

Networking & Informational Interviewing

Tips & Strategies



**CAREER AND
PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT CENTER**

Networking is about building relationships that provide an opportunity to learn from others' experience, explore career options, hone interview techniques, and potentially obtain job search leads. Networking is **NOT** about asking for a job.

NETWORKING is consistently found to be the most effective job searching strategy.

NETWORKING STRATEGIES

- **Know what you're after.** It's important to have a goal in mind when networking. Brainstorm about your [primary strengths and interests](#). It's important to be clear, concise, and confident when speaking with a contact.
- **Start with your personal contacts.** Think broadly about who is already in your network - friends, relatives, faculty, church members, internship or employment supervisors, coaches, your roommates' parents - and start there.
- **Be willing to connect with all types of people** – even if their career path seems unrelated to your interests. You never know who someone is connected to, and how their connections might impact you.
- **Keep a record of the people you meet.** Immediately after you make a new contact, write down their information: name, title, company, email/phone, referral sources, date of contact, and a few notes about your conversation.
- **Learn to ask for referrals.** Ask the people around you if they know someone in the fields that interest you. You might be surprised what you can find when others share their contacts.
- **Attend events that promote networking/relationship-building.** Examples include Mocktails, the annual Career Expo, *Into the City* career immersion programs, Pizza with Professionals, professional conferences, alumni career panels, and so on. Try to get connected with a professional association in your field. Read on for advice and tips on how to navigate networking events.

If you really want to know what it is like to work in a specific job, field or industry, you should talk to someone actually working in that specific job, field or industry and get a first-hand perspective.

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW STRATEGIES & OBJECTIVES

An informational interview provides you with the opportunity to speak with someone working in a job, field or industry you are considering for your career. Informational interviews are great ways to get the inside scoop on career paths you are considering, develop your network of professional contacts, and get advice that will help you make better career decisions.

1. **Gather information** about a job or career area you are considering, so that you can make a sound decision as to whether or not you wish to pursue that career path;
2. **Seek advice** regarding how you can best prepare to enter or advance in this field/profession;
3. **Ask your interviewee for assistance** entering or advancing in the field/profession after you have determined that you actually wish to do so; and
4. **Request referrals** from the interviewee to others in the field/profession that might be valuable contacts for you



NETWORKING & INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING ETIQUETTE

- **Avoid asking for a job.** Instead, focus on gathering information.
- **Always send a thank-you note.** After a meeting or phone conversation, send a thank-you note to that person for taking time to share information with you. A professional card or email is appropriate.
- **Respect their time.** When requesting a meeting or phone call with a prospective network, let them know how much time you plan to take - 20 minutes, 30 minutes.
- **Stay positive.** Avoid any negativity when talking about people, past experiences, or what you have to offer.
- **Be professional.** When emailing or phoning, be mindful of your tone of voice and writing skills. Avoid slang, and proof for grammatical errors.

NAVIGATING A NETWORKING EVENT

Many types of organizations conduct networking events for employees, volunteers, donors, clients, etc. These events are typically held at functions such as professional conferences, political campaigns, fundraisers, and recognition dinners.

- It's typically not recommended that you bring a resume to a networking reception; however it is encouraged that you create [professional networking cards](#) to hand out to any contacts you meet.
- Try to **talk to a variety of individuals** at networking events. Keep in mind that people from all stages and walks of life can provide helpful advice, so do not simply stay with your friends or converse with the same person all night. Make your way around the room, trying to engage in conversation with as many people as possible, while focusing on quality dialogue.
- Extend a **firm handshake**, maintain eye contact, and smile.
- A **polished appearance** will help you make a positive first impression. Dress neatly and professionally. Do not overdo makeup, jewelry, or fragrance.
- **Place your nametag on the right.** When shaking hands, this allows the eye of the person you are greeting to easily follow your right arm up to your nametag.
- Hold your **food OR drink** in your left hand, so that you are free to shake hands with your right hand. Don't try to balance food and drink at the same time.
- If possible, **find out before the event who will be in attendance.** This will enable you to do some **research** on the people you may come in contact with and organizations they represent, so that you can intelligently enter into a discussion with them.
- When you are **ready to leave a discussion**, simply excuse yourself by saying something like, "Thank you for your time. I enjoyed meeting you and hope we have the chance to connect again. I hope you enjoy the rest of your evening." This is also a perfect opportunity to hand out your **professional networking card**.

NETWORKING THROUGH LINKEDIN

Utilize LinkedIn to connect professionally with others in your field of interest, join professional groups, follow companies, and search for jobs.

- Use this [LinkedIn Profile Checklist](#) to build your profile
- Navigate to the [Messiah University](#) page on LinkedIn – and explore "[Alumni](#)" to make potential connections.



NETWORKING & INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW SAMPLES

I. SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN NETWORKING & INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING:

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- What was your major in college?
- What was your career/vocational journey like once you graduated from college?
- How did you prepare for entry into your profession?
- How did you locate and secure your current job?
- What specific degree or experience is necessary for this kind of work?
- If you were to redesign your college experience, what would you do differently?

B. CURRENT ROLE INFORMATION

- What is a typical work day like for you? What are some common tasks throughout the day?
- Do you have opportunities for a varied schedule, such as telecommuting or job sharing?
- What are the interesting aspects of your job? What are some difficulties and frustrations?
- What are the most significant changes facing your field/organization?
- What are the salary ranges for various levels in this field? What is the job outlook in this field?

C. YOUR INTEREST IN THE FIELD

- What experiences would you recommend I have (coursework, internship, volunteer, study abroad, campus involvement, etc.) to prepare for a job in this field?
- What does it take (personality traits, strengths, competencies, experiences) to be successful in this field?
- What do I need to have on my resume to be considered for employment in this field?
- Can you recommend resources that offer helpful information about the field?
- What are some related occupations that I might investigate?
- What professional organizations would you recommend? Publications to read?
- What specific advice would you give a person entering the field?

D. GOOD FINISHING QUESTIONS

- Thank you for your advice about <subject>. If I would like to learn more about <subject>, whom else would you suggest I contact? May I tell them you referred me to them?
- Can you tell me a little about how your company uses interns?
- If I wanted to apply for an internship with your firm, how and when should I apply? Would you be willing to introduce me to the person in charge of interns?
- What are the near-term job opportunities with your company?
- How can I best position myself to compete for these opportunities?

II. SCRIPT FOR INITIAL EMAIL CONTACT:

Dear Ms. Mitchell,

I obtained your name and contact information from my academic advisor. Currently, I am a junior Psychology major at Messiah University. I am interested in learning more about the art therapy profession, your organization, and about your career path.

I would greatly appreciate an opportunity to talk with you about your experience and advice, if you are able to find 20-30 minutes in your schedule to talk with me. Thank you in advance for your time. You can reach me at 717.555.5555 or MollyS@messiah.edu.

*Sincerely,
Molly Sanders*

FOLLOWING UP

A key ingredient to effective networking is proper follow up. When possible, obtain a business card or jot down contact information so that you can send a thank you note or email to your new contacts. After a meeting or a phone conversation, send a thank-you (within 2 business days) to that person for taking time to share information with you. Be sure to reference any noteworthy items which you discussed. If appropriate, you can even ask for an additional meeting to further any conversation or request an informational interview. Also be sure to utilize **LinkedIn** to connect with your new contacts.

