



# Networking Guide

We have all heard the adage “It is not what you know but who you know”. When trying to get a job or internship, you may need both. **Networking** is the cultivation of productive relationships for employment or business, it is when you interact with other people to exchange information and develop contacts, especially to further one's career. This may happen during the course of your day- to- day activities, at internships, co-curricular activities, part- time jobs, volunteer activities, online, or at more formal networking events and professional development organizations.

### **Networking in Every-day Settings**

Networking at your internship, summer, or part- time job, is a great way to build connections. Of course, you need to be working your hardest while you are on the job/internship, but making connections with other people will help you as you move forward. (*See the SC Career Center for information about how to make the most of your internship*).

Smile and be approachable. Learn each person's name and their role within the organization. When you are new, ask questions and make notes. Learn about your co-workers and supervisors. Ask those people to introduce you to others within the company. Remembering names and personal anecdotes will help you connect.

Take advantage of any intern or employee groups or programs. If there is an after-work softball league or networking club, join it. If you are invited to anything...go to it! Ask if you can participate in group projects, and meetings. Do not eat lunch alone at your desk, get out and meet with people.

In a professional way, learn as much as you can about the people with whom you work. Be sure that they know who you are and what your career goals involve. However, do not overshare. Your co-workers do not need to know the details and anecdotes from your private life. Be sure to get the contact information of your new connections, before you leave the job or internship.

Never overlook your family and friends and classmates. Your next door neighbor, best friend's mother, or roommate's girlfriend may work somewhere you are interested in learning more about. Your career counselor, academic advisor, and professors will certainly know some alumni and contacts who might be willing to speak with you. Chances are, someone in your network is able to introduce you to people who could help you break into your industry. They may even be able to use an employee referral program to get your resume in front of hiring managers, however, you will never know if you don't approach them. One of the best ways to learn more about an organization is by conducting an informational interview.

An important thing to remember about all networking but especially in every-day settings is that networking is a two- way street. You may be the one who has a personal connection to someone one of your contact's would like to approach. It's important to be able to reciprocate the helping hand.

### **Informational Interviewing**

One of the best sources for gathering information about what's happening in an occupation or an industry is to talk to people working in the field. This process is called *informational* or *research interviewing*. An informational interview is an interview that **you** initiate - you ask the questions. The purpose is to obtain information, not to get a job.

#### **Prepare for the Interview**

Read all you can about the field prior to the interview. Decide what information you would like to obtain about the occupation/industry. Prepare a list of questions that you would like to have answered.

## **Identify People to Interview**

Start with lists of people you already know - friends, relatives, fellow students, present or former co-workers, supervisors, neighbors, etc. Professional organizations, organizational directories, and public speakers are also good resources. You may also call an organization and ask for the name of the person by job title. Be flexible about scheduling the interview. If a busy professional is willing to take the time to meet with you, make every effort to be available in accordance with their schedule.

## **Arrange the Interview**

Contact the person to schedule an interview by letter, telephone, email or through LinkedIn. You could also have a mutual contact arrange the meeting.

## **Conduct the Interview**

Dress appropriately, arrive on time, and be polite and professional. Refer to your list of prepared questions; stay on track, but allow for spontaneous discussion. Before leaving, ask your contact to suggest names of others who might be helpful to you and ask permission to use your contact's name when contacting these new contacts.

## **Follow- Up**

Immediately following the interview, record the information gathered. Be sure to send a thank-you note to your contact within one week of the interview.

## **20 QUESTIONS!**

Prepare a list of your own questions for your informational interview. Following are some sample questions:

1. On a typical day in this position, what do you do?
2. What training or education is required for this type of work?
3. What personal qualities or abilities are important to being successful in this job?
4. What part of this job do you find most satisfying?
5. What part of this job do you find the most challenging?
6. How did you get your job?
7. What opportunities for advancement are there in this field?
8. What entry-level jobs are best for learning as much as possible?
9. How do you see jobs in this field changing in the future?
10. Is there a demand for people in this occupation?
11. What special advice would you give a person entering this field?
12. What types of training do companies offer persons entering this field?
13. What are the basic prerequisites for jobs in this field?
14. Which professional journals and organizations would help me learn more about this field?
15. What do you think of the experience I've had so far in terms of entering this field?
16. From your perspective, what are the problems you see working in this field?
17. If you could do things all over again, would you choose the same path? Why? What would you change?
18. What do you think of my resume? Do you see any problem areas? How would you suggest I change it?
19. Who do you know that I should talk to next?
20. When I call him/her, may I use your name?

