

Network Your Way to a Job or Internship

Learning how to network, to build and create connections, is key to your career development and success. Whether you are looking for an internship, getting your first job, or changing your career path, networking provides valuable information at every stage of the job search process. Networking is about building relationships and connections in a purposeful, organized way. Networking is not quickly acquiring names of people just to get a job.

Why Network

Networking is considered one of the most effective ways find jobs and internships nationwide. There are a variety of job search strategies; however, networking results in an average of 60% to 80% of all job offers. Learning how to build and maintain your network is one of the most crucial skills to develop as you embark on your career.

Through networking you can learn about career opportunities, specific organizations, industries and career fields. Professionals already working in the fields that interest you are typically the best sources of this type of information. They can offer specific inside views that can't be duplicated. They can also connect you to individuals in their network who can provide additional assistance.

Informational Interviews

One avenue to gain information about a wide variety of careers using your networking skills is the informational interview. Tapping into the knowledge of others will provide you with invaluable information to help you as you make career decisions.

Informational interviews are meetings you arrange with a person who currently does the job you think you might want, or who has specific knowledge of an occupation or career field of interest. Your contact person certainly has the most up-to-date information on the position you are investigating and may or may not have the power to hire you within the organization. An informational interview is a low stress situation where you have the opportunity to gather the data you need to make a realistic career choice and/or get advice for your job-search strategy.

How Can Information Interviews Help You?

- Informational interviewing allows you to collect information on a particular function, industry, or geographic area. It helps you focus your career choice and job search.
- You can discover the skill sets that are required for certain jobs and match them with your own abilities and strengths.
- Finding out how people feel about their work or the culture of their organization can help you to visualize yourself in a similar position and allow you to assess whether it would be right for you.
- Informational interviewing can give you a competitive edge in an interview. After you have talked with several people in a functional area or industry, you should have a strong understanding of current issues facing that industry. In an interview, you will be well prepared to demonstrate your preparedness and knowledge base for that organization by being able to speak the language of that organization and the industry.
- The professionals with whom you speak can serve as valuable contacts in the future. By asking for names of those who are doing similar work, you can begin to establish a list of resources and get a sense of the network of professionals in that particular occupation.
- You will develop self-confidence in the art of interviewing

Where Can You Identify Contacts?

inCircle -JHU Social/Professional Networking Site

This resource is a pool of over 100,000 Hopkins alumni who are available to help you. They have offered to talk with students and other alumni to advise them about their career fields. You can access inCircle from the Career Center's website or directly at www.alumni.jhu.edu. You will need to register with inCircle to access alumni. You can search for individual alumni by major, employer name, location, etc. You can also use the Groups to connect with alumni in specific industries.

Your Own Network

Tell everyone you know what you are interested in investigating and ask if they can refer you to one resource person. Friends, family, and family of friends are all great sources for contacts. You will be surprised at the vast number of contacts that can be generated in this manner. A "contact" is just "someone who knows someone you know."

Professional Associations

For many industries, professional associations are excellent ways to develop a network of individuals who have similar interests to yours. Additionally, many of these professional

associations have student membership rates that make membership easier for you. By joining and participating in the events of the professional associations in your areas of interest, you can generate contacts from membership lists, seminars, and business meetings. This is one of the easiest and fastest ways to meet people in your field. If you need to identify professional groups, look in the Encyclopedia of Associations in the MSE library or browse the Career Center's Best Career Links (www.jhu.edu/careers/links.html).

Other Sources for Contact Names

- Online Professional Networking Sites – Use both general sites, like LinkedIn.com, and targeted sites, like inCircle, to contact people in specific career fields or industries.
- Annual reports – read between the lines and search out names.
- Professional journals – look for authors who have published in your area of interest
- Library – conduct an article search and find out who has been in the news.
- Chambers of Commerce – provide local membership listings or tell you which firms are growing.
- Professors – they have many colleagues and remember graduates.
- Alumni – from your undergraduate and other graduate institutions.

