

Building a Network To Guide Your Search

A. What is Networking?

Networking is *building relationships* with a group of contacts who can guide and assist you in your career search. It is not about calling people and asking for a job -- it is about getting the information and guidance you need to get the job you want. Networking is a refined skill learned through experience that takes time and effort. Effective networking can help you enormously in your career search.

The people within your network can help you in the following ways:

- a. Educating you on a career, company and industry. It is important to understand industry trends, the competitive landscape, lingo used within the industry and current events. In addition, you need to understand what positions exist within a company that would be of interest to you.
- b. Preparing you for your search and interviewing process. Those who work within the industry you are pursuing are great resources for feedback on your resume, interview tips and guidance on your strategy.
- c. Building a list of potential companies and contacts. You should use every contact as an opportunity to learn the name of another company that may be of interest to you and to gain the name of at least one additional contact with whom you could speak.
- d. Guiding you to open positions. Frequently, positions are open inside a company before they are posted on a website. By knowing a few ‘insiders’, you can learn about opportunities early and potentially have an ambassador who can recommend you to the hiring manager.

B. Who Needs to Network?

Everyone. Even if you think you will get a job through on-campus job interviews, you still need to build a network. First, it will help educate you on the career you are seeking and can provide valuable feedback on your resume and interviewing strategy. Second, it expands your pool of opportunities – typically a job search requires multiple approaches and it may also reveal options that you didn’t know existed before.

C. How Networking Works:

Building your network takes significant time: it takes time to find people who can assist you with your specific career path and it takes time to build a relationship.

When building a network, the key to remember is that you are creating and nurturing a relationship. You cannot just start asking for a job. If you ask for a job immediately, you will get no response since others won’t recommend you for a position if they don’t know anything about you. But people have a natural tendency to want to help, guide and assist others. So your best strategy is to use a two-phased approach:

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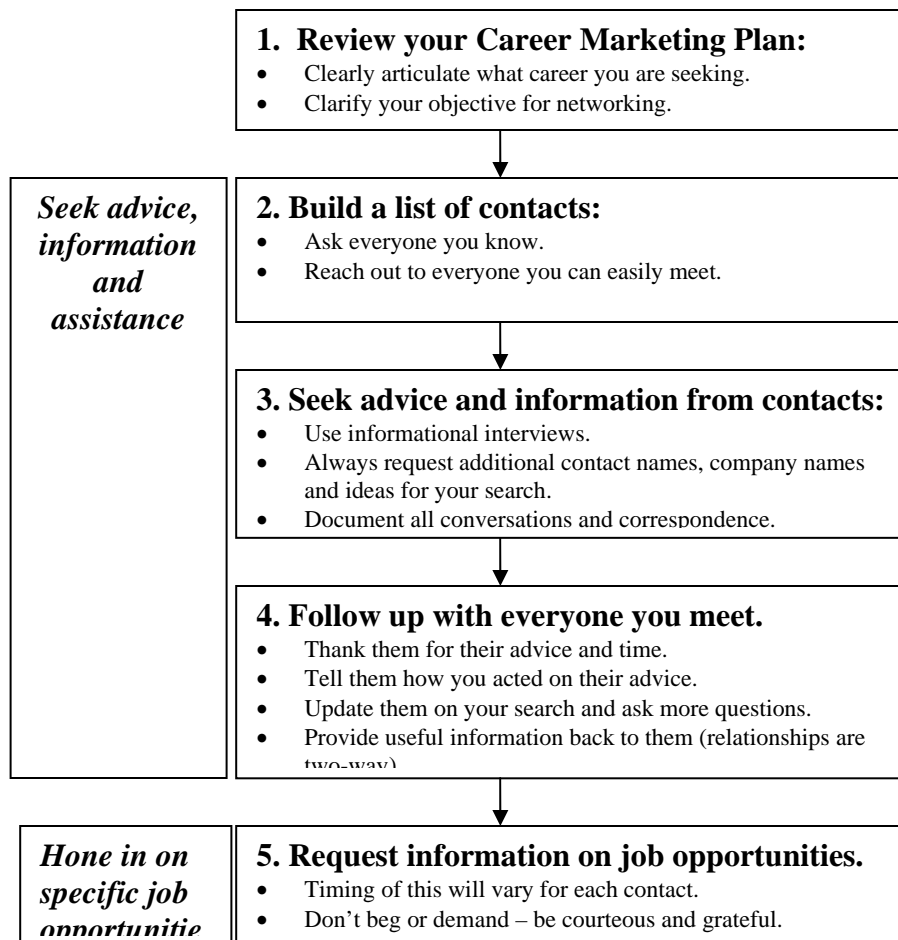
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1. Seek advice, information and assistance. You will build trust and gain support of others during this phase, which is necessary before asking someone to help you find a job.
2. Hone in on specific job opportunities. Once you have built a relationship with someone, you can then contact them with more specific questions regarding job opportunities.

