**Guide to Networking**

Employer Competitive individuals develop a networking plan, attend events regularly (at least 1-2 per week), set goals for what they want to accomplish at events, and follow up with contacts for informational interviews. **In other words, Employer Competitive individuals are always making themselves visible and selling their strengths.** They use networking as an opportunity to learn about the industry and use this knowledge to deepen their understanding of the marketplace so they can target individuals and companies for finding jobs.

Successful networking depends on being able to articulate your personal brand in crisp, concise and compelling ways to a variety of audiences in changing contexts. You already developed a plan to begin to make yourself visible. Now, we’ll discuss how to use your brand when you meet with individuals. Sticking with your plan is something that you have to do -- it takes time and effort, but it will be worth it!

**What Is Networking?**

Your network is a web of relationships made of people you know directly and indirectly. For example, LinkedIn helps you organize your network into 1st Order (people you know directly), 2nd order (people who your 1st order people know) and 3rd Order (people your 2nd Order people know).

Networking allows you to broaden this personal and professional community so that you can learn more about the industries you are interested in and can be connected to career opportunities. A professional introduction from someone you know to somebody they know is extremely valuable. At the same time, networking is about building two-way relationships. When networking, you want to create genuine relationships that are beneficial to both you and your contact.

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| **Networking IS….** | **Networking IS NOT...** |
| * A chance to learn more about an industry and what employers are looking for * A chance to make people aware of your name and to open doors that might otherwise be closed * A chance to gain confidence in your ability to describe your interests, skills, values (which will help you in a real interview) * A chance to build relationships and introductions * Reciprocal -- beneficial for both people | * Asking for a job * An interview for employment * A guarantee of employment or employability * Just a business card swap at a meeting or conference * Lots of connections on LinkedIn |

**Step 1: Identify Your Network**

You may have more people in your network than you realize! Use the chart below to help you think about who is in your network and how you might want to reach out to them.

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| **Family Members**  *Think about who in your family knows people in your target industry. Who could introduce you to someone or who might have good advice for you?* |
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| **Friends**  *Think through your personal friend circle. Who could introduce you to someone or who might have good advice for you?* |
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| **Former colleagues and supervisors**  *Think through each job you’ve had. Who really liked working with you and might be willing to introduce you to people, or to brainstorm people or places that might be helpful for you?* |
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| **Professors or Trainers**  *Who have you connected with during your academic or technical training? Is there anyone you think could be particularly helpful to you?* |
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| **Other People**  *Think about people you have met since starting BootCamp -- in a class or at an event. Is there anyone you feel comfortable reaching out to for a conversation or a quick coffee?* |
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**Step 2: Expand your Network**

During Milestone 2, you built a plan to build your visibility. Now is the time to update that document. Note progress you have made since you developed that plan. What else can you do to expand your network? Remember that it’s important to continue to expand your network regularly. Your network might include people you have one informative conversation with, or people who might become a mentor. To go even further, consider some of the steps below:

* **Reach out to every person on your networking list** above and send them your materials and make a specific ask. “Asks” can include: a quick chat on the phone for advice, or a lunch date to talk about your target industry and find out who they suggest you talk to next.
* If you are currently employed, **ask your boss for projects that require you to interact with new departments or individuals**. For example, you can propose that you help the company enhance its website (and in doing so, interact with other developers and/or the marketing department).
* **Find volunteer opportunities**. Get involved in an organization or group that you are interested in and offer to contribute some of your new tech skills. You may meet people who can be helpful.
* **Create business cards** to hand out that include your desired title, links to Github, Linkedin, and a QB code to scan for your resume.
* Continue to **use LinkedIn weekly to connect to employees and decision makers**. Look for people who might have secondary connections to you. Send personal messages about your passions and common interests and ask to meet.
* Here is a great reminder of all the many places where you can network. <http://www.jobmonkey.com/best-places-to-network/>

**Step 3: Attend Networking Events**

Networking events can be scary to attend, but with practice, they get easier. You may want to try bringing a friend with you— that can help ease you in. When you go, it’s helpful to have a goal (e.g. “I will have 3 meaningful conversations that may lead to potential follow-up,” or “I will not leave until I have entered into at least 5 conversations.”)

Always bring business cards with you to events. Make notes on the back of cards you received about the person you spoke with so that you can follow up in a personal way.