In developing contacts, think broadly. Do you want to move to Atlanta and work in human resources, but we have no alumni in that location and that field? Call Atlanta alumni in other fields, or HR alumni outside of Atlanta. Tell them of your interests, and ask who they know that you can call.

Online Networking

With the emergence of social and professional networking sites, you have greater access to professionals in a wide range of fields. Just like networking face-to-face, it is important to establish a professional image, from the profile you create to the way you interact online. Remember this is not your social network, so don't approach it as you would approach Facebook. Your online profile should only include information relevant to your job and internship search, much like a conversation at a professional networking event. Your major, internship/work experiences, honor societies, and student activities are all relevant. Though sites may allow you to include information about your marital status, religion, country of origin, ethnicity and other personal information, it is best to exclude that information. When you connect with your contacts through an online networking system, your message should be error free. The Career Center recommends that you prepare and check your messages in Word, and then copy them into the site's message system. Read

below for more details on how to connect with your contacts.

How to Connect With Your Contacts

You can initiate a conversation in several ways. To create an immediate link in your introduction, use the name of the person who referred you. It may take multiple attempts to make contact.

Send an Initial, Introductory E-mail

Sending an introductory e-mail allows you to compose your thoughts carefully, and its arrival will not interrupt the individual's work. Because most individuals prefer to talk by phone, an e-mail serves only as a means of introduction, and will rarely yield a written response. Therefore, you must take responsibility for the follow-up. In your e-mail, state "I will call you next week to set up an appointment." Then make the telephone call. Be selective, and keep your list of contacts manageable by spreading out your mailings. The main advantage of sending an e-mail is that the individual you are contacting can learn something about your needs and interests prior to his or her conversation with you. The greatest disadvantage of sending an e-mail is the potential for over-familiarity and informality. Remember that this correspondence should be of a professional nature. If you are unsure about your introductory e-mail, have someone review it before you send it out.

Make a Telephone Call

- Many students have discovered that direct calls are quicker and more productive than e-mails. When you telephone a contact, explain why you are calling, and ask to set up a phone or personal appointment. Have a 30-second introduction ready. For example:
"This is Susan Student. I'm a sophomore at Johns Hopkins, and I found your name on inCircle. I'm calling because I'm interested in Human Resources, and I'd like to talk to you about your experiences in the field. Could we set up a time to talk for about 15 minutes?"
- Alternatively, you can ask to meet in person:
"I'll be in Atlanta during spring break, and I'd love to meet with you then, if you're in town."

Do not ask the person to answer your questions during your initial call, but be prepared to start the conversation immediately if he indicates that he is available now.

The key advantage of the telephone contact is that it saves time for both you and the person you are calling. Most people conduct business via the telephone and find it easier to schedule a call than to schedule a meeting. A face-to-face meeting is the best option because the individual can get a much better feel for who you are, and will remember you

later.

Regardless of the method you choose, you will need to explain your purpose in requesting the interview. Remember, your purpose is to gain information as you investigate a particular field, not necessarily to obtain a job.

Overcoming the “Networking Jitters”

The prospect of asking for help can be daunting. Some students find it awkward to make telephone calls to people they don’t know.

- Keep in mind that people are usually very willing to give advice. Everyone likes being regarded as an expert!
- If you keep in mind that the purpose of your information interview is to provide you with facts and perspectives, you have nothing to lose. You will become more knowledgeable and skillful as you conduct more meetings.
- If you are contacting Hopkins alumni, remember that they want to see you succeed.
- View informational interviewing as relationship building. You are developing advocates for your professional life. Understand that it might take conversations with 20 or 30 individuals to turn up three or four who “mentor” you. Those individuals will be worth their weight in gold.
- Practice with a friend, and try out being on both sides of the fence. You will quickly see how easy it is for you to be helpful to your friend. Extrapolate this lesson to those who are helping you.
- Prepare a 30-second pitch to explain your purpose in calling, and a list of your questions. Practice your pitch until it rolls off your tongue.
- Smile into the phone. Your voice tone, attitude, and self-confidence will improve markedly.
- Practice your story with those contacts you have less interest in, and save the people at the top of your list for last.
- People are generally eager to grant your request. For the most part, people enjoy talking about themselves and like to be helpful.

