

# Networking

What is “networking”?

“It’s not what you know, but who knows about you!” It’s a common cliché uttered often to those in search of a job. What the person offering that helpful advice is most likely referring to, is your need to establish a network of contacts. To date, networking is still the number one job-search method and accounts for about 80 percent of job offers. Networking is, however, something of an art. It requires some time and a little luck to meet the person holding the key to your dream job.

As defined by Merriam-Webster, networking is: *the exchange of information or services among individuals, groups or institutions; specifically: the cultivation of productive relationships for employment or business*

Networking is...

- something you do everyday
- a simple conversation
- expressing interest in another
- making a connection that may be mutually beneficial

Networking is not...

- building lifelong friendships
- something new or mysterious – no need to be nervous!

## Importance of Networking

Networking is not something you only do during your MBA experience. We hear from a number of business leaders – locally and nationally – who attribute a significant portion of their success to the network they have built. You need to continually challenge yourself to meet new people as you never know where that new

connection will lead.

Seattle is an extremely tight business community, and you will soon realize that you may be only a few people away from meeting someone like Richard Tait, Howard Schultz, Blake Nordstrom, or even Bill Gates. Networking takes on many different forms and many different paths, and it becomes your own personal process – what is most comfortable for you.

## 10 Golden Rules of Networking

**1. Be Prepared - Any Time, Any Place - Keep your business cards and copies of your resume with you all the time. You never know whom you might meet.**

**2. Talk with Your Personal Contacts First - Start with the people you know personally - friends, family, and professional contacts, such as clients, vendors, coworkers, professors, classmates and former bosses. Practice marketing yourself to those who are close to you before you try your new sales technique on new faces.**

**3. Begin contacting those people to whom your personal contacts referred you - Network your way to a hiring authority or “influence.” Initiate each conversation by stating how you received their name and work to establish a relationship by showing an interest in what they say, not just what they have to offer. Ask for 20-30 minutes of their time and stick to that time commitment.**

**4. Ask for Information - This approach is referred to as the “informational interview” because it is an opportunity to learn about industries, job opportunities and local busi-**

nesses. When you request the meeting, say you wish to talk with the contact about your career options. Your goal is to have a conversation that generates information, ideas, leads and referrals. You can be candid and open about your own career aspirations, and why you are interested in the person's industry/company/function. While you can safely assume your contact knows you want a job, since you are discussing careers, this is not the appropriate time to ask for one. If the contact likes you and can help you in some way, he/she will. Get permission to use his/her name with any referrals provided and always say thank you.

**5. Focus Your Conversations** - Use each conversation to get the most information possible. Give your contact a brief summary of your career objective, major strengths and accomplishments. Then ask specific questions that will provide you with helpful information. Get realistic feedback on your goals vs. qualifications and on your resume.

**6. Look for Opportunities to Reciprocate** - Offer something of value to those who are taking time to help you. Make your conversations two-way communication. As you ask questions and listen to answers, respond with helpful information of your own. Remember, your own network, knowledge and experience may benefit your contacts.

**7. Keep Your Promises** - Again, adhere to your 20-30 minute time commitment. If you promise to call back, do it. If the person is difficult to reach, keep trying. It is your responsibility to make connections happen.

**8. Stay in Touch** - Keep your contacts informed about the progress of your job search through brief phone calls or short, handwritten notes. Send a thank you letter within 24 hours after every informational interview. To keep the relationship beneficial for you and your contact, keep communication consistent. After you land your job or internship, thank those who helped you along the way, letting them know where you ended up. Such gestures allow you to maintain these relationships into the future.

**9. Professional Organizations** - Gathering information from people in the industry can be made easier by visiting or joining a local professional organization. Many members are eager to help job seekers and often know companies with open positions.

**10. Get a Mentor** - Find someone with experience in your field and build a relationship with them. Get their advice and use them as a sounding board for discussing your thoughts and ideas. Ask for an opportunity to shadow them for a day in order to get a better picture of what they do.

## Identifying Your Network

### The Foster MBA Network

One of the networks that you have accessible at your fingertips is the Foster MBA Network.

Q: Who makes up the Foster MBA Network?

A: You, your current classmates, the Evening MBAs, the TMMBAs, and the generations of Foster MBA Alumni who have preceded you.

Q: How do you access the Foster MBA Network?

