

## TIPS ON PROFESSIONAL NETWORKING



Networking is the process of discovering and utilizing connections between people. Professional and social networks can direct interns to people who can provide leads, support and advice about their careers and the job market. The relationships established during this internship can help in finding future job opportunities, since the majority of jobs are never advertised. Petrowski (2010) conducted a survey regarding the value of networking. The findings indicate that those that network benefit from professional development, opportunities, and access to current knowledge and research. A successful

networking structure provides opportunities to lead, create, and shape the profession.<sup>1</sup> For this reason; networking needs to be an integral part of an intern's future job search. The benefits of networking include learning more about career options, increased visibility within their field, propelling professional development, finding suitable mentors, increasing chances of promotion, and perhaps finding their next job. Though initially, interns may feel uncomfortable about the notion of networking, it is a skill that can be learned and mastered by following the practical guidelines below.

To initiate networking, interns should begin with people they are familiar with, such as family, friends, faculty, students, community members, and alumni. Suggest they talk to them about what they want to do. They should ask whether these people know of any companies or organizations doing the types of things that are of interest to the intern. Do they know of anyone in a related area of work or study who the intern might talk to? Networking etiquette requires that the intern not ask for a job. The focus of networking is to meet many people in their field of choice, and find out more about the jobs they do.

Networking provides interns first-hand information to assist in the determination as to the type of business and work that they really want to do. The art of informational interviewing is in knowing how to balance the ultimate agenda (to locate a job) with the unique opportunity to learn first-hand about the demands of the field. The networker should always approach the experience as asking for advice rather looking for work. They should be courteous and professional at all times; never abusing the privilege by asking for a job, but executing their informational interviews skillfully so that a job may follow.

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<sup>1</sup> Petrowski, M. (2010). Colleagues. Community. Collaboration. *College & Research Libraries News*, 71(7)

Studies provide solid proof regarding the benefits of networking. In an article by Driscoll, John Bennett, director of the Master of Science and executive coaching and assistant professor of behavioral science at the McColl School of Business at Queens University of Charlotte, indicates that “between 60-80% of jobs are found through personal relationships. Learning to work in networks and in relationships in a way that is meaningful, that has impact and that conserves both our interest and the interest of the people we’re connected to, certainly is only going to add value to us as employees”.<sup>2</sup>

Networking can take place anywhere. A great first place to start is within the walls of the internships. Talk to people in host organization. Utilize the Alumni Associations, which can help identify graduates from the university who are working in the intern’s areas of interest. Be sure to look for special events that are of interest, and stay connected after the internship is complete.

Interns are encouraged to continue networking long after the internship. These can include professional associations, conferences, local or regional career fairs and events. Looking into local community groups can also assist in meeting people. Utilizing on-line professional networking sites like LinkedIn or social networking sites like Facebook can be helpful. Don’t forget to look into joining newsgroups and clubs so connections to others with similar interests can be made.

Beyond the aforementioned benefits, networking provides the advantage of interviewing skills development. Simply talking to people about interests, background and careers that are of interest will help prepare for a more formal interview process.

Here are some helpful tips for networking:

- Keep track of networking meetings and be proactive with follow-up. Remind interns to keep a list of contacts and update it frequently with the names of any new leads.
- In a group setting, circulate and meet people, but do not try to talk to everyone. It is better to have a few meaningful conversations than 50 hasty introductions. At a reception, be sure to wear a nametag and collect or exchange business cards and later contact the people you meet. Send a thank-you note or email if appropriate.
- Be Dedicated to Networking: Most important, networking should be on-going. Stay in touch with contacts over the long haul - not just when something is needed. Make networking part of a long-term career plan.

It is important to know what networking is, as well as what it is not. Networking is not about “using” people. Many people are afraid of the “networking” label because they assume it means they will be using someone. This is not the case at all. Networking is used to build relationships, where connections are being made within a group or community where there are commonly held interests. For example, if a student is graduating with a degree in Aeronautical Engineering and has a specific interest in model engineering, building and testing scale models of the aeronautical equipment, meeting people who currently work in the aeronautics industry and learning more about types of jobs and work conducted within that industry would be of interest to both the student and the people they are speaking with.

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<sup>2</sup> Driscoll, Emily. (2011). It’s All About Who You Know: Networking to Get a Job. Fox Business. Retrieved from <http://www.foxbusiness.com/personal-finance/2011/04/25/know-networking-job/>.

Networking is clearly a valuable tool that can truly help enhance careers, as well as to have opportunities to learn and enhance a chosen field. HIP has provided a list of helpful questions to utilize during networking sessions. See below:

### **Helpful Questions for Networking and Informational Interviews**

1. Could you describe a typical workday for me?
2. What skills are required in your position on a day-to-day basis?
3. What parts of your job do you find most challenging?
4. Despite these challenges, what motivates you to remain? What do you find most enjoyable?
5. Which time of the year are the toughest in your job?
6. What developments on the horizon could affect future opportunities?
7. This industry has changed dramatically in the past five years. What have you seen from inside your company?
8. Why do people leave this field or company?
9. Who are the most important people in the industry today?
10. Which companies have the best track record for promoting women and minorities?
11. What developments on the horizon could affect future opportunities?
12. What would my earning potential be if I entered this field?
13. How did you get your job?
14. If you could start all over again, would you change your career path in any way? Why?
15. How long does it take for career advancement to management?
16. What is the background of most senior-level executives?
17. What educational preparation would you recommend for someone who wants to advance in this field?
18. Can you recommend any courses I should take before proceeding with my job search?
19. What do you know now that you wish you knew at my age?
20. What qualifications do you seek in a new hire?
21. Which of my skills are strong compared to other job hunters in this field?
22. What do you think of the experience I've had so far? For what types of positions would it qualify me?
23. What do you think of my resume? How do you suggest I change it?
24. What companies might be interested in hiring someone with my background?
25. Considering my background, how well do you think I would fit into this company and/or profession?
26. How does your company compare with others?
27. Would the work involve any lifestyle changes, such as frequent travel or late-night business entertaining?
28. What personal attributes would you say are essential for success in your field?

29. Taking into account my skills, education, and experience, what other career paths would you suggest I explore before making a final decision?
30. Where can I get up-to-date information on salaries, employers, and industry issues?
31. What professional journals and organizations should I be aware of?
32. Is there anything else you think I need to know?
33. Who else would you recommend I speak with? When I call, may I use your name?
34. How did you break into the field?
35. What professional associations should I join?
36. What professional publications should I read?
37. What are some of the problems and issues your organization faces?
38. What are the most necessary skills for these types of jobs?
39. What are the trends affecting your business?
40. How is the hiring done? (direct ads, search firms, contacts, and friends?)
41. Is there formal or on-the-job training?
42. How should I prepare for job interviews in this field?
43. What's a typical career path for someone coming in at my level?
44. What are some of the obstacles I would face in this job?
45. Whom would you suggest I talk to next? (Be sure to keep a list and ask if he/she could provide an introduction or if you could use his/her name when making contact.)
46. Can I keep in touch with you and let you know my progress?