## **Conferences and Networking Events**

In addition to networking in every-day settings, you may want to network at professional conferences and specific networking events. Meetings that involve others from your career field will put you in contact with potential employers. Meetings that teach you new skills or keep you up- to- date can get you in touch with mentors and peers. Ask people already employed in the type of positions you hope to obtain which professional development or community involvement groups they recommend. Professional conferences or trainings can be either one day events or they may span over several days. Conferences generally have speakers, training, presentations, panels, and/or round table discussion sessions that relate to a specific field or topic. There will frequently be meals, networking events, and social activities built in to conferences. You may also choose to attend a stand-alone networking event.

## **Before attending a conference or networking event:**

- If you are a student, see if they are looking for student volunteers. If so, volunteer to help out in an area where you will have the opportunity to meet many attendees. You will get to interact with many new people and having a specific task can help cut down on feeling of nervousness. You might even get some of your registration fee waived.
- If you are at a conference or an event that lasts across several days, try to stay at the hotel that is hosting the conference. You may be able to get the “conference rate” and you will not have to waste time commuting.
- Set some goals for the networking event. Who do you want to meet? What do you want to learn?
- Dress for the occasion. For most events “business attire” is expected. When in doubt go up a notch. This is specific to each career field, so ask someone if you’re not sure. There may be some casual portions to the program, look at the schedule to determine what to pack.
- Bring a networking kit with a pen, breath mints, and business cards. If you do not already have business cards, you can make some at no cost in the SC Career Center.
- Come prepared with three neutral questions. For example, “Are you from the area?” or “What do you do?” (*There is a list of sample questions in this packet*).
- Research ahead of time and discover who you might want to try to meet. Find out who the presenters are going to be. Research the other attendees; look into who they are, where they work, and what they do.
- Find out who is on the executive board and subcommittees of the event. Learn about them before the event and introduce yourself to them. These are the people who know everyone else and can introduce you to others.
- Consider emailing people who you want to meet. Introduce yourself to key people and let them know that you look forward to hearing their presentations and meeting them in person.
- If there are keynote speakers or presenters, consider following them on Twitter, before the conference. This will help you learn more about them and maybe allow you to formulate some specific questions.
- Find out if the event and/ or organization has an official Twitter hashtag and/or LinkedIn or Facebook groups. Join the LinkedIn group. If other people are excited about the event and are tweeting about it, you should be able to find them if they’re using the hashtag. Just do a Twitter search for the hashtag to find other people talking about the event.
- Turn off your phone! There is no way to fix a bad first impression. You cannot recover from letting your cell phone interrupt the program.

## **During a session or presentation:**

Before the event starts, talk to the people sitting next to you. When you walk into a seminar, take the time before the presentation begins to say hello to the people seated around you.

You might want to introduce yourself to the speaker. Frequently before the session starts, the speaker is standing around waiting for the session to begin. If they are not busy talking to others, sorting through their presentations, or trying to set-up A/V equipment this might be a good time to introduce yourself and let them

know how much you are looking forward to their presentation. After the session, most other people will take the chance to meet the speaker.

Take advantage of Q & A portions of the program to demonstrate your knowledge and or learn more by asking a relevant question. Be respectful of the presenter. Avoid questions that are overly political or confrontational or that the person you're asking is unlikely to be able to answer.

- Stand up. This will allow the person who's answering your question to see you and talk to you directly. It will also help your voice to carry.
- Introduce yourself – give your name and if it's not obvious from the context, your school or employer.
- Ensure you ask your question loudly enough to be heard both by the person you're addressing it to and people at the back of the room.

If you, for any reason, are going to have to leave the room during the presentation, be sure to apologize and explain to the presenter before the start of the program. Do not simply get up and walk out.