Following is the general flow of the networking / relationship building process. Each individual will find different approaches that work best for them so this is to be used as a guideline.



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1. Review your Search Plan:

- Before starting any type of networking activity, you need to review your search plan to make sure you have clarity on why you are networking. This will help you come across as clear and focused when speaking to other professionals and will help determine what kind of people you seek out. First, clearly articulate what type of career you are seeking. Second, clarify your objectives for networking. Depending on where you are in the job search process, this may be very broad or very narrow and it will evolve as you continue to network.

Here are some examples:

<u>Career Objective:</u>	<u>Networking Objective:</u>
Marketing in general	Learn about differences between product and services marketing.
Product management in hi-tech industry on West Coast.	Meet people who can provide guidance on my search and eventually lead me to open job opportunities.
Product management at Microsoft.	Meet hiring managers in marketing at Microsoft.

2. Build a list of contacts:

A contact doesn't have to be someone who works directly in the area you are seeking. Contacts are people who can provide advice and potentially lead you to someone else. They can work in related industries, companies or functions; in a company you are seeking but not the function you are targeting; or simply in the geographic area you are targeting. To get started:

- Reach out to everyone you know: One way to do this is to write an email summarizing the career you are seeking, the types of companies that interest you and any geographic preferences. Send it to everyone you know, asking them if they know anyone who may be able to provide advice or assistance in your search. Don't leave people off the list just because you don't think they know anyone – you may be surprised to learn that your cousin's neighbor's brother works at Disney, your dream company.
- Reach out to people you can easily meet (see ideas below), requesting the same information as above.

Here are examples of potential contacts for someone seeking a Supply Chain Management position at Motorola in the Chicago suburbs:

- Friend of a friend who works for a supplier to Motorola.
- Finance manager at Motorola who was your brother-in-law's college roommate.
- Alum from your undergrad school who retired from a long career in Chicago.
- Recent Fisher alum that works in consulting and lives in Chicago.

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3. Seek advice and information from your contacts:

- Your initial contact with someone should be purely informational. You should introduce yourself, indicate how you received their name and explain why you are contacting them (seeking advice / information on your career search). You may contact them via telephone or email, whichever is more comfortable for you. An “informational interview” request is an excellent strategy for this phase. See below for tips on informational interviews.
- Always kindly request additional contacts and additional ideas for your search.
- Document all conversations and retain all correspondence. Over time, it will be difficult to remember what was discussed when. You may also want to assess how useful the person may be in identifying open jobs in the future.

4. Follow up with everyone you meet:

- When building a relationship, you need to maintain contact and even return the favor by providing helpful information to them. You should always thank them for their time and advice, tell them how you acted on their guidance (including how you followed up with contacts they provided), ask additional questions and keep them apprised of your search.
You can also send them information you’ve seen on their business, industry or competition (i.e. “I saw your competitor’s ad in the airport and thought it was a great strategy because...”), interesting news from campus if they are an alum, information they may find useful (i.e. “since you are going to San Diego, I wanted to give you the name of this great hotel...”), etc.
- Make sure you contact every referral you receive. Many times, a contact will ask the referral if they heard from you.

5. Request information on specific job opportunities:

- You should only reach out to those with whom you have nurtured a relationship and should focus on those who are closest to the hiring process. Remember that someone won’t recommend you for a job if they don’t know you, so the earlier steps are critical.

