NETWORKING YOUR WAY TO THE CAREER YOU WANT

To paraphrase Merriam-Webster, networking is the development and fostering of personal relationships for employment or business. Networking permits you to:

- Gain advice about a career field, an industry, or an organization
- Connect with more people who are doing the things you want to do
- Tell people about you
- Learn about possible job opportunities (not necessarily immediately)
- Develop mutually beneficial relationships with other professionals

Skillful networking is a planned, structured, and time-consuming campaign that usually starts with family, friends, and acquaintances, but rapidly moves onto conversations or meetings with people you don’t know, who refer you to still more people you don’t know. Think of networking as a long-term investment in your career.

Where to Build Your Network

WHOM DO YOU ALREADY KNOW?

Is there someone among your family, friends, friends-of-family, neighbors, faculty, and former employers that works in an industry that interests you? You’ll be surprised how word-of-mouth can help. Don’t forget your current friends, roommates and teammates – in a few years they’ll be your colleagues.

UNIVERSITY SPONSORED EVENTS

Keep abreast of campus events where you can network with employers and/or alumni who are working in your field. Events such as Career Fairs, Employer Information Sessions, and Resume Clinics (where employers critique students’ resumes) will give you wonderful opportunities to expand your network.

USE YOUR ALUMNI NETWORK

Alumni “Advisors” have made themselves available for “Career Conversations”, resume critiques and mock interviews through the UMD Alumni Advisor Network. Sign up with your UMD email at www.umd.evisors.com. When using the Alumni Advisor Network, do keep the following in mind:

- Contact just one advisor at a time, so that you can better manage your connections. Respond to emails from an Advisor within three days. You will have up to two opportunities to speak with an Advisor each month.
- The network is for seeking advice and building professional relationships with alumni. As such, it is not appropriate to ask an Advisor directly for a job or HR contact.
- You may use eVisors for free as an advisee while you are a UMD student and for one year after graduation. After that, you must be a member of the Alumni Association for continued access.

LINKEDIN

This valuable tool is critical in your job search since over 300 million people in over 200 countries use LinkedIn as a professional networking site. It is a more acceptable way to connect with people in the professional setting than using Facebook or other social media platforms. Be thorough with your account since members with complete profiles are 40x more likely to receive opportunities through LinkedIn.
Need help creating your LinkedIn account and profile? Register at [http://ter.ps/engrworkshop](http://ter.ps/engrworkshop) to attend a hands-on LinkedIn 101 workshop. Already have a profile? Ask us to give you feedback next time you come in for a resume critique.

**Small Talk/Chance Meetings**

Never underestimate the power of “chance!” Perhaps one weekend your roommate’s cousin comes for a visit and you find out that she is a mechanical engineer working at a company that interests you. Take that “chance” opportunity to talk to this person and learn more about what her experience is like, what tips she has for applying to work with her company, or other information/advice. If it is difficult or inappropriate to dive into a conversation right then, ask the person if he/she would be willing to talk to you in more detail at a different time.

**Professional Associations/Meetings**

There are thousands of professional associations – student chapters, local, national, and many international. The advantage of being part of a professional association is two-fold. You can add it to your resume, which may help people see you as seriously committed to your field. But, it also enables you to attend meetings with other people who share similar professional interests. Often, they may know someone who is desperately in need of someone just like you. See the list of societies on our web page for a list of web sites.

**How Do I Network?**

**Before you reach out to a new contact:**

- **Know yourself:** skills, interests, qualifications.
- **Know basic information** about a career (through books, Internet, classes).
- **Set SMART goals** (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timed) for yourself and your job search.
- **Determine what you want** from the people you contact. Advice? Information about their organization? Other contacts?
- **Start slow:** To gain confidence, approach familiar people and less desired organizations first. But, don’t be afraid to initiate contact with people you don’t know.

**When you know who you might talk to at an event:**

- **Practice what you want to say**, even record yourself. Have a script ready for voicemail and another for actually speaking to the person.
- **Listen to what the other person is saying.** If you don’t understand something, don’t be afraid to ask – don’t guess! Listening may also give you a chance to help out the other person – networking goes both ways.
- **How you speak is just as important as what you say:**
  - Be interesting & enthusiastic!! SMILE!
  - Be aware of how quickly or slowly you are speaking
  - Watch for fillers/slang (um, like, cool, ya know…)

**What if I would like to continue the conversation?**

- **Request an informational interview.** See our handout on Informational Interviewing for tips on how to initiate a meeting, what to ask, etc.

**Once you’ve become more comfortable with networking:**

- **Network anywhere/everywhere you go:** Think of everyone you meet as a networking contact, and practice your skills all the time.
- **Keep a well-documented record of contacts.**
- **Be patient and persistent:** things may take a while to develop, and you will sometimes hear, “No”.
- **Be thankful!** Sending a thank-you note to a contact is always a good practice.
Always follow up! After meeting new people it’s important to follow up with short communications: email, a phone call, a visit (see “Maintaining the Contact” on the next page for more information). Take notes during and after the conversation. This will assist you in writing good follow-up letters and for your next contact with that person.

Networking Follow-Up

It is important to understand that your work is not done once you’ve finished speaking with a new professional contact – it has just begun! Rather than waiting to be contacted, make yourself stand out by being proactive. An effective way to do this is to write a thank-you letter. The letter should be written and sent within 24 hours of your meeting the recruiter.

Tips for effective, respectful follow up:

- When writing the letter (email), refer to the date and location of the fair, and mention any unique or highly specific points discussed so the employer will remember you.
- Any important information discussed should be restated and emphasized in your letter.
- Reiterate your qualifications and include any information you neglected to mention.
- Proofread your letter carefully. There should be no errors (misspellings or typos). Consider having it reviewed by a staff member at Engineering Co-op and Career Services Office.
- Include a copy of your resume.

Maintaining the Contact

There are many ways you can keep in touch with networking contacts that you make. For instance, you can:

- Advise a contact of the results of a referral
- Send a short note about how the discussion helped you in a given situation
- Seek out your contacts at professional meetings or conferences
- Invite your contact to speak or participate in a campus event
- Let a contact know when you get a job

Networking Follow-Up E-mail Template

Subject: University of Maryland Career Fair, September 17, 2015
Dear Mr./Ms.______________:
Thank the employer for taking the time to meet with you at the Career Fair. Mention the name and location of the Career Fair and the date.
Mention something specific you discussed at the Career Fair (for example, an internship program you discussed or a new company project the recruiter mentioned that interested you).
Confirm your interest in the company and reiterate how your skills and qualifications match what the company is seeking.
State that you’ve enclosed your resume. Give your phone number and mention that you look forward to hearing from the employer and learning more about possible opportunities (or a specific opportunity you discussed) with the company. Thank the recruiter for their time and consideration.
Sincerely,
Your name