# NETWORKING & INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

***Networking*** *is a systematic development and cultivation of informal interpersonal contacts and relationships.* ***Informational interviewing*** *is a popular and effective method of collecting information on a career field from professionals currently in that*

## NETWORKING

Network to gain knowledge of specific jobs/career options and make contacts for referrals in the job search process. These people can coach you in cover letter and résumé writing as well as interviewing. Networking allows you to learn industry specific behaviors which may help confirm your interest in a chosen field.

Your network is everyone you know. Think of your network as a giant web of interconnected links tying each contact to another. Consider the following: family, friends, directories (organizations, church), professional associations, civic groups, church members and *LinkedIn* Groups. A meeting can be as casual as "Can I ask you a few questions about how you got into _____?" to arranging an appointment.

**Evaluate**

- Identify areas where it can grow. For example, should you make more contacts with professors who specialize in your chosen career field?
- Inform your closest contacts of your job search status/goals.
- Differentiate between the types of contacts in your networks:
  - *Professional*: employers, professionals
  - *Personal*: family, friends
  - *Pro-personal*: close professors, classmates, coworkers, supervisors

Here is a list to help you get started:

- Family members
- Friends (school, email, Facebook, etc.)
- Co-workers from your last five jobs
- People at the gym or intramural field
- Salespeople with whom you interact
- Maintenance workers attending to your apartment/house
- People you meet at the grocery store, bank, etc
- Your barber/hairdresser, manicurist, physical trainer, etc
- Wait staff and managers at your favorite restaurants
- Your walking, exercise, etc partners
- Doctors, dentists, etc
- Professors, instructors, staff, advisors, etc
- People at church, synagogue, mosque, etc
- People who are in the same social or service organization
- Casual acquaintances from parties
- New introductions

Every person you meet, stumble across, or blunder into, during your job-hunt, whose name, email address, and phone number you have the grace to ask for, is a contact. (Always have the grace to ask for it.)

**Connect**

Technically, you can network anywhere. The woman in front of you in the grocery store check out line, may hold your dream position. However, MSU Alumni are a great way to build your professional network.

- Avoid appearing as a spammer or stalker by asking for an introduction from a mutual connection.
- Attend professional and civic organization meetings and enroll in local leadership programs.
- Make contact through a message before requesting to connect on websites such as *LinkedIn* or *Facebook*.
- Clarify your intentions when making the connection. If you are looking for career advice, say so in your message.

**Cultivate Connections**

- Take the "me" mentality out of the equation and focus on building quality relationships with your network.
- Give first, receive second by providing your network with relevant information to meet their needs.
- Never ask for a job outright.

## INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

These conversations should assist you in making your career choice by gaining a more realistic insight into your career area of interest and to network with professionals. Informational interviewing helps you develop career-related contacts while you evaluate the environment as a fit for your career goals. It is not, however, a job-seeking method.

## HOW TO CONDUCT AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

**Preparation:**

- Be informed about your career of interest utilizing resources through Career Services
- Develop a list of questions
- Start with people you are familiar with and practice
- Contact individual in advance to schedule an appointment
- Be prepared to respond to questions from contact

**During:**

- Refer to your list of questions if you need to, it shows you are prepared
- Make positive first impressions through appearance, social skills and punctuality
- Observe work environment, people, dress, etc.
- Thank everyone for their time and assistance
- Ask for business cards and two or three other contacts

**Networking and Informational Interview Questions**

- How did you get started in this industry? What is your educational background and what previous work experience have you had?
- What short- and long-term trends affect your industry?
- What are the positive and negative aspects of your position and this industry as a whole?
- What are the major rewards of your job?
- What are the major frustrations you encounter on your job? How do you deal with them?
- What fringe benefits are offered on your job?
- Based on my research, I see that the average salary range is $___ to $___. Would you say that is accurate?
- Who are the recognized leaders in this industry?
- What professional associations represent this industry?
- Is there another professional I should talk with about careers/ trends in this field?
- What are some other good sources of information about this industry - articles, reports, journals, people?
- What are the current career opportunities in this field?
- In this industry, is it more likely that I will be hired through a direct application on-line or via a referral from a current employee?
- What skills, experience or other qualifications are sought by employers in this field for entry-level employees?
- What is the typical career path for entry-level hires?
- Of your organization's hires the last three years, what qualities, backgrounds or achievements did they have that made them attractive candidates?
- Is training typically formal or on-the-job training?
- (Offer a copy of your resume.) Could I get your opinion on my resume? What strengths and/or weaknesses do you see in my qualifications?
- Can I call you if I have further questions or to check with you about news and leads in the field?

"Networking." National Business Employment Weekly: 1994

**Follow-up:**

- Summarize information you gathered
- Send a thank you email that day and a written note the following day
- Keep contact informed if they expressed interest
- Contact new leads