

FGSR Professional Development Career Development Module



Networking

Networking is about building relationships and is one of the most effective ways to tap into the hidden job market. Networking is a skill that you can learn. According to CaPS' most recent employment survey of University of Alberta graduates, 42.7% of respondents found out about the job they held six months after graduating from personal contacts.

What is networking?

"Networking is a process of establishing links between people with the intent to promote communication for mutual benefit." Science Careers, February 18, 2005.

Networking is a two-way relationship and therefore it is important for you to think about what you can offer to your contacts as well. Effective networking takes time, energy, organization and requires creating a dialogue. Networking, particularly with people in your field(s) of interest, can also help you learn about career options within the field and which ones you want to pursue. Activity #1 will help you develop a contact list for networking purposes.

Tips

- Give your time and expertise freely to others when asked. It is better to give before you receive. Give your help without expecting in return.
- Use your contacts wisely. Let your contacts know you are looking for employment without specifically asking them to find you a job.
- It is important to keep in regular contact with people on your network list. This means you will need to invest time to developing and maintaining contact with people who can help you with your work search.
- Start now! It is never too early to begin connecting with people who can be part of your network. The best time to build your network is before you need it. As a student you have access to people on campus, as well as an opportunity to contact professionals in your field.
- Set up a time to meet and ask your contacts about strategies on how to find meaningful work and tips about possible job leads. Remember, you are not asking for a job outright but to learn from people who have successfully entered the workplace in their preferred career.
- Ask your contacts if there is convenient time for you to meet with them. Commit to taking up no more than thirty minutes of their time; your contacts will appreciate that you recognize and respect how busy they are.
- Always prepare for your meetings by thinking of possible questions to ask. For example, you can ask your contacts how they got started in this field. What do they like most about their current employment? What are some challenges in their type of work? What current trends do they see happening in the field?
- Act and dress professionally; you want to make a good impression.
- Ask your contacts if they would like a copy of your resume. Suggest that your resume can be shared with others who may be hiring.
- Finish the networking meetings by asking if your contact can recommend any one else that you should talk to about getting started in this field or finding employment, for example, the Human Resource Consultant or Manager.

- Acknowledge the support that you receive by following up with a thank-you note or e-mail message.
- Design and print up business cards containing your name and contact information. You never know when they may come in handy. Also, start collecting business cards from the people you meet.
- Remember in most cases students can attend conferences at a reduced rate. Aside from the academic and research benefits, conferences are an excellent venue for networking.
- Work to continuously build your network and whenever possible provide information and support to others. Take time to develop and refine your skills and knowledge through volunteer opportunities, part-time and contract work, or job shadowing.
- Participate in local meetings of associations and trade groups in your field of interest. Get involved or volunteer with their committees. You will gain a reputation as a person that can be counted on and it will give you increased visibility.
- Write (and publish) articles on topics that may be related or distantly related to your research project. Get your name out there by writing about career issues in your field or write for your local paper on your research. You could write up a research profile on yourself for the University of Alberta (see Activity 5 below). Just getting exposure could help you to find job leads.
- Positive body language can help you in face-to-face networking situations. Body language that gives a positive presence includes standing with palms open, making eye contact, smiling, and offering a pleasant greeting. This is appropriate for a North American setting. Be aware that different cultures read body language differently.
- When greeting others use a pleasant tone and try to use the other person's name. Use of a person's name communicates a message of familiarity and acknowledges that you are listening. This technique will also help you to remember the other person's name.
- Effective networking requires effective communication. A good way to begin communicating with someone new is to ask open ended questions or introduce yourself with some information about yourself.
- Be an active listener. Active listening requires listening carefully and distilling information that will allow you to participate in a discussion. This will help you to understand what the other person has said and will allow you to acknowledge that you heard and understood what the other person has said.

Activities to Do On Your Own

- Begin a list and identify who should be part of your career contacts: both short and long term. Your network can include:
 - Family members (e.g. parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins)
 - Friends and their family (focus on those currently in the workplace)
 - School contacts (e.g. professors, teaching assistants, Career and Placement Services) at University of Alberta and other institutions that you have attended
 - People that you meet at conferences or workshops
 - Current work contacts (paid or volunteer)
 - Community contacts (e.g. members of your community league, neighbours)
 - Professional Association / Committee Contacts
 - Professionals that you access (e.g. doctor, dentist, lawyer)

Think about who should be on your list of people to contact about possible employment opportunities. Build a list by writing down names of people you can ask about finding work and include their contact information (**name, position title, phone number, address, and e-mail address**). Think about the best way to connect with people, ranging from formal to informal. Is the best way to send a letter, make a telephone call, write an e-mail message, or drop by their office?

Consider that different people in your network may be more helpful than others depending on the task you need help with. For example, scholarship applications and job searches may require the help of different people in your network.

- Contact someone in your network to set up a meeting. Consider sending an e-mail message. In your message, ask if the individual would be willing to meet you to discuss ways to tap into the job market. Offer to buy them a coffee, and specify that you will only take up to thirty minutes of their time (and stick to that time limit). If you do not hear back from your contact in three or four days, follow up your request with a telephone call. Prepare some questions to ask at the meeting. After you meet with them, thank them for their time. Update your network list and include notes about when the last connection was made and any follow-ups required.
- Contact the author of an academic paper that you are reading with your questions about the paper. This will develop a new contact and keep you from guessing what the author meant in the paper.
- Use the University on-line community at <http://www.ualberta.ca/alumni> to connect with professionals in your field.

Other Resources

- [“Tooling Up: More than just a job-seeking skill.” Science Careers, February 18, 2005. Dave Jensen.](#)
- [“Network your way into work: My friends are your friends.” Science Careers, December 3, 2004. Dick van Vlooten.](#)
- [“How to get a good connection.” Science Careers. David Bomzer.](#)
- [“Guerrilla marketing yourself.” Science Careers. April 21, 2006. Dave Jensen.](#)