A: Check out the MBA Program Student Directory (given out each Fall by the Program Office), use the ProNet feature on your Foster MBA Jobs account, get LinkedIn to the Foster MBA Program, attend recruiting/networking events which alumni participate in regularly, talk to your classmates in the MBA Lounge...the list goes on and on.

### Expanding Your Networking

Start with those you know...

If you're new to the whole idea of "networking," then start with people you know and work out from there.

### What connections/resources does the BCC Offer?

-Recruiter, Employer, Alumni Networking Events

- MBA Fall and Spring Forums
- Meet-the-Firms and Fireside Chats
- Mentor Program
- On-site employer events

-Connections to alumni and other business community members on a case-by-case basis

-The Foster MBA Jobs ProNet service

### Other Networking Resources

-Professional associations (i.e., American Marketing Association, NetImpact, etc.). You'll find links to their calendars of events at [www.iloveseattle.org](http://www.iloveseattle.org).

-UW Alumni Association's Husky Career Network (<http://www.washington.edu/alumni/careers/careerconnections/>)

-LinkedIn

-UW Husky Connect (available only to UW Alumni; can pay a fee as a current student)

### Informational Interviews

Informational interviewing does not mean asking for a job, or going on hands and knees to people for help. It also doesn't mean ignoring anybody that doesn't already have a job for you.

It does mean:

- Talking to people — lots of them
- Graciously requesting useful information from those willing and able to give it, whether they have a job for you or not
- Allowing people to get to know you, so that they can think of you when conditions for you are right

### **What Informational Interviewing Can and Should Do**

When done with attention and follow-through, informational interviewing yields four results:

- You learn more about the field you're in, or the field you're shifting to. Or, you learn more about the field in a given region.
- You develop a set of relationships, some of which will last through your entire career.
- You glean information that helps you make a decision about where you want to work.
- You find your way to a job or internship.

### **How to Prepare**

- Draft your resume, so you're clear about your accomplishments.
- Understand your criteria for a job or an internship.
- Have your elevator pitch clear in your mind. Know who you are, what you're good at, and where you're headed.
- Have a starting list of who you want to talk to, and be clear about why you've picked them. Be prepared to add to this list.
- Send your outreach email or letter to the people you want to talk to, and follow up by phone or email a week later. Don't expect a high response rate, but if you get no responses, check your email or letter for content and/or style. Or examine your industry or strategy to make sure your target companies make sense.

### **Tips for Success**

- Your discussion isn't an interview, but it is an interview situation. Dress as if it were an interview.
- The person you're talking to knows you're looking for a job without your saying anything about it. In your outreach email or letter, you will implicitly say you won't talk about your job search. And, most of the time, the people you want to talk to are trying to avoid being asked for jobs. So honor that commitment — don't ask for a job during your discussion.
- However, there are times when following this approach can come across as coy or otherwise inappropriate. If you can tell that someone is trying to sound you out about a job, it's okay to respond.
- Thoroughly research the company you're talking to, and come prepared with questions that will give shape and purpose to the discussion. Since the talk is happening at your request, your energy should drive it. As with a job interview, these questions should be at a level that demonstrate your strategic thinking, your insight, and the initiative you've taken to do your homework and set up the discussion.
- At the end of the discussion, it makes sense to say something like this:

"This has been tremendously helpful — it's terrific of you to take the time to talk to me. You've probably gotten a pretty good sense of who I am and where I hope to be headed—who do you think I should talk to next?"

Let the person advise you. You're likely to get a lot of good suggestions (and contacts) this way.

- As you walk out the door, it's okay to say something like this:

"Again, thanks so much for seeing me. It was

really helpful. Let me know if there's ever anything you think I could be helpful with — it would be great to work with you sometime."

- Send a thank-you note, whether handwritten, in lettermail form, or via email, within a few days. If you forget, do it anyway, as soon as you remember. In your thank-you note, say something like, "I hope I may take the liberty of keeping you informed about my progress."
- Keep the person informed! Every couple of months, send them a note or an email letting them know what's happening at your end. Occasionally, ask them to have a cup of coffee with you. Send them a holiday card. These things are all part of maintaining a business relationship that's less than a friendship, but more than an acquaintanceship.
- If you do a lot of informational interviewing to get a summer internship after your first year (highly recommended), maintain those relationships. Your search for a permanent job becomes much simpler if you do.
- Keep track of your contacts: who you've talked to, who you've followed up with, who has referred you to whom, and so on. As you talk to more people, your world will expand and will need attention.