Here are some tips that might help you differentiate yourself at an event:

1. **Master the Use of Language:** The better your vocabulary (especially as it relates to your industry), the more impressed people will be. Your vocabulary creates a first impression by demonstrating your knowledge.
2. **Eye Contact:** Always keep good eye contact. Looking away makes you appear unconfident or sneaky. Remember to smile.
3. **Leave personal space**: Don’t stand too close to people— keep a reasonable distance.
4. **Acknowledge your understanding:** When someone else is talking, acknowledge that you heard them with non-verbal body language such as nodding.
5. **Do not interrupt**. Successful professionals are also good listeners. In addition, each of us have different tolerance levels for interruption. Assume the people you talk to have a low tolerance for interruption.
6. **Watch body language:** Mirror the body language of the person with whom you are interacting. If they sit down, you should sit down too— they may be ready for a longer conversation. Do not cross or fold your arms, as that creates the appearance you are guarded. If your contact has her arms crossed or folded, he or she may be uncomfortable or feeling defensive— try to loosen up the conversation.
7. **Be curious:** Open the conversation with questions. Focus on the other person’s interests first and show genuine curiosity.

Here are some [conversation starters](https://www.themuse.com/advice/30-brilliant-networking-conversation-starters) that might help you as well.

**Step 4: Follow-Up**

Attending networking events or reaching out to people only works if you follow up! After meeting interesting people, reach out to ask for a coffee or an informational interview. This gives you a chance to learn more from them and for them to learn more about you, moving you closer to establishing a real professional relationship.

When reaching out, whether via email or phone, here are a few tips:

1. **Remind them how they know you**. Always begin by referencing a common person, event, educational experience, work experience, organization or award that creates a common bond.
2. **Call people at unusual times**. Busy people are more likely to answer their own phones when their assistant or receptionist are not in the office. This is typically before 8 AM, or after 6 PM.
3. **Be clear on what you bring to the table.** Express interest in the person’s work and offer additional help or services.
4. **Be flexible** with regard to a meeting time and date. Make it easy and convenient for the contact to say yes!
5. **Do your homework!** The internet, via name search, and LinkedIn provide instant access to information on your targeted connections.
6. **Don’t give up and don’t take it personally.** Some people hesitate to reach out again for fear of being ignored or rejected. It’s okay if someone doesn’t take you up on your offer. If you are reaching out to people regularly, you’ll get more yes responses than no’s!
7. **Breathe and stay calm.** It’s perfectly normal to be anxious about calling people. Networking is a skill that requires practice and rehearsal. It may help to practice your calls with friends or family. And remember — you are not asking for favors; you are asking to learn from someone. Most people love getting to show off their expertise! If someone says no, it’s okay. Simply thank them politely.

**Step 5: In-Person Networking—Hold Informational Interviews & Seek Mentors**

Informational interviews let you get to know people personally and learn more about the field you are working in. They let you explore whether this work/company/industry really is the right match for you. The person you interview with might also be able to introduce you to other people in the industry.

But it’s important that these interviews feel helpful to the contact as well. Listen for ways that you may be able to be helpful to them. And if you cannot be helpful now, you may have an opportunity in the future.

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| **Do** | **Do NOT** |
| **Before the Interview** | |
| * Research the individual -- study their background on LinkedIn, google them, talk to people who might know them * Prepare a list of questions (at least 4) * Review a list of [conversation starters](https://www.themuse.com/advice/30-brilliant-networking-conversation-starters) for informational interviews and have a few ready to go. * Be ready to deliver your Elevator Pitch | * Plan to “wing it” -- while these are not job interviews, they need preparation * Script every second of the interview -- you need to build a relationship as well * Assume this person is going to lead the conversation or just hear from you the whole time |
| **During the Interview** | |
| * Smile, be aware of appropriate eye contact, and lean forward * Ask questions to demonstrate curiosity and strong listening skills * Find a personal connection through interests, passions or hobbies * Listen for ways you may be able to help or volunteer for them * Use varied tones and volumes to demonstrate your passion and enthusiasm * Describe work you have done that might be interesting to the person | * Do not complain about previous employers or peers * Do not dominate conversation -- make sure to let them talk * Do not answer questions with one word answers -- be concise, but be thorough too * Do not look at your phone during the conversation |
| **After the Interview** | |
| * Jot down notes to remember the conversation * Write a thank you email * Follow up about once a month with updates and check ins | * Follow up too frequently (more than about once a month) * Text a thank you -- this should be a more formal thank you |

These interviews should lead to more interviews, some volunteer or open-source projects, or ideas about new directions to take. For more on informational interviews, check out this [article called *5 Tips for Non-Awkward Informational Interviews.*](https://www.themuse.com/advice/5-tips-for-nonawkward-informational-interviews)