

Professional Networking

It's not just suggested, it's required

Hegi Family Career Development Center

Southern Methodist University

Networking can offer valuable contacts and insights into career fields, companies and geographic locations.

According to NACE's 2009 Student Survey:

- ◆ 38.1 percent of students who had a job offer cited networking as being extremely useful, beating out the company web site in general and other job posting sites.
- ◆ 70 percent of all respondents said networking was helpful.

Networking unlocks the door to the "hidden job market" that is jobs that are never posted for the public.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 70 percent of jobs are found through networking.

WHAT IS NETWORKING?

Networking is simply building alliances. It's not contacting everyone you know to find out if they know of any job openings, but rather a more proactive approach of gathering information about a particular company, career field, graduate school or even a geographic location long before your actual job search begins.

The most effective networking begins in your own backyard. Begin by having intentional conversations with your family, family friends, your friends, former employers, faculty, and certainly other SMU alumni. Most people are happy to share advice, so don't be shy. Until you have asked them about their company, job field or city, you don't know what you don't know, and you certainly don't know WHO they know. Networking is a powerful way to learn about your area of interest and to begin meeting more people in the field. For example, let's say that by talking to your mom about your career interests, you discover that her college roommate is an executive at your target company. You can then request an introduction through your mom and it is likely that you will be able to set-up an informational interview with your mom's college roommate (Check out our Informational Interviewing Guide for more in-depth information).

Always remember, networking is a two-way street. Try to share advice and help others as you move along in your career.

WHY NETWORK?

According to the results of NACE's 2009 Student Survey, nearly 70 percent of students found networking helpful in finding a job.

In fact, networking is not only helpful, it's almost required. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 70 percent of jobs are found through networking. Without conducting informational interviews and making contacts, it is nearly impossible to gain access to the *hidden job market*, that is, the jobs which have not been made public. Many positions are filled by word-of-mouth and referrals. So, the old saying just may be true, "It's not just who you know, it's who knows you."

PREPARATION

BEFORE MAKING CONTACT

- **Assess Yourself.** What are your own interests, skills, knowledge areas, and personal attributes? Be able to speak about yourself with enthusiasm and confidence (note: there is a difference between confidence and arrogance!).
- **Research:** If it's not a family member, research information about your potential contact and his/her field.
- **Have a Plan:** Decide what information you hope to obtain from your contact and create a list of questions you would like to have answered (see SMU Informational Interviewing Guide for examples of questions).
- **Meet with a Career Counselor:** If you're not sure how to tackle the networking process or if you simply want to practice, feel free to set-up an appointment with a career counselor in the Hegi Family Career Development Center. Remember, you are representing yourself and SMU as a whole, so we want to make sure you put your best foot forward.

CODE OF CONDUCT (THINGS TO AVOID)

- DO NOT ask for a job or internship (focus on obtaining advice, information and other contacts).
- DO NOT spam with multiple e-mails or stalk with multiple phone calls.
- DO NOT act unprofessionally or negatively.
- DO NOT ask your contact to mass distribute your resume.

WHERE TO FIND CONTACTS

- **Start with your existing network** of family, friends, former employers, faculty etc. As you begin having career-focused conversations with these people, always ask for at least one more contact who they would recommend.
- **SMU Alumni:** Join the SMU Alumni & Hegi Career Services LinkedIn group. Get started by visiting <http://www.linkedin.com> and use <http://grads.linkedin.com> to help you create your profile. LinkedIn is an online forum to share career-related knowledge, information, referrals, and advice across industries and geographic locations. It is also a good idea to get involved with your local SMU Alumni Chapter.
- **Get Involved:** Join professional associations for your industry and get involved with your local chapter. Many associations have frequent meetings as well as networking events.
- **Start Talking:** Whether you're volunteering, out shopping or on an airplane, strike-up a conversation. Take time to learn about the other person and then share your information. You never know who may be in the seat right next to you.

Online career-related networking is great, but don't stop there! You should always take it to the next level and schedule either a phone conversation or in-person meeting.

WRITING YOUR INITIAL OUTREACH

- **The most common method** of initial outreach is through writing; either e-mail or a brief letter.
- **Letter/E-mail Content:** Your letter/e-mail should include a brief introduction about yourself, the fact that you are an SMU student, why you are writing to this individual, a brief statement of your interests or experience in the person's field, organization, or location and why you would like to speak with him/her. Be straight-forward; tell him/her you are asking for information and advice.
- **If you would like to meet in person or via phone**, ask for 15 to 30 minutes of the person's time.
- **Your last paragraph** should always include a sentence about how and when you will contact this person again. **THEN MAKE SURE YOU FOLLOW-UP.** Usually this involves a phone call to set-up a phone appointment or an in-person meeting. Never expect the person to phone you.
- **Proofread! Proofread! Proofread!** Your letter/email is their first impression of you; it must be error free. Do not use any informal language; "Hey Sally."
- **It's encouraged that you enclose or attach a resume** and make sure your LinkedIn profile is complete. This will help the person get a better sense of your background.

YOU LANDED A MEETING—NOW WHAT?

- **Be on Time:** Whether meeting in-person or via phone, punctuality can make or break your first impression. For in-person meetings it's recommended to be 10 to 15 minutes early.
- **Professionalism:** Be polite, respectful, and enthusiastic. If you're speaking on the phone make sure you are in a quiet area with your list of questions and no other distractions.
- **Dress for Success:** Dress professionally for in-person meetings.
- **Prepare** 10-15 appropriate questions ready to ask for a half-hour conversation.

Material for Networking Handout Adopted From:

Brandeis University, Hiatt Career Center

National Association of Colleges & Employers (NACE)

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

The Riley Group

NOW WHAT? Continued...

- **Take Notes** during your conversation. They may be helpful as you reflect on the conversation and when you follow-up.
- **Respect the Timeframe:** Keep the conversation to the allotted meeting time; they will let you know if they have additional time to share.
- **Say “Thank You”** at the conclusion of your conversation.

FOLLOW-UP

- **Send a Thank You Note** within 24-48 hours. This can be an e-mail or a handwritten note.
- **Reflect:** What did you learn from the conversation? How does what you learned fit with your interests, abilities, values, and goals? What more would be helpful to know? What plan of action can you take?
- **Follow-up with New Contacts:** If your contact refers you to others, follow-up with them in a timely manner. Make sure to immediately mention your mutual contact, and why the person you originally spoke with thought they might be helpful. *Remember to abide by all of the previously mentioned rules regarding timing, etiquette, and thank you notes.
- **Keep Contacts Informed:** If your original contact referred you to someone who was helpful, let them know. Likewise, if a particular resource or research avenue was fruitful, share that information. These individuals invested time in you and are often sincerely interested to know what happens in your career.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- **Visit the “Student” section of www.smu.edu/career** to review additional information on: Informational Interviewing, Resume and Cover Letter Writing, and Job Search Strategies.
- Be sure to register in **MustangTRAK** by visiting <http://www.smusaddleup.com>. This is the job site where employers post internships and full-time opportunities specifically for SMU students and alumni.
- For all things career-related, feel free to **schedule an appointment** with a career counselor by calling 214-768-2266.

HEGI FAMILY CAREER DEVELOPMENT CENTER

200 Hughes-Trigg Student Center

214-768-2266 (phone)

214-768-4292 (fax)

Visit us anytime at www.smu.edu/career