up on leads you have been given. You don't want to embarrass those who have made connections for you.
7. **Don't betray** other people's confidentiality. Trust is a vital part of networking.
8. **Don't monopolize** other people's time when networking. Keep your conversation brief and make arrangements to call or meet at another time if you discover areas of mutual interest.
9. **Continue networking** even after you've found a job. An active network will always be helpful, and you never know when you may want to make a job or career change. Everyone needs a personal and professional support system. Keep yours in place throughout your career.
10. **Incorporate networking** into your everyday life. It is a powerful tool for marketing yourself, but also a powerful tool for enriching your life and the lives of those in your network.