

There is something in the old saying, “It’s not what you know but who you know.” Many students will land their first job through their network of contacts, so the power of networking should not be underestimated. A networking meeting can take the form of a casual dinner party conversation or that of a formal appointment with a company representative. A great way to network is to conduct informational interviews to learn more about a field. You could also attend Career Fairs to make initial contacts with recruiters.

In addition to making referrals to hiring managers and supervisors on your behalf, your network can help you obtain information about certain companies and link you to contacts who may work in the very company you are interested in. They can also assist you in cover letter and resume development as well. Here are a few tips for successful networking:

## 4 Easy Steps to Building your Network from the [campuscareercoach.com](http://