If you did not get to meet the presenter before the program, you might want to remain for a few minutes after the program and participate in the follow-up discussions

### **During a networking event:**

*You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you. - Dale Carnegie*

- When attending a networking event, arrive early. You'll feel more comfortable as the crowd builds and this can be especially useful if you tend to be shy with new people. That way a cluster of conversation builds up around you and you don't face the challenge of working your way into other clusters like you do if you arrive late.
- When you arrive at the event take a moment to look at the nametag table. Get a sense of who else is coming to the event and let that help shape your networking strategy.
- Wear the nametag and place it on your right lapel. People will be able to follow up your arm to read it when you shake hands.
- It's not easy to talk to strangers. It takes some practice to learn to unlearn shyness and become comfortable chatting with strangers.
- Put your technology away. Do not run to your phone, tablet, or laptop at every break. When you are working on electronics you send the message that you are unapproachable because you are busy. Utilize the time on breaks to converse with others.
- Smile and introduce yourself to the people who make eye contact.
- Have a firm handshake: Two pumps and let go. Be the first to extend your hand. "It's an old protocol, a sign that you're eager to interact."
- Make sure to shake hands good-bye.
- Look like you are having fun. No one wants to try to start a conversation with someone who looks unhappy or overly stressed out.

- Build rapport. Maintain eye contact, appropriate personal space, and smile. Match the speed and tone of voice of the person with whom you are speaking. Keep your body language congruent. Don't shake your head while seeking positive response.
- If you are attending with a friend or colleague, do not sit with or stand with this person for long. It is more effective (although less comfortable) to network separately.
- If you exchange business cards with someone, write down the date of the meeting and what the event was on the back of the card. Out of sight; jot down a couple of notes about your conversation.
- Take advantage of all of the networking opportunities. You should absolutely attend the sessions and presentations, however some of the best networking at a conference takes place during the less formal sessions. Sit with new people at the meals. Instead of heading back to your room, attend any mixers, parties, or cocktail hours.
- If you're especially active on social media, you can tweet or post about the conference while you're still there. Tag people you've met and make positive comments about panels and the conference itself.
- Use two pockets: One for business cards coming in, the other for your business cards to hand out. That way you will not be fumbling with them and trying to sort through to find yours.
- Avoid alcohol. If you must drink limit your consumption to one alcoholic beverage per event. Always keep your drink in your left hand. Otherwise your handshake will feel clammy.
- Also stay late. Networking occurs before and after the meeting.

### ***Where to stand:***

If you are seated at a table, go around the table and introduce yourself to everyone when you sit down.

Lots of networking takes place around the food table but don't arrive hungry. Networking is not about the food. It's difficult to shake hands, exchange business cards, and eat all at the same time. Try to hold your plate or glass in your left hand, this leaves your right hand free to shake hands. However, standing near the food table is a great place to meet people.

You can also stand near the entrance door to the event. Standing near the entrance gives you access to new people who are just arriving. Other people are also nervous when they first go into a room of people they don't know. A friendly smile goes a long way and it might be all you need to start a conversation with someone. Another added benefit is people have a greater tendency to remember the first and last people they meet.

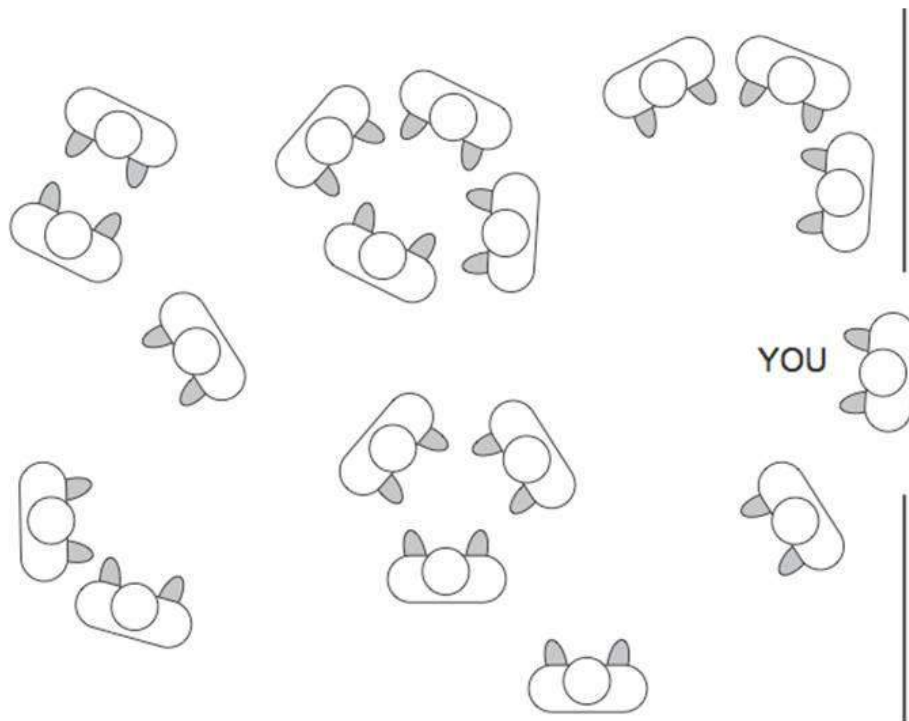
### ***How to approach people:***

If you have to approach people in a networking setting, survey the landscape and create a plan for how to work the room. It is as easy as 1-2-3 because people tend to **congregate in groups of ones, twos, and threes.**

