



UNIVERSITY OF  
TORONTO

# Finding Work: Networking

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*CAREER CENTRE WORKSHOP*

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# Researching and Networking

## Networking

### What is it?

Networking is an ongoing process of developing and maintaining personal and professional relationships which may result in the sharing of ideas, information and knowledge; developing friendships; exploring common interests; uncovering possible job opportunities; learning about what other people do. Networking is not about asking people for jobs or for the sole purpose of, "How can you help me?" Rather, it is a two-way process, where the goal is to get to know other people. If you are open to meeting people through your studies, work, volunteering or social activities, you will most likely develop and maintain lifelong mutual relationships.

### Why network?

Networking is an effective work search strategy that allows you to meet people, build friendships, learn new things and help others which **may** lead to referrals and/or new work-related contacts in the present or future. It is also an effective career management strategy that can help you to learn how others have succeeded in the career area you are interested in.

**Example:** Meeting another graduate student at a departmental retirement party.

- Initially, you both have your department and the professor who is retiring in common. Over the course of the evening, you discover that you share an interest in rock climbing. You make plans to go to a climbing gym the following week.
- This becomes a weekly routine as does a visit to a local pub where you learn more about each other. It turns out the new friend is American and has invited you to join him/her and his/her family for Thanksgiving. You agree to go and end up meeting many relatives some of whom have pursued graduate studies. They in turn learn about your research. Some of the people you meet ask to keep in touch with you and you exchange email addresses.
- Two months later, you receive an email from one of your friend's relatives saying he will be coming to town on business and wanted to know if you were interested in meeting up. You make arrangements to meet him for a coffee.
- You meet him for coffee and learn that he is in town for a symposium on enabling technologies for proteomics, a topic that holds a lot of interest for you since it ties into your research. He invites you to join him for day two of the symposium where you meet others in the field. You are invigorated by researchers you meet and the work they are doing and begin to consider the possibility of working outside of academia.
- You then decide to contact one of the scientists you met who made the shift from academia to a private research organization. Her experience will help you consider the possibilities and she may also become the mentor you've been looking for outside the university.
- Additionally, the scientist was interested in meeting a U of T professor who has recently moved to Toronto and happens to be one of your instructors. You in turn, can provide her with an introduction.

### How to network?

#### Maintaining your existing network

Make an effort to stay in touch with people in your personal and professional network including professors, colleagues, peers, family, friends, neighbours, employers, mentors, teachers, members of your community (sports teams, religious affiliations, etc.). This can be done by setting aside time to regularly call people, e-mail them, and meet for coffee, lunch, dinner or drinks or by engaging in an activity of mutual interest. By staying in touch with those in your network, you will be learning about new things that may interest you on a personal, academic, or work level.

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## Expand your network by

### 1. Being prepared for unplanned opportunities to meet and talk with people

- An unplanned opportunity to meet and talk with someone at any time, (e.g. a party, on an airplane, at a conference) which may have no end result or it may lead to the beginnings of a mutually beneficial relationship. Because the encounter is not planned, there are no expectations of the outcome.
- Be polite, friendly and if possible, helpful with everyone you meet.
- Show genuine interest in the other person by asking questions and listening. Be an active participant in a two-way conversation. Be prepared to respond to questions about yourself.

#### **Example: Meeting your neighbour on the elevator**

As you are getting off the elevator to your apartment, a senior tenant on the same floor drops one of his grocery bags. You stop to help him gather his groceries and notice he buys the same brand of tea that you do. You strike up a conversation and the next thing you know, he invites you in for tea. You discuss many things one of which is his son, a publisher for a well-respected academic journal in English literature. The next thing you know, he is suggesting you join them for lunch over the weekend. You accept!

### 2. Looking for opportunities to become involved and help others

- Get involved in volunteer or social activities; e.g. join a health club, sports team, craft activity, professional association. Look for opportunities to be helpful and make a contribution.

#### **Example: Join a running group**

You recently decided to train for a marathon and join a running group to help you with your training. The group includes a total of 15 runners all of whom come from different walks of life but have this one interest in common. The group is very supportive and as the runs become longer, individuals spend more time together and learn more about each other. On one of your runs, you learn that your running partner works at a women's shelter. With a graduate degree in women's studies, you feel you have a lot to contribute and offer to sit on her board of directors. After attending a couple of meetings, one of the board members is impressed with your contribution, approaches you about a full-time employment opportunity in the field.

### 3. Attending employment-related events

- These would include employer information sessions, career fairs, alumni panels, networking breakfasts, or receptions that are organized by the Career Centre, your faculty or department, the government, community agency or a professional association. Career paths and opportunities are the primary topics of discussion so be prepared to talk about what you are looking for and what you want to do.
- Research the organizations participating in the event. Find out as much as you can about what they do, positions they offer, the major issues facing their field or industry and then be prepared to link their needs with your skills and experiences. You also want to prepare good questions for them that are not answered on their website.

### 4. Utilizing social media tools—the following links will introduce you to these social media tools and how they can be used in your work search.

**LinkedIn**—<http://learn.linkedin.com/students/step-1/>

**Twitter**—<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B0sdTdcM2Ws>

**Facebook** – <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZbwvK5AI0dQ&feature=related>

### 5. Conducting informational interviews

- Ask people in your existing network for contacts in your field of interest and then set-up an informational interview. Informational interviewing is discussed in greater detail in the next section.

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# Informational interview

Your research and networking activities will also lead to informational interviews.

