

Networking – the most effective job-search strategy

Networking is arguably the single most valuable and least understood career management resource. New research out of Harvard Business School indicates that almost 80% of all jobs in the last 10 years were the result of networking – 35% of those jobs didn't exist 10 years ago, which indicates the crazy rate of job and career changes in our country. Some of the advantages of Networking include:

- People like helping the friend of a friend
- Non-threatening interaction for all parties
- Leveraged introductions – referral from a well-respected and well-liked source
- Resolves questions of integrity and credibility
- Removes uncomfortable feelings associated with cold-calling

Networking helps you...

- Gain information about a discipline, firm, or industry (especially about changes)
- Narrow your choices for careers, job search, academic majors, internships
- Meet new and interesting/influential people
- Re-establish contact with people you already know
- Connect with people who can assist and support your career management activities
- Create opportunities through contacts

Networking is a powerful tool that requires knowing network etiquette. There are certain expectations when networking, and the *golden rule is* – reciprocate! Never ask for a job. Networking is first and foremost about gaining information.

Social Networking

Within the past few years the popularity of social networking has exploded. Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace, MyFamily, blogs, networks, etc. have dramatically increased the amount of connection we have with each other. These networks provide excellent opportunities to stay in touch with others that can help you with your career. And you can return the favor by helping them with information when they need it.

Tips for using social networking sites.

- Google yourself to see what comes up – know what to expect, clean up your image
- Create a professional profile – we suggest LinkedIn.com. Employers are using this site on a regular basis – and join affinity groups such as Willamette University
- Be careful about Facebook pages, pictures, etc. Employers look at it
- Pay attention to your privacy settings
- Network before you need it. Networking – staying in contact with people -is ongoing, not just when you need something like a job.
- Clean up your “digital dirt.” Your Facebook or any other online network site may have pictures, groups, inappropriate language, etc.
<http://monster.typepad.com/monsterblog/2010/03/clean-up-your-digital-dirt---or-at-least-sweep-it-under-the-rug.html>

Before you start networking, you must be prepared to...

- *Know who you are:* What are your values, skills, abilities, interests
- *Know what you want:* Be specific. What do you need and for what purpose? When you need it? In what form do you need it?
- *Know what you offer:* Willamette contacts, resources, support, accessibility, your network, unique qualities, content knowledge and expertise, a good ear, etc...
- *Know who can give to you:* Identify an appropriate network based on specific criteria such as information, expertise, accessibility, etc...
- *Know network protocol:* Expectations, attitudes, approaches...it is a two-way street. Have patience, practice the “Golden Rule.” Remember that you are part of someone else’s network and expect that they, too, will ask you for assistance someday!
- *Have Questions:* Have a couple of questions in mind. These questions can range from general small talk to specific professional ones. Let the questions lead you into a more genuine and sincere conversation.
- *Know how to track:* Develop a tracking system for your network—3x5”cards, computer system, business card files, etc. Track favors as well as contacts!
- *Follow-up:* Every week, call or email at least one person whom you have not talked to in at least 90 days. This re-activates your “hidden” network. Send a gift or note as soon as possible when another person has assisted or supported you in some way. Invite people to events you are attending when you know the event would of interest or value to them. If you seen article about someone, send a copy with a congratulatory note. If an article relates to business, trends, their science, etc. send a copy of the article with a short note. Return phone calls and emails within 24 hours! Always respond as promised. These are simply courteous and polite behaviors that everyone enjoys.

NOW, LET’S NETWORK!

If you are at a meeting, start by introducing yourself to someone you don’t know. After introductions, ask them a thoughtful question about their career, job, interests, etc. At the end of the conversation, exchange business cards (students should get business cards – they are available at the Print and Design Center, first floor UC).

http://www.willamette.edu/dept/print_design/index.html

Good, you’ve just started a network. Networking is as simple as talking to each other. Create a strategic career network; creative alliances to help you create career success.

Develop a database or list of professional contacts that enrich your knowledge of your business, field, firm, industry, hobby/interest, etc. The more diverse your contacts are, the greater the opportunities that they can help you with. You can keep contacts in an Excel file, Word

document table, or use a low-tech process of taping the business cards and contacts on notebook pages and jotting a reminder note about your relationship/how you met the contact. Invite them to join your LinkedIn network.

Effective networks include several specific kinds of people

- **Mentors** – guide your career by providing opportunity, access and guidance
- **Role Models** – those whose professional behavior you wish to emulate
- **Hubs** – walking referral systems – Career Services, your boss, etc.
- **Challengers** – people who you do not necessarily like but who cause you to examine yourself and your behavior
- **Promoters/recommenders** – people who encourage you, promote your visibility, talk about opportunities, etc...

Successful Networkers

- Are open-minded
- Are prepared and persistent
- Are current on events (i.e. news, industry trends, etc.)
- Use their imaginations
- Treat everyone in their network as equals (non-hierarchical)
- Choose members for information, not position
- Are not afraid to ask for what they need
- Always thank their networks
- Set clear, realistic and achievable goals
- Are patient! It takes time and energy to build a caring community

Dealing with discomfort – keep in mind that networking is a 2-way street

- Most people enjoy being asked for their opinion. They enjoy helping the next generation of eager students. It is an ego-boost and enhances our sense of self when people seek us out.
- It is natural for most people to want to help others, especially a friend of a friend.
- If you are well prepared and informed, people will learn and benefit from your ideas and expertise. Networking becomes a process of mutual learning.
- When contacting someone for the first time, it is okay to leave two messages within the first two weeks. After that wait three weeks and then express your regret at having not heard from them.
- When meeting, ask for a limited amount of time – 30 to 45 minutes.

Networking still remains the most effective job search strategy around. Read up on it and utilize the best practices. You are more likely to find a job through your network than applying to websites or looking at job listings.

Good luck.