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The Student Life Centre

The Art of Networking: A Guide to Building Connections that Count

St. James Building Room 119 · www.brescia.uwo.ca/campus_life/student-life/index.html

Table of Contents

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--------|
| 1. What is Networking? | page 3 |
| a. Why is it important? | page 3 |
| b. Finding Networking Opportunities | page 3 |
| 2. Networking Do's & Don'ts | page 4 |
| 3. Questions to Ask | page 5 |
| 4. Your 'Elevator Pitch' | page 6 |
| 5. Networking Barriers | page 7 |
| 6. References & Resources | page 9 |

What is Networking?

Networking is meeting and connecting with others to develop mutually beneficial relationships leading to discovery and sharing of opportunities. It is a skill and like any other skill, it requires practice to become good at it. Networking is about being genuinely curious in others—building relationships based on authenticity. It provides a forum for you to let others know about your skills, qualifications, strengths, and interests, and involves developing a broad set of connections that consist of people that can help you or refer you to others who can.

To effectively network, you need to understand what you can offer and where you fit within the interests and fields of those you want to connect to or from which you'd like to learn more. When it comes to your career development, networking expands your career knowledge and connections.

Why is it important?

A strong network is invaluable. Because only 5-20% of jobs are advertised, networking allows you to tap into the over 80% (!!) of opportunities that are found in the 'hidden job market'. The hidden job market is not a mysterious place with a secret code word only special people are privy to: it simply refers to jobs that are attained by word of mouth.

You never know where the connections are going to be, but they DO exist and networking puts you in the game! Once you understand the value of networking, you will begin to realize that it should DEFINITELY be part of your job search and career development strategy.

Finding Networking Opportunities

Technically, you can network always and everywhere! Consider your **informal network**—family; friends; peers/other students; classmates; others you meet and know through your involvement opportunities, student leadership teams, or volunteer roles.

Your **formal network** includes professors; current or previous employers; Brescia alumnae; individuals found in professional associations; those you meet at career fairs or conferences; attending networking events in your city or community; conducting informational interviews (See www.brescia.uwo.ca > Campus Life > Student Life > Career Resources for more information on 'Informational Interviews').

Make sure they know what you're studying, what you're interested in, and where you're hoping to find work or experience. Listen and be aware of what *they* need and offer to help!

Tips:

1. Make networking an ongoing part of your daily life
2. Treat any contact with respect, be professional even when that person is a friend
3. Remember names and faces
4. Be willing to help others
5. Be dependable and reliable

6. Strive to be more interested (in who they are and what they do) than interesting (about who you are and what you want)
7. Listen and retain information
8. Learn something from everyone you meet
9. Ask whether you can use your referral's name when you follow-up on the lead given to you by the referral
10. Always do what you say you are going to do
11. Go to as many opportunities as you can
12. Look for ways to increase your visibility
13. Be yourself
14. Have fun!
15. Do not expect immediate results

Networking Do's & Don'ts

Do's

Do...

1. **Act like the host at your own party:** Smile, be friendly and approach people, don't wait for them to approach you. Ask meaningful questions to learn more about the other person and actively listen to their response.
2. **Keep your interactions to 5 minutes:** Remember that other people may be waiting to talk as well. Always have a graceful exit strategy prepared—give them your business card, if appropriate; firmly shake their hand and thank them for their time.
3. **Make eye contact:** Show that you're interested even if they are not the most interesting person. If they're not your most interesting person, use them as your 'practice' person (i.e. to help you get your 'jitters' out asking questions before you approach someone whom you are more interested in talking to) 😊
4. **Bring your business cards:** If you would like someone else's business card, ensure that you offer yours first.
5. **Dress appropriately:** Treat a formal networking opportunity as a job interview and wear professional dress clothes.
6. **Manage your food and drink:** Always have one hand clean and free to shake hands.
7. **Make sure you follow up the next day with a quick email:** For any business cards received, thank your contact again for their time and reiterate something interesting they said that resonated with you, and state your interest in arranging a possible future informational interview with them. If you haven't heard back from your contact in approximately 6 weeks, email him/her again to request the informational interview again.
8. **Complete some research ahead of time:** Who is attending this networking event? Look them up and find out a bit about their organization, so that you are prepared to ask meaningful questions.
9. **Broaden your horizons:** Open yourself to the unexpected possibilities. Don't undervalue the importance of talking to someone you weren't intending to. You never know where a great connection could be made!

10. **Set a goal of how many people you want to connect with:** Push yourself to meet that goal.

Don'ts

Don't...

1. **Stand with all your friends:** In fact, stay away from them as much as possible—you can hang out with them after the event, this event is about you building your own contacts.
2. **Don't hand out your resume:** ...Unless you are specifically asked for it! This is not a job fair; it's a networking event meant to intentionally build connections and meet others. However, having copies of an updated resume neatly tucked away in a folder or portfolio is handy, just in case you are asked for it.
3. **Linger awkwardly:** Watch his/her body language for when it's time to wrap up or if there's a lull in the conversation. That's when you need to come up with another question to ask or move along!
4. **Don't be on your cell phone:** Turn off your phone so you're not inclined to text or take a call.
5. **Dominate the conversation:** The most important thing you can do is ask meaningful questions and listen carefully.

