

Networking -

The art of using contacts

There is a common quotation about establishing a career -

“It’s not what you know but who you know and who knows you that matters

The ability to use contacts for discovering opportunities and helping you to make decisions, (i.e. networking) is probably the single most important skill you can develop to be successful in life. You don’t have to have friends in high places to be able to network - you can learn to do this effectively even if you think you have no useful contacts at all.

This guide will explain how networking can help you at every stage of your career planning and job hunting process. It will show you how to develop contacts and make effective use of them. It has been designed to be used with a range of other resources about networking, available in the Career Development Centre - these are listed on the last page and referred to throughout the leaflet.

① How Networking Works

What is networking?

The idea of networking is to approach your own existing contacts, or contacts of people you know, for help and advice. Every time you make a new helpful contact you then tap into

their network and get introductions to a new range of contacts. Through this method you gradually build up a large list of people who can help you.

Why it is important to be able to use contacts

If you are to succeed in applications and interviews for types of job that you have not done before, you will need a very clear idea of what the work is like. Networking is the best way of gaining this knowledge.

Most job vacancies aren’t advertised in national or local newspapers. Jobs are often filled either through personal contacts or through specialist publications. You’ll need contacts who work either in the organisation or in the industry to hear about these jobs.

What kind of help can contacts offer you?

> **Enabling you to see what a job is really like** Questioning someone about the job they do should give you a better idea of what is involved and whether you would like this work. Your contact may also be able to organise some work shadowing (i.e. unpaid work observation) for you. Because no training is required for this, it is possible to witness the work of people in senior management positions. Work shadowing might lead to work experience or even a job.

> **Helping you in preparing to look for work** You can get your contacts to -

- Outline the range of jobs within their field and the level of competition for them.
- Look through your CV, suggesting improvements.
- Advise you on other skills or experience that you might need.
- Recommend other sources of information and advice, including their own contacts.

> **Researching firms you are applying to** Contacts can be invaluable in giving you insight into the activities, culture and history of their company.

> **Helping you to find a job** Your contacts may be able to

- Tell you which papers and agencies to use for vacancies.
- Give ideas of firms to apply to
- Let you know about openings within their firm.

When you first make contact, however, ask for information and advice - NOT for a job.

If you’re not sure about networking, remember -

- You’ve probably already used networking skills, e.g. in finding a vacation or weekend job.
- There are many established networks that you can use.
- Most people are flattered to be approached for advice.
- If you don’t use contacts, you’ll lose out to those who do! Many people establish successful careers through networking.
- It never hurts to contact someone (tactfully!) for help - they can always say no.

- Contacts alone rarely get you a job - you'll need to prove you have what it takes!

② Creating a List of Contacts

Listing your contacts, starting with connections that you already have

You may not realise it, but it is likely that you already belong to many useful networks. Obvious examples are -

- Your extended family.
- The university, school and colleges you have attended.
- Clubs and societies that you've belonged to.
- Places that you have worked.
- Your parents' or partner's networks of friends.

It is likely that the contacts that will be easiest to make and most helpful to you will already have some link with you, however slight.

Step 1 - Start to identify your contacts by "brainstorming" a list of all the networks you have belonged to, expanding the list above to include every circle of friends you can think of (e.g. people you've met on holiday, mates at your local pub etc.). Also try to think what other networks might be attached to those listed, e.g.

- old boys/girls associations
- university alumni association

Step 2 - List all individuals known to you within the groups you've identified. Have any of these people worked in jobs or for firms where there might be someone doing the kind of work that might interest you?

Even if you can't think of individuals who could help you directly, someone from within these groups is likely to know somebody who could give you some advice. One of your contacts may belong to a well

established network, such as a Rotary club or sports club.

As you think of new individuals and groups, add them to your list - this will continue to grow as you network.

Mind Map your contacts

A Career Development Centre resource which will help you to create a large list of contacts is the "Networking Help Sheet - Mind Mapping". This illustrates a technique which many creative professionals use for brainstorming ideas.

Developing contacts from scratch

There are many other people with no connection to you at all who may be able to offer you advice. Those most likely to be helpful are people whose job role involves providing help and advice. Try to concentrate on people you can telephone or speak to face-to-face as not many people have the time to reply to letters or e-mails.

> **Professional bodies** are a good starting point - they often employ information officers and training advisers who can talk to you over the phone. They may publish careers information and a directory of members. They may have a local branch that you can join or a network of regional advisers. The best way of identifying appropriate bodies is to use the web sites listed under "Sources of Contacts" on the back of this leaflet.

> **Courses and events** are a good way of meeting people who could give you advice e.g.

- Graduate recruitment fairs
- Careers information fairs
- Specialist recruitment fairs for specific industries
- Trade fairs
- Conferences and short courses

When attending any of the above events take copies of your CV with you.

> Other sources of contacts

If you are a creative person you'll be able to think up lots of other ways of making contacts. Here are two methods that have been used successfully:

- Identify adverts for jobs you would ultimately like to aim for (but don't feel currently qualified for) - contact the employer for advice on how to get into this type of work.
- Identify experts on your chosen career through articles they have written or talks they've given - contact them for advice.

③ Making Effective use of Contacts

To be successful, you will need to plan your networking campaign at every stage of the process and keep good records of all that you've done. The Career Development Centre has a number of resources to help you do this effectively – these are listed on page 4 of this leaflet and will be referred to throughout this section.

Be aware of what your contacts could do for you.

