

NETWORKING GUIDE

The most successful job searches include a variety of methods to locate job openings: online job postings, career fairs, and sending introductory résumés and cover letters, but job seekers often forget about one of the most successful ways to locate potential job openings, networking through their personal contacts. Nearly 80% of jobs and internships are never advertised to the public, which is why it is often called “the hidden job market.” When hiring, most organizations first look at people they already know and acquaintances recommended by people they know.

CAREER COMPETENCIES

The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) has identified 8 core competencies that company recruiters want college students to have mastered prior to being hired in their organizations. Networking, whether in person or through phone or electronic means, utilizes these core competencies: **Career & Self-Development, Professionalism, Equity and Inclusion, Teamwork, Communication, and Career Management**. Before implementing your networking plan, review your skills in these areas and think about how you will use them professionally.

WHAT IS NETWORKING?

Networking Is:

- An exchange of information or services
- Getting the help you need
- Building and maintaining relationships *before* you need them
- Helping/mentoring others
- Genuine and authentic

Networking Is Not:

- As difficult as it seems
- Asking for a job
- Bothering or pestering someone
- Expecting something as a result of a connection

GETTING STARTED

Create a Plan - What are your networking goals and what results are you seeking?

A Few Good People - You want quality contacts, not quantity. Spend your time making a few, quality contacts and keep in regular communication with them.

Inventory Your Current Networks - Networking contacts may be social, professional, or online and may include primary (the people you know) and secondary (the people they know) contacts. Your network is larger than you think. Consider these current networks: friends, extended family, your parents' friends and co-workers, your co-workers and bosses, church members, college faculty and staff, alumni of your high school and college.

Networking can take place in a variety of settings including conferences and professional or student organizations, internships, career fairs, the gym, sporting events, volunteer sites, and online platforms.

Evaluate Your Current Network

- What is their relationship to what you need and how can you give back?
- Who has the power to help you?
- What is the best way to approach them? Who can make an introduction on your behalf?
- What is their value? What can they offer you?
- What is your value? What can you offer them?

NETWORKING

Networking can be done in a variety of ways. You can network at an event, during a scheduled meeting, through an online correspondence, or in an impromptu conversation. It can be informal like a conversation at a conference luncheon or formal like a scheduled informational interview. Just remember you are **always** networking, and every person you meet is a potential networking contact and could be a future colleague.

Encourage Face-to-Face Meetings

It's preferable to meet network contacts face-to-face or through video conferencing when possible. We forfeit 93% of our communication power when we can't see non-verbal cues. Phone calls are acceptable if face to face is not possible.

Even if the conversation is informal, maintain professional behavior and an appropriate verbal and non-verbal communication style. Shake hands confidently, smile, and maintain eye contact. Convey enthusiasm and a sense of purpose and refrain from using slang or inappropriate humor.

Informational Interviews*

Informational interviews are fact-finding meetings that will help you gain insight into an industry/occupation/specific employer, learn what types of skills are needed in the job, and establish contacts that may help you find employment in the future. You will need to ask your contact for a specific meeting date and time and have questions prepared.

*A separate guide on Informational Interviewing with a sample meeting request and a list of common questions to ask is available through the Career Center website.

Networking at an Event

You will attend many events through your personal and professional life, and every one of them provides a chance to meet new people and add to your network. When you attend a conference, banquet, charity event, wedding, or even a tailgate party, you have the chance to meet people who might help your professional career down the road.

Tips for Networking in person:

- If possible, scan the attendee list ahead of time and do some research on a few people you'd like to meet
- Check with the host or organizer to see what the appropriate attire will be
- Practice your elevator pitch (guidelines can be found in the Career Fair Preparation Guide)
- Take business or contact cards. Business cards can be printed through ISU's Ricoh service. Prepare your template online and email the print-ready document to ISU-Ricoh@indstate.edu with the number of pages you want for \$1 per page. There are also a few companies online where you can design and print your customized cards.
- When joining a conversation, begin with making eye contact, nodding and smiling in agreement
- Once you feel included, join in the conversation and introduce yourself; Use OAR: Observe, Ask, Reveal
- When choosing conversation topics, think of where you are, who you know, and why you are at this particular event; Do NOT discuss religion, politics, controversial topics in the news, or use profanity

Follow Up & Organization

At the conclusion of a meeting, informational interview, or engaging conversation, get a business card or contact information. Send a written or emailed thank you letter.

To keep track of your contacts for future use, create a spreadsheet or use a notebook to record important information. Record the date of the conversation, who you spoke with, their contact information, what they said, what you promised you would do, who they referred you to, and what follow up is needed.

DEVELOPING & MANAGING YOUR PERSONAL BRAND

Why is personal branding so important?

- Communicates your professional identity
- Allows you to align your skills & abilities
- Defines why you should be sought out by others
- Helps you value your distinction
- Holds you accountable

Think of yourself as a brand

- What attributes do people recognize you for?
- What are you passionate about?
- What have you accomplished?
- What value do you provide?
- What makes you unique?

Promoting Yourself

- Develop your résumé focusing on accomplishments and skills; Be concise, organized and consistent
- Prepare a cover letter that intrigues employers; Tell a story that connects your experience to their needs
- Build a positive and consistent message through social media; Can people tell what you are passionate about through your various online platforms?
- Audit your online presence; What is being posted about you? What impression do you leave?
- Evaluate your efforts; What must I keep/stop/start doing to make a greater impact?

SOCIAL MEDIA

Employer Dislikes:

- Inappropriate photos or information
- Content of drinking/drugs
- Bad-mouthing employers, co-workers, or clients
- Poor communication skills and grammar
- Misrepresentation of qualifications

Employer Likes:

- Profile supports professional qualifications
- Intelligent and creative content
- Solid communication skills
- Other people posting good references
- Showcasing awards and accolades

LinkedIn:

- Roughly 95% of job recruiters use LinkedIn to find qualified candidates (Forbes 2022).

When creating your profile:

- Make sure your profile is filled out to 100% completion
- Update your experience and education; use descriptive bullet points like you do on your résumé
- Add industry and career skillsets to the “skills” section and ask colleagues to endorse you for these skills
- Use relevant keywords to your desired industry and career
- Include a professional photo
- Professional headline and summary statement should include what you are seeking as well as what you are bringing to the table

Tips for Adding Contacts:

- Connect with colleagues, classmates, university alumni, companies, and industries to expand your network
- Write a personalized message to introduce yourself rather than the default introduction
- Join groups and professional organizations related to your career interests
- Follow companies and industry influencers related to your career interests for news and updates
- Include your LinkedIn address on your résumé

Facebook / X / Instagram, etc.

- Remember recruiters, managers, and professional contacts will search these sites for information about you
- Always keep your profile, photos, and comments professional!
- Let people know what you are looking for in a job and location
- "Like" and follow industry, company, and group pages appropriate to your job search
- Post and share articles, comments, and videos that are relevant to your professional interests