How to Prepare

- The people with whom you speak will expect you to have a basic knowledge of the field. Research your targeted function or industry before conducting an information interview. Career Beam’s industry profiles provide excellent information and call–prep questions.
- Identify specific questions that are designed to fill in the gaps in your knowledge. Do not ask broad questions such as, “Tell me about finance” or “What’s the best way for me to look for a job in Atlanta?” A better version of the first question might be: “I’m interested in the finance industry, and I’ve been reading about the various aspects of investment banking. I’ve found limited information about the corporate finance area. Can you tell me what the responsibilities are of someone in a corporate finance job?”
- You’re responsible for managing the discussion. As you learn more, you can build on your knowledge and develop more sophisticated questions. Some questions are listed at the end of this handout.
- Be prepared to talk about yourself. Think about your strengths and skills, and review your accomplishments. A good informational interview will be a two–way discussion.
- Be current in the field. Do a library search and read appropriate newspapers and magazines before your meeting.

The Conversation

If you schedule a phone appointment, be sure to call back at the appointed time. Be well prepared with specific questions. The conversation should not last more than 15 minutes unless the individual chooses to extend the conversation. If you schedule an in–person informational interview, treat it as if it were an actual job interview and dress professionally. In either case, you will make a lasting impression by your punctuality, professional conduct, and the content of your discussion.

Demonstrate that you have done your homework and that you know what you’re talking about. Be clear about what you expect to learn from this person. Lastly, always ask if the person can suggest someone else you might contact. The next person may be more receptive if a colleague has referred you.

Sample Questions and Topics

The informational interview is your opportunity to learn what you need to know about particular occupations. Here are some sample questions:

Career Paths:

- Describe your career path. How did each job lead you to your next position?
- How/why did you decide to pursue the career in which you are working?

- What related occupations and industries might I explore? What other fields could you see yourself moving into?
- Where can someone in an entry-level position expect to be in two years? Five years? Ten years?
- How did you first learn about your job vacancy?
- What is the employment outlook in your field? Describe new developments.

Job Content and Responsibilities:

- Describe your responsibilities. How do you spend a typical workday — yesterday, for example? How much time do you spend with people? data? things?
- What do you like most/least about your job? about your field?
- Describe your work environment/corporate culture.
- Describe the organizational structure of your workplace.
- What are the titles and responsibilities of others with whom you work?

Career Preparation:

- What personal abilities are important for success in your field? What personality traits are important? What is the skill set that an employer in your field would look for in a new hire?
- What courses or training have been most helpful to you?
- How can students find summer internships in your field? Are there other means of gaining experience before graduation?
- If you could do anything differently in your career preparation and advancement, what would you change?
- What advice do you have for students who are preparing to enter your field?
- What starting salaries/salary advancements can one expect in this field? (Use care – salary is a delicate subject.)
- Can you recommend sources for more information (specific books, trade publications, professional journals)? To what professional associations do you belong?
- Whom do you know doing similar work at another organization that I might contact?

Some individuals, especially alumni, will be willing to advise you about your concerns. For example, you might ask:

“As you know, my experience is limited to campus activities and summer jobs, and I want to move into marketing. I know I have what it takes; my analytical and project management skills are strong, and I’ve worked effectively as a team leader. What is the best way to communicate this in a compelling way to employers and how can I

effectively translate my background?”

How to Follow-up

- Keep a log of your contacts, with your impressions of the meeting and the names of individuals to whom you were referred.
- Send a thank you letter the same day as your meeting. More than just a courtesy, it's a reminder of you.
- Touch base with your contacts as you progress. Drop them a note occasionally and let them know where you are in your career thinking. You might mention the outcome of your conversations with individuals to whom you were referred. Such contact also keeps your name on their minds. If you are actively searching, this may mean you interact every two weeks. If you aren't actively searching, it may mean an email to your contacts once a semester.
- Remember that the people you meet can serve as job contacts. At a later date, you may want to send a letter expressing interest in employment. If so, you can recall your informational interview and enclose a copy of your resume.