Section 1 of this leaflet summarises the benefits of career networking but there are very many other possible positive outcomes. "Networking Skills Help Sheet - Outcomes of Networking", available in the Career Development Centre, lists 55 different ways in which contacts can help you to plan your career. These outcomes are grouped into six main categories, according to the type of support being offered:

- Self Reflection & Awareness
- Action Planning
- Acquisition of Knowledge and Understanding of Opportunities
- Experience and Observation of Work Activities
- Increasing Access to Contacts, and Information
- Skills Development

Set yourself objectives for your networking Before you start contacting people for help, decide what you want to get out of your networking campaign.

You can set the objectives for your networking campaign by using either the "Outcomes of Networking" list (see above) or the Career Development Centre "Networking Card Sort" exercise. You can then make a note of your priorities on the "Record of Key Networking Objectives" (Career Development Centre help Sheet).

Research each contact, their role and their organisation, before making an approach

You will impress a contact more at a first meeting if you already have some relevant knowledge. If you have found out about a contact through someone you know, then you should be able to get some background information on the individual. You will be able to do some preliminary research on the career area and the company either by using the resources of the Career Development Centre or by searching the internet (e.g. the company's web site; Prospects Web).

Prepare a list of questions for each discussion "Networking Interviews Prompt Sheet", available from the Career Development Centre, gives you quite a few ideas of questions to start with. You should also try to think of some questions of your own. You can use the "Networking Preparation Question Sheet" to record your questions as a prompt sheet for your meeting.

Think how to Approach each of your contacts You'll have to find a method of approaching contacts that works for you and adapt this to each situation. For detailed ideas on how to make

your approaches look at the video, held in the Career Development Centre, called "Can I Have a Few Minutes of Your Time?" This shows networking in action and highlights the strengths and weaknesses of different tactics.

Some points to consider -

- A particular method of approach may be acceptable to one contact yet not to another.
- The better you know someone, the more informal you can be in your approach to them.
- The better your communication skills the more success you will have with direct approaches.
- Contacts will often have a lot less hassle responding to a telephone call than replying to a letter or e-mail. Most mail you send won't result in a reply and any response may take weeks.
- Telephone or face to face enquiries usually result in some kind of immediate feedback.
- Before you telephone a contact, write down what you are going to say and keep this by you.
- It is possible to combine a written approach with a direct or telephone approach, e.g. you can e-mail each contact a copy of your CV to introduce yourself and arrange to phone them on a specific day.

After each talk with a contact, note any action points The Career Development Centre "Networking Contacts Sheet" will help you record details of meetings and make an action plan. Be sure to follow up all action points. You should also write to thank each contact for their help.

4 Final Points

Networking without being a pest Nobody likes to be bothered by nuisance calls or junk mail. Here are some tips for making sure you don't come across like an unwanted double glazing salesperson!:

- Start with contacts who have a fairly direct link to you - they're

more likely to want to help.

- Only approach people for whom you have a definite name.
- Clarify how you got the contact and outline the help you need.
- Always ask initially for "help and advice" NOT for a job.
- Don't be too pushy!

Safety first! Because most networking involves meeting with people that you know something about, personal safety is not normally an issue. However, you should try to get a personal introduction to each new contact you make. If you are meeting with a complete stranger then to protect yourself you should -

- Meet in a public place.
- Tell someone where you are going and with whom.
- Avoid getting into a car.
- Walk away from any situation that makes you uncomfortable, after making a polite apology.
- Use your common sense!

Effective networking requires effort and organisation but -

- It will greatly improve your career direction and prospects.
- It will prove useful to you in other aspects of your life.
- It will help you improve your interpersonal skills and develop your self-confidence.

Happy Networking!!

This document is also available in large print, braille and as plain text.

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Suggested Career Development Centre Resources to Use

Career Development Centre Networking Skills Help Sheets and Exercises

- **Making Use of Contacts** - a questionnaire to help you think how you use contacts already
- **Mind Mapping** - information on a technique useful for brainstorming lists of contacts
- **Outcomes of Networking** - a detailed, categorised list of all the things that contacts can do for you in helping you to plan your career
- **Record of Key Networking Objectives** - a sheet for planning what you want to get out of your networking campaign
- **Networking Card-Sort** - a practical exercise to help you set your networking priorities
- **Networking Interviews Prompt Sheet** - ideas for questions to ask your contacts
- **Networking Preparation Question Sheet** - for recording your questions, prior to each meeting with a contact
- **Networking Contacts Sheet** - a sheet for recording the details of your meetings with contacts and the further action that needs to be taken

Video

- **Can I Have a Few Minutes of Your Time?** - 23 minute AGCAS video giving detailed advice on career networking and showing networking in practise

Career Management Reference Books (with sections on networking skills)

- **What Color Is Your Parachute**, Richard Nelson Bolles
- **The Art of Building Windmills**, Peter Hawkins

Sources of Contacts (professional bodies, useful publications etc)

- **Occupational** information files
- **Work Experience** information files
- **Career Development Centre Best of the Web guides** - www.derby.ac.uk/careers/bestoftheweb.htm
- **Prospects Web** - www.prospects.ac.uk
 - Click on “Explore types of jobs” and identify relevant job profiles. Look at “contacts and resources” sections of these profiles.

General

- Career Development Centre **Careers Adviser** available for drop-in advice and guidance. Visit the Career Development Centre web site or call 01332 591316 for details
- Careers Advisers also run **workshops** on networking skills, either through the Career Development Centre **Employability Programme** or as **customised sessions** for course groups