D. Making Contacts:

You may not know anyone personally who has the career you want. But you probably know someone or can easily meet someone who can eventually lead you there. Here are some ways to help you get started building a network:

People you know:

- Friends, family, former colleagues, neighbors. Everyone you know can lead to a potential contact. Remember not to leave people off your list just because you don’t think they know anyone.
- Fellow students. Your fellow students are a great resource (both first and second-year classes) since most have worked professionally before attending graduate school and they come from a variety of geographies and undergrad institutions.

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- c. Career Management. The career management consultants can assist you in finding contacts for companies you are seeking, including companies that don't actively recruit at Fisher.
- d. Professors. Your professors have contacts at a variety of organizations so be sure to include them in your networking.
- e. Fellow members of clubs and organizations. Reach out to members of any organizations you belong to including: volunteer group, professional association, campus club, running group, book club, church, etc. You may even want to consider joining a group as a means of meeting more people.

People you can easily meet:

- f. Fisher Alumni. The Fisher Alumni database has an *Ask an Alum* resource that allows you to connect with alumni who work in companies or positions you may be interested in. It can be found at <http://www.fisheralumni.org> or by clicking on Alumni and Friends from the main page of the Fisher website.
- g. Alumni from Your Undergrad Institution. Leverage the alumni database from your undergraduate institution. Most universities have an online database that is easily accessible.
- h. FisherConnect Contacts. FisherConnect has contact names for all companies who recruit at Fisher or have posted a position on the system. Even if a company doesn't recruit for the particular position you are seeking, the contacts may be able to direct you to the right internal resource for your area of interest.
- i. Professional Recruiters. Recruiters can be helpful if used the right way. They can provide feedback on your resume and names of companies who may be interested in your background. Recruiters work mainly with experienced hires so they may not be able to connect you directly to a position directly out of school. But remember that they are professional networkers so they can be a great resource later in your career and may be even more helpful if you can provide contacts to help them in their active searches.
- j. Online career networking sites. Several of these exist ranging from the broad networking site LinkedIn.com to more specific groups such as the Chinese Professional Network (http://www.cpnhome.com/about_us/).

You should leverage and build relationships with those above to meet others who can guide you in your career search.

E. How to Conduct an Informational Interview

Informational interviewing is a method of career exploration that allows you to talk with people who may be able to guide and assist you in your search. They may already be in the industry and function you have targeted, or may work in a related industry or function. By obtaining informational interviews, you have gained access to the "inside information" regarding career paths, alternate careers that will use your skills, and people to contact who may be looking for an employee like you.

Making Contact for an Informational Interview:

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- You may contact someone via telephone or email, whichever is more comfortable for you. You could even use a combination of the two: use email to introduce yourself and arrange a time to talk on the phone. Do not attach a resume in your initial introductory email.
- If calling, ask if he/she is free to talk at the moment (he/she may be in the middle of a meeting, another call, etc.). If not free, ask for a convenient time to call back or schedule a telephone appointment.
- State how you got his/her name (who referred you).
- Provide a quick summary of your background so they know a bit about you.
- State reason for contact, which is to gather information and guidance on your career search (“I have decided to go into X field and would like your feedback on my resume/career goals/job search techniques, etc.”). Keep it as conversational as possible. Don’t ask for an “informational interview” – just describe what you would like to discuss.
- Ask if you could arrange a time to talk in more depth. Always specify the length of time you want to talk (should be kept to 20-30 minutes max). Some people may be willing to talk right away so always be prepared. If someone isn’t willing to talk now or in the future, ask for the name of another person who could help you (a colleague, friend, former classmate, former co-worker).
- Send a thank you note to every contact, whether the information was of use to you or not.

Conducting an Informational Interview:

Always start off by thanking them for their time, restating the objective of the discussion and the time allotment and reviewing your background so it’s fresh in their minds. A good way to get the conversation going is to ask them about themselves (tell me what you do at XYZ, Inc., did you come to XYZ, Inc. right after Fisher?).

Following are some questions that you could ask. Your specific questions will depend on your networking objective.

Getting to know them.

