

DRIVING FORWARD NETWORKING GUIDE



Networking Overview

Professional networking is the process of building relationships that can help you explore careers, gain advice, and uncover opportunities. It’s not about asking for a job—it’s about learning, sharing, and connecting with people who can support your growth.

Networking happens everywhere: on campus, at events, on LinkedIn, in class, or through a shared interest. Every conversation has the potential to lead to a new opportunity.

Why Should I Network?

Networking helps you learn about job types, career paths, and industries. This contributes to becoming a more informed candidate when you interview. It also helps you determine what you may like or not like about different roles and companies.

Networking sets you up to ask question that provide helpful answers not featured on job search sites or application portals like?

- How do you break into this field?
- What does a typical career path look like?
- What do like about your role?
- What do you find most challenging about your job?
- What advice do you have for me at this stage of my journey?

Another benefit of networking is making connections that can lead to interviews. Employers and hiring managers are more likely to interview and hire people they know. Before going through a large stack of resumes, recruiters like to start with who the company knows and thinks might be a good fit.

Why Are People Willing To Network With Me?

Many people struggle with understanding the purpose of networking and find it intimidating. One question job seekers ask is why are they talking with someone about career insights if that person / company does not currently have an opening. More pointedly, “why are they talking to me and trying to help if there is nothing in it for them?”

People that network with you typically do so for three reasons. First, they like to help, remembering being in your shoes and how challenging it felt. Second, their altruistic efforts make them feel good. Lastly, they are playing the long game just like the job seeker. They want to know what talented candidates are doing, what they are looking for, and what the market looks like to them.

Networking Outreach

When reaching out to contacts, your goal is to send a message, that is simple and specific. Plan for four to six sentences with spacing and a call-to-action. One example:

“Hi <name>,

My name is <name> and I am <education or current role>. I am exploring roles / careers in <more detail on the roles, careers, or industries of interest>.

Your background and role is of particular interest to me as I am eager to learn more about <content>.

I would enjoy the opportunity to meet with you and learn more about your career path and advice you would have for me. Let me know if you have availability in the next two weeks for a ½ hour phone call.”

Thank for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Salutation,

Name

Additional elements that can be helpful include referencing commonalities especially if you are from the same university.

Not everyone you contact will respond quickly and some will not respond at all. For follow-up, consider sending another outreach at two weeks and one last attempt at six weeks.

Networking Discussion

In a 30 minute networking you want to be listening for 80% of the conversation. Remember, the purpose is to learn about roles, companies, and industries. It is hard to learn anything if you are doing most of the talking.

Your discussion outline can include simple questions with the opportunity to ask more questions about what they shared. A common discussion outline includes:

1. Reintroduce yourself and your interests
2. “Tell me about your background and career path.”
3. “What are your primary responsibilities?”
4. “What do you like most about your role?”
5. “What do you find most challenging about your role?”
6. “At this stage of my exploration, what advice do you have for me?”

Typically, you will not have to stick to your outline. Whatever they share that is interesting is your queue to probe further and follow the discussion wherever it goes.