1. Approach the "ones" first. Look for people standing alone. These people are often found around the sides of the room. Approach them and ask if you can join them, most people will be grateful and appreciate your approach. It would be good networking etiquette, if when you finish speaking with them you could help introduce them to someone else to facilitate additional networking.

2. Look for Twos Standing in a V- Formation—when two people are standing in an open V-Formation, they are usually open to others joining their discussion. Avoid people standing directly across from each other; this indicates they are engaged in a closed conversation.
3. Use the O or U-Rule for groups of three or more—a group of people standing in a circle is the hardest to join. Look for groups arranged in a U-formation.
4. Use the ballroom waltz trick for joining a closed group —follow this advice for "breaking in" to talk to someone you know. If you approach a group in mid conversation, join them quietly, listen to their conversation and wait either until they invite you to join them or there is a suitable pause. Approach the person who was speaking to and ask permission from her or him or to join the conversation, introduce yourself and then turn the conversation back to the original topic by asking a related question “Hi I am XXX from XXX, I couldn’t help but hear you mention XXX, do you know more about that subject?”

## Where do I start?



From “*Networking Like a Pro*” by Dr. Ivan Misner

### ***What to say and how to say it:***

*“I have a problem meeting people because if I know what to say, I don’t know when to say it, and if I know when to speak, I never know what to say. To me, networking events are just giant meteorological conferences where I approach everyone as if they are a weatherman as I say, “So, what do you think about this crazy weather we’re having?” — Jarod Kintz, Author*

Practice small talk. Avoid conversations about personal stuff, sex, religion, and politics. Listen more and talk less. Ask people questions and get them talking about themselves and their businesses. Find out what they are struggling with or what they are celebrating.

- Try a backwards introduction by describing yourself before you give your name. People will remember you better. ***“Hi, I am a Math major from Springfield College seeking an internship. My name is Mike Smith.”***
- Develop and practice an elevator pitch or 15 second commercial which is a short introduction of your career skills, experience, and interests. It's designed to help you briefly communicate any time you meet a potential employer, client, or contact. The term "elevator pitch" reflects the idea that it should be possible to deliver your personal self-marketing summary in the time span of an elevator ride. Keep your commercial simple and brief. Always include who you are, what you want to do, and why it matters (or what the employer/client will get out of it). Finish with a question designed to start a conversation.

***Sample Elevator Pitch:***

***“Hi, I am a senior majoring and I will be finishing up my Marketing degree at Springfield College. I had the opportunity to do an internship with XXXX Marketing Firm this past semester and I learned that my strong organization skills and excellent customer service background combined with the marketing techniques and strategies I learned through my coursework let me help clients plan and implement really successful fundraising events. I am looking to find a full time position in the field for May when I graduate. How did you get started in your career and do you have any advice for me? My name is Jane Humanics.”***

- Practice what you're going to say at home, so you know how long it takes and you make sure to include all pertinent information. However, try not to sound rehearsed when you give your spiel.
- If you plan to attend a networking event for one hour, try to make three to five solid contacts. The conversation is not always going to be stellar with every person you meet. Know when to say “it was nice meeting you” and move on. If you become glued to the first person you started talking to, the event won't be as successful for you as it could be. You should talk to someone as long as the conversation lasts, but you do not want to monopolize them. Usually each conversation lasts for three to five minutes, eight minutes maximum.
- The person with whom you're speaking is worthy of your full attention. Stay focused! Glancing sideways to see who else is around or looking at your phone is off-putting and unprofessional.
- Pay attention to what the other person says, too, instead of being self-conscious about how you came across. Don't simply nod your head while you wait for your next turn to talk.
- Do not use slang, profane, or vulgar language. Do not air problems or talk negatively about anyone or anything. Do not share anything too personal. Do not lie or name-drop.
- Introduce people to each other as they join the conversation.
- Learn how to excuse yourself gracefully. There will be times when you are speaking to someone with whom you do not wish to be connected. Alternatively, you might start to realize that the other person does not appear interested in talking with you. In either case, if your agendas do not synch, simply excuse yourself politely, thank the person for his or her time, and continue your networking with other conference members.
- Networking is a two- way street. Listen for how you can help others. If you are nervous don't focus on yourself, think about how you can help solve someone else's problem.
- Also, ask for help. Others are there to network as well and might have just the contact for you.
- Remember, you're not there to close deals or get a job. You're there to get the right to follow-up with a phone call or a meeting over coffee. Even one contact like that makes the whole day worthwhile.