## What is it?

Informational interviews are short conversations (20—30 minutes) with professionals working in a career area that interests you allowing you to gather career related information. These formal conversations will help you

- learn more about what a career actually entails and decide whether it is an occupation that suits you;
- gain insider tips how to find work opportunities and how to market yourself when actively searching for similar positions;
- learn what skills, qualifications and or relevant experience is needed for that specific career area;
- develop knowledge of the industry, recent trends and developments, as well as jargon;
- build new contacts in your field of interest;
- develop communication skills and confidence in meeting and talking with new people.

Informational interviewing is not interviewing for a job. It is a research tool—a way for you to find useful and specific information that you could not find elsewhere. It is important that you conduct preliminary research prior to your meeting so that you have general information on the company and the occupational area. This research will also help you structure what questions you would like to ask during your informational interview.

## Finding Contacts

- **Tap into your existing network**

For example, you have decided that you want to pursue a career as a management consultant. Since you don't know anyone in the field, you start to ask around. This includes a professor who has been very helpful to you with your academic career. Much to your surprise, he knows a couple of people in the consulting field. Not only does he pass on their contact information, he is willing to contact them beforehand and introduce you.

- **Informational Interview Contacts list** — This is a list of professional contacts working in a variety of career areas who are willing to meet with University of Toronto students and recent graduates for the purpose of an informational interview. View contacts online on the Career Centre website or in person at the Career Resource library reference desk.

- **Related associations and company directories**—the Career Resource Library has a diverse collection of directories.

- **Professional trade journals and newspapers.**

- **Networking with professors, friends, family, neighbours**—you could be surprised by who they know.

- follow companies and contacts on **LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook**

## What to ask

The easiest way to come up with questions to ask your interviewee is to write down brief points that you want information on. These points or ideas are mainly concerned with what general information you would like the contact to address such as “What interested them about this field?” and “How did they make the transition from academia to industry?” The next step is to narrow the focus of your questions. This is necessary as many people have a very limited amount of time when they are free to speak to you. Incorporate some of the research you have done into your questions to structure your questions so that you obtain more detailed answers.

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Try and ask open ended questions, not ones that will elicit simply a yes or no. Do not ask questions that are inappropriate or are not career related.

Here are some sample questions that you might consider asking, although you will develop your own more specific ones along the way.

1. How did you get into this field? What is your educational background? What is your career path to your current position?
2. Can you give me a description of a typical day?
3. What are the challenges and rewards of your position?
4. What would be the top skills, qualities and/or training someone interested in this career area would need to be successful?
5. What are some trends and/changes you can foresee regarding this industry?
6. Can you offer any work search advice if I were interested in applying to opportunities in this field?
7. What advice can you provide in preparing an effective resume for this industry? What will make me stand out?
8. Are there associations in the field to contact or professional journals that you subscribe to?
9. Who else might I talk to for more information?

## **Arranging the interview**

When calling your contact, explain that you are preparing to make some career decisions by researching potential occupations and if possible you would like to arrange a 20 minute conversation with them to learn more about what they do and how they got into their current role/field.

## **After the interview**

- Follow up with a thank-you note or email and let the interviewee know what was most helpful for you.
- Keep their contact information (phone number, and e-mail address) in case you want to get in touch with them for follow-up questions or to share any information you come across that may be of interest to them. This is a great way to maintain this person as part of your network!
- Analyze the information you received and what you have learned from this meeting. Is this an area that still appeals to you? Are there changes that you need to make to your work search strategies or documents in order to stand out in this field? Should you continue to speak to more people?
- Determine your next steps—have you been given another contact name to follow-up with? Have you been asked to send in your resume? Have you discovered that this industry has set recruiting periods and you may have to follow-up again in a few months?

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# Contacting employers: the process

## Step 1 Determine the purpose of your call

- Trying to schedule an informational interview.
- Exploring work opportunities.
- Trying to identify the name of a contact person to personalize your cover letter.
- Following up on a cover letter and résumé already sent.
- Finding new contacts.

## Step 2 Anticipate any challenges you may encounter and how you will deal with them

- If the contact person is not in, prepare a message you can leave on his or her voicemail.
- Know how you will approach the receptionist or the administrative assistant.
- Tip: try to have the name of a contact person prior to your call.

## Step 3 Prepare what you are going to say

- Example of how to introduce yourself and your reason for calling  
*« Good afternoon, Mr. Kumar. My name is Sue Brown and I recently graduated from the University of Toronto's environmental management program. I am currently exploring careers in this industry and found your name through the Environmental Industry Directory. I was hoping to speak with you briefly. »*
- Check for convenience of timing: *« Is this a convenient time for you to talk? »*  
If the contact person is busy, arrange another time to call back.

## Step 4 Describe who you are and why you are calling

- Example of how to investigate employment opportunities  
*« I'm particularly interested in your organization's use of post-consumer waste. Through my environmental management degree and my experience, I have been exposed to the latest innovations in this area that I think will be quite useful for your organization. »*
- Example of how to set up an informational interview  
*« I'm interested in speaking with you about your work as an environmental consultant and to learn more about organizations that use post-consumer waste. Would it be possible to set up a 20-minute meeting to talk with you. »*

If the contact person is unable to meet, suggest an alternative time to speak or ask for a referral.  
*« Is there anyone else in your department or company who I can speak with? »*

Confirm meeting arrangements and thank the contact person  
*« I appreciate you taking the time to meet with me. I'm looking forward to meeting with you on Tuesday, the 25<sup>th</sup> at 12:30 p.m. »*

## Step 5 Evaluate each call

- What did you do well?
- Where can you improve?
- What would you say or do differently?