EXAMPLES: PHONE PITCHES

Here is one example of how to make an average telephone introduction better. The improved final pitch below gets across all the relevant information effectively and efficiently.

Scenario: A student is hoping to relocate to the California area and is looking for a summer job in high tech. She is calling a non-alumnus.

Pitch A (average)

Hi, my name is Sara Wilkens and I'm a junior at Johns Hopkins University, majoring in Electrical and Computer Engineering. I'm interested in careers in the high tech field in northern California and I'm in the process of gathering information about the field. Could we set up a time to talk for about 15 minutes or so?

Pitch B (better)

Hi, my name is Sara Wilkens. I'm a junior at Johns Hopkins University, majoring in Electrical and Computer Engineering. I'm interested in relocating back to the West Coast long term. I'm gathering information about the high tech industry in the Bay area and would be interested in talking with you for 15 minutes or so about your experiences. Could we set up a convenient time to talk?

Pitch C (best)

Hi, my name is Sara Wilkens. I'm a junior at Johns Hopkins University, majoring in Electrical and Computer Engineering, and I've worked in computing support for the last two years while attending school. I'm from the West Coast, and I want to relocate back there after graduation next year. Right now I'm collecting information about the high tech industry in the Bay area and I'd love to talk with you about your experience. Could we set up a time to talk while I'm home on spring break?

EXAMPLES: PERSONAL STATEMENTS

1. Who I am
2. What I'm good at
3. What I want

Example 1 (15 seconds):

At a Career Fair, talking to employers about advertising and public relations:

"Hi, I'm Suzanne Student. Nice to meet you."

(Smile, shake hands)

"I'm a Senior English major here at Johns Hopkins. I have a strong background in promotional writing and editing – I've done several internships as a reporter and editor for newspapers and arts groups, and I'm currently the Editor-in-Chief of the school newspaper. What I'm interested in is advertising, public relations and other positions where I could do promotion work. Could you tell me about your opportunities?"

Example 2 (45 seconds):

To an alumnus/a, on the phone seeking advice about entering the field:

"Hi, Ms. Smith, this is Suzanne Student. I'm a senior at Hopkins and I got your name from the Alumni Career Network. Thanks for taking a few minutes to talk with me." "I have a background in promotional writing and editing – I've interned as a reporter for a regional newspaper, I spent a summer doing promotion work for a non-profit arts group, I've been writing for the Hopkins News-Letter for three years, and this year I'm Editor-in-Chief. My interest is in advertising, public relations, or other positions where I could do promotion

work and writing. My purpose in calling you is to get your advice about career opportunities and how to break into the field. May I ask you some questions about what you do and how you got your start in the _____ field?"

Example 3 (90 seconds):

In an interview, when the employer opens with "So, why don't you tell me about yourself?"

"I came to Hopkins as an English major four years ago – my passion in high school was writing, and I've pursued as many opportunities to write in college as I possibly could. I've had three outstanding internships, and they were all very different from one another – one as a news reporter for a regional paper, one as a journalist for a non-profit arts group, and one with a public relations firm. I've also written for the school paper for three years, and this year I'm Editor-in-Chief.

If I had to sum up what I'm all about, I'd say two things: first, that my greatest passion is writing; and second, that I'm a results-oriented person – you can see from my resume that when I take something on, I like to work hard and excel. I'm proud of the awards I've received in college, and I'm anxious to get out there and start working and contributing.

What attracted me to this position was, of course, the fact that the job is in public relations and promotion and I hope I could not only use my writing talents, but also learn a lot more about the public relations field. I'm also attracted by the growth of your company over the last few years, and the entrepreneurial style you project. From what I've read, the people who work there are achievers, and it sounds like it would be an exciting and fast-paced place to work."