## **After the event:**

- Send a thank you card or email to everyone with whom you had a positive communication. If you make a solid networking contact, follow-up immediately by email to show you have business acumen, but also follow-up with a handwritten thank you note to demonstrate grace and manners.
- Take advantage of social media. In addition to emailing, connect with people on LinkedIn and Twitter as a way to keep in touch. These mediums are important networking tools, they help people stay connected. Send a short message with your connection request reminding the person who you are and stating how nice it was to meet with him or her. (*See the SC Career Center for Guide to Creating and Utilizing LinkedIn*).
- People are not part of your network until you have a relationship with them. Some of those you meet you will want to stay connected with through email and regular mail. Others you want to make an appointment with to talk to them either by phone or in person.
- If the person emails you, email back. Don't drop a connection a few days after the conference, because anything can happen. Even if the person doesn't immediately give you a lead on a new job, he or she might do so down the line. Networking is about sharing who you are and what skills you offer to the world, and if you're good at keeping in touch, people will remember you when it counts.
- Consider doing your own part to advance your relationship with a connection you've made. If you see an opportunity to actually start working with the person, take things to the next level by asking them out for coffee or lunch, or asking for an informational interview.
- Once you decide on a group to join, become an active member so others will get to know you. Volunteer to join committees. Meeting someone once is just the beginning. You want to cultivate deeper relationships.
- Find excuses to be in touch. Send congratulations to people who you know when they are in the press.
- If anyone you met calls on you for help or information, give it. You never know when someone new in the field might be in the position to help you one day.
- Make sure your outgoing voice-mail and email address are professional and contain your name.
- Make it easy for people to reach you. Don't rapid-fire a phone number or email address onto your contact's voice-mail. Always leave your contact information. Don't say "You have my number." Then while you are providing your contact information you can write it down yourself too, this will help you pace your message.
- Avoid 911 networking. Don't only call your contacts when you need something, build relationships before you need them.
- Hang around the right people. These people will change as you move through your life and career.

### **Ways to start a conversation in any setting:**

Any question about the season. i.e. – I still can't believe it is spring; did you get a lot of snow this year?

A question about the food, i.e. – Have you tried the stuffed mushrooms they are great?

A question about traffic, i.e. – Did you get stuck in that mess on I-90 this morning?

A question about the weather i.e. - Is it wet enough for you? I thought I might need a boat this morning.

So, what brought you here today?

Where are you from?

What do you do?

How's your day going?

Are you getting away this summer?

Are you working on any charity initiatives?

I like your necklace. *Keep compliments innocuous, this is not the setting to be flirty or inappropriate.*

A question about current events. i.e. - So are you looking forward to the new casino?

### **Ways to start a conversation at a networking event:**

*Any of the strategies above and.....*

Ask or comment about the information on the person's name badge.

How long have you been with XXXX Company?

Where were you before you came to XXXX Company?

What a beautiful venue. Have you been here before?

How did you get involved in...?

What do you love/enjoy most about what you do?

Who has been most influential in your career/work life? How did they help you?

What was the most meaningful bit of career advice ever given to you? Who gave it? How has it helped you?

What do you see as the coming trends in your profession?

What are the biggest challenges affecting your field or company?

What's keeping you busy when you're not at events like this or at work?

What books do you read or organizations do you belong to in order to stay up to date in your field?

Is there anyone else you can suggest speaking with to learn more about your field or company?

Who are you trying to connect with?

### **Ways to start a conversation at a conference:**

*Any of the strategies above and.....*

Comment about the last speaker.

What sessions are you looking forward to attending?

What have been your favorite sessions so far?

What are you hoping to learn about at this event/conference?

What other conferences are you planning to attend this year?