

Networking

WHAT IS NETWORKING?

Networking is meeting people, getting to know them, allowing them to get to know you, and hopefully building lasting connections that may (or may not) result in professional or developmental opportunities. Networking is extremely important in developing professional contacts and creating internship and job leads - well over three-quarters of all jobs and internships are obtained through networking. Most importantly, networking is how successful people get the opportunities they want.

WHY NETWORK:

Meeting professionals in your field of interest will allow you to hear first-hand information about what that career is like. Some reasons to network include:

- Explore careers
- Conduct research on an industry or organization
- Prepare for an interview
- Learn about potential opportunities (navigate the “hidden” job market!)
- Gather information on an unfamiliar city

WHO TO INCLUDE IN YOUR NETWORK

Your network consists of all the people you know and everyone you have yet to meet; anyone who might be able to offer advice, information, or referrals to additional contacts, share specific job openings, introduce you to people with hiring power, and/or serve as a mentor.

- Classmates
- Coaches
- Parents/relatives (yours and those of classmates)
- Participants in career panels and guest speakers (attend these events!!!)
- Professors/Advisors/Staff
- Current and former employers
- St. Olaf Alumni (use the alumni directory, Linked In to find)
- Professional association members

WHERE TO NETWORK

You will run into people in a variety of settings, from where you volunteer or attend religious services to job and internship fairs right here on campus. The point is to get out and mingle in groups where you are most likely to encounter professionals who can help. This is called ‘planned happenstance.’

While in-person networking is most effective, it is often necessary to initiate a connection in another way (phone, email) in order to arrange an in-person meeting. Send an email first. Do **not** include your resume if you are contacting a professional for the first time and have had no previous correspondence with or introduction to her/him. Say in your email that you will follow-up and do so within two weeks days of when you originally send your message.

Online networking is incredibly popular due to social networking sites like [LinkedIn](#). If you do not yet have a profile on LinkedIn, consider creating one! LinkedIn provides a very helpful Grad Guide, which walks you through everything from conducting company research to building your professional network, all using LinkedIn resources.

GENERAL TIPS

- Networking is an easy target for procrastination. Consider setting goals for yourself and hold yourself accountable. e.g. “I will send out 5 networking emails and have 1 call per week.”
- Start early. Networking will help you the most if you build relationships over time through multiple conversations. You need to build credibility and seriousness with whom you are connecting because they are then more likely to think of you when opportunities cross their desk AND to advocate for you as needed.
- Take advantage of easy opportunities to meet people and network. Use Piper Center and other campus events to practice networking in a “safe space”.
- Networking can be draining. Be sure to schedule quiet “recharge” time so you are less likely to avoid networking

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TOP TEN THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT NETWORKING ETIQUETTE

1. Know your purpose: You waste your contacts' time when you do not know what you want to do, where you want to work, skills you want to use, etc. If you are just beginning to explore, do some initial career research on your own using Piper Center resources. Then do some informational interviews to gather more information. Try to have a good sense of general areas of interest and skills. The more specific you can be, the more helpful your contacts can be!

2. Do your homework: Do not ask your contacts questions that could easily be answered by doing basic research online or in a career library. You will impress your contacts by knowing about your field of interest, your contacts' organizations, etc. Also, use professional association's websites and other sources to remain up to date on trends and industry news.

3. Don't act desperate or aggressive: Contacts are much more willing to help and refer someone who is confident and capable. Stay positive and upbeat. Smile, maintain eye contact, have fun! Similarly, try not to be pushy; be sensitive to just how much a contact is willing or able to do for you. In a majority of cases, you should **not** ask for a job or internship.

4. Listen: Do not monopolize the conversation, and do not rush through it. When you write your thank you message, include something you learned from the conversation that will show you listened.

5. Respect your contacts' time: Do not drop in uninvited, and if you call always ask if it is a good time to talk. Make the conversation brief and to the point. Do not share your life story, and remain aware of time zones. With an initial conversation, be patient with making your pitch. You may need to start with more casual conversation, and listen for the right cues to "market yourself."

6. Ask for help in small doses: Do not burden your contact right off the bat with requests for additional contacts, job advice, etc. Ask more questions than favors. If offered referrals to additional contacts, it is important to follow-up right away! Doing so will demonstrate professionalism and seriousness. Be sure you have completed all you were asked to do by a contact before you contact them again for additional assistance.

7. Be careful with use of the word *networking*: Unless you are attending an event earmarked for the purpose, it is best to consider what you are doing as making connections, building relationships, and seeking advice. No need to label it in conversations with contacts!

8. Never criticize anything or anyone: You are making a first impression. If you are seen as negative and gossipy, that impression will stick! You never know who they know, or how they will react to a comment about their role or organization. Keep your conversation positive.

9. Remember that it's a two-way street: Reciprocity is the most important aspect of networking etiquette. Try to learn ways that you can help your contacts and offer that help whenever possible. This is especially difficult for college-age students who may not feel they have much to give. But, even offering your own connections or your talents in some regard could be enough to let your contact know that you are not just a "taker."

10. Get permission and follow up: *Always* send a thank you note after meeting with a contact and follow-up promptly on referrals and advice! However, before using any contact's name to approach another contact, make sure you have permission. Tell prospective contacts how you got their information. Honor any requests for confidentiality. Do not attribute information to a contact or other source without reflecting on whether the disclosure will compromise the person.