- Why did you choose your career in Finance?
- Why did you decide to work for XYZ, Inc.?
- Describe your career path.
- What are you responsible for at XYZ, Inc.?

Learning about the company.

- What makes XYZ, Inc. unique?
- What does XYZ, Inc. do well? What do your competitors do well (name them if you can – you shouldn’t have to ask who their competitors are if you’ve done your homework).
- What are some of the challenges XYZ, Inc. faces? Are these common across the industry?
- How does your group interact with other groups (specify “groups” – good question if you are speaking to someone in sales but are pursuing a position in finance).

Learning about a field/job.

- What are the key responsibilities for a “finance manager” at XYZ, Inc.?
- What is the most challenging part of the job?

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- What attributes do you think are essential to success as a “finance manager”?
- What qualifications / attributes do you look for in hiring a “finance manager”?

Feedback on your Career Search.

- Could you provide some feedback on my resume? (You may want to email your resume in advance and ask if they could provide feedback during your discussion). What attributes should I emphasize more? Anything I could do better?
- Are there other positions / career paths to consider based on my background and interests?
- Do you have ideas of other companies or contacts names I could reach out to? (Be sure to share your list of target companies). ALWAYS ASK THIS QUESTION.

Remember to:

- Confirm your meeting a day or so before.
- If meeting via phone, call on time. If meeting in person, arrive early and dress professionally.
- Prepare questions beforehand. But be conversational – don’t just read questions from a list.
- Listen carefully and attentively and take good notes.
- Respect their time by sticking to an agreed-to timeframe.
- Follow up with a thank-you note.

F. Goal Setting

A crucial step while networking is the development of specific goals. This keeps you on track and motivated. It also allows you to check your progress as your job search continues over time. Your goals should lay out specific steps that will eventually lead you to your ultimate goal of getting a job. It is important to break the process down into achievable steps so you aren’t overwhelmed by the larger objective.

Sample goals:

- Call 5 people I’ve never met this week.
- Meet 3 second-year students and learn about their background.
- Search my undergrad alumni database for 10 new contacts.
- Identify 4 companies and research the business and potential job opportunities.

Every few weeks, you should sit back and evaluate your goals: What goals have you achieved? What approaches are working for you? What have you learned? Where are you falling short? Why do you think this is happening?

Make sure you have support while networking. Career Management consultants are always available to provide guidance and support. Meeting with others who are also networking is also helpful. You can swap notes, share stories, trade contacts and help keep each other motivated.

G. Networking Tips

Here are some tips to keep you focused and motivated throughout the networking process. Remember that many others have done this before and their learning can be incredibly helpful.

- Start early. It takes time to build relationships and is much easier to talk to people when you aren’t desperately seeking a job.

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- Know yourself. Being able to clearly articulate who you are and the value you can bring to an organization will make people much more interested in talking to you.
- Focus on your future. The more you know about what you want, the easier it will be to find.
- Communicate professionally at all times. Learn as much as you can about corporate and industry language. Pretend like you are calling from your office, not your kitchen table. Be sure emails are succinct, free of typos, grammatically correct and have effective subject lines.
- Show respect and appreciation. Respect others' time through preparation and succinct communication. Express gratitude for their advice and time. This is true for everyone you interact with -- friends, fellow students, professors, etc. -- not just corporate contacts.
- Be persistent and diligent. Networking requires constant follow-through and follow-up. It's ok to call someone again when they haven't returned your call but never act exasperated. Remain friendly and grateful at all times.
- Celebrate small wins. Setting and achieving small goals will help you get down the long road. Find other people who can keep you energized and help you maintain a positive attitude.
- Help others. The foundation of networking is building relationships and relationships are two-way. Constantly seek opportunities to help others as they will likely help you in return.
- Remember you are President of Your Career. Your career search is your responsibility and a top priority in your life. But the people you are contacting have other priorities and may not be as responsive as you would like. You need to remain in control and accountable for the outcome of your search. If things aren't going the way you planned, you need to build contingency plans, try different approaches and always remain focused on your goal.

For more information, including sample networking correspondence and informational interview questions, please see the career search resources webpage: <http://fisher.osu.edu/offices/career-management/graduate-students/career-resources/>.

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