Questions to Ask

One of the most important things to remember at a networking event is to listen carefully and ask meaningful questions. In most cases, people love to talk about themselves; while you can capitalize on this and ask useful questions, it is equally as important to be an active listener so that you can remember what your contact told you after the networking opportunity. Remember to keep your questions clear and concise and don't monopolize the contact's time by asking too many questions at once.

Here are a few questions you could ask a contact at both a formal and informal networking event:

- What brings you here today? How did you hear about this opportunity?
- How did you get started in your career?
- What do you like best about what you do?
- What education would you recommend for someone wanting to enter the '_____' (e.g. marketing) field?
- Do you belong to any associations or memberships?
- Are there any particular experiences you would suggest for someone new to the field?
- What is your favourite part of your role?
- What are the most common job titles for a position like yours?
- From your experience, how have you seen the field change since you started?
- How do you see the field progressing in the future?
- What is a typical work day like?
- What are the toughest problems and decisions you handle?
- What do you wish you had known about your position/the field before you started?
- What do you see as the major issues/ trends in the field today?
- What books or journals would you recommend that I read?

Your ‘Elevator Pitch’

The ‘Elevator Pitch’ is a short summary statement that you can prepare and use to explain yourself, your goals and your passions to a potential career contact or future employer. Typically an ‘Elevator Pitch’ is shared with someone who does not know you very well, so you will want to be able to share your introduction quickly and concisely in a way that makes them want to know more about you.

‘Elevator Pitches’ can range from 20 seconds to a minute, and being able to deliver such a concise statement under pressure requires preparation and practice.

- A 30-second ‘Elevator Pitch’ for both formal and informal networking interactions could include:
 - Why you are there
 - What has made you interested in this area and why it is a good fit (education, work, volunteer experience, etc.)
 - What you are hoping to get out of this experience
 - Option: Any additional, relevant and positive information to introduce yourself
 - Option: Something that distinguishes you—a passion, a skill, something you’re proud of

Start Here: Three words...

What are three words that best describe you?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Consider Your 30-Second Elevator Pitch

When someone asks you, ‘Tell me a bit about yourself?’—what do you say? Create your ‘Elevator Pitch’ here:

Stuck? Try this tool → Harvard Business School, ‘Elevator Pitch’ Builder: <http://www.alumni.hbs.edu/careers/pitch/>

Networking Barriers

It's easy to be discouraged by the perceived barriers that you may feel exist when it comes to learning and practicing effective networking. The great thing about barriers is that any barrier can become an opportunity or an enabler when you re-frame it...and TRY!

Common Networking Barriers

1. **I don't have any contacts.**
You only need to know one person to get started.
2. **I don't like having other people solve my problems.**
Ask for advice and an opinion.
3. **It'll appear as if I'm begging.**
Tell, don't sell.
4. **I don't like to use people.**
Look for opportunities to give back down the road.
5. **I will owe too many favours.**
And others will owe you; it is give and take.
6. **I feel uncomfortable networking and lack confidence.**
Buddy up with someone and jump in.
7. **I don't know what to say.**
Ask other about themselves. Start with open-ended questions.
8. **I hate cold calls.**
Turn them into warm calls, by getting a referral.
9. **No one can help me- why should they?**
It is in people's nature to want to help others.
10. **It doesn't work.**
That is simply not true. 75-80% of opportunities are found by networking.
11. **I don't have enough time to network.**
Once connected, you just pick up the phone or send an email- no more research or reference checking.
12. **I'm shy.**
Ask others about themselves; buddy up with someone; approach one-on-one; try it out!
13. **I fear rejection.**
Don't take it personally; it isn't about you or maybe isn't a good fit for you or them. Move on to the next person.
14. **No one understands my real needs.**
It is your responsibility to articulate what your needs are. Know your goal; then state your purpose.

Changing Barriers into Enablers

My main barriers to networking effectively are:

- _____

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

To overcome these barriers and enable myself, I will take the following actions:

I will complete them in this time frame:

I will ask these people to help me:

References & Resources

Websites:

- University of Toronto, *Career Services*:
<http://www.careers.utoronto.ca/mycareer/findingjob/networking.aspx>
- University of British Columbia, *Centre for Student Involvement & Careers*:
<http://www.students.ubc.ca/careers/students/get-career-guidance/job-search-skills/networking/>
- Harvard Business School, *'Elevator Pitch' Builder*:
<http://www.alumni.hbs.edu/careers/pitch/>

Books:

- Carnegie, D. (1936). *How to win friends and influence people*. Pocket Books: USA.

Articles:

- Fontinelle, A (May, 2010). Four career networking tips that work. *Forbes*. Retrieved Mar 1, 2013 from <http://www.forbes.com/2010/05/25/career-networking-tips-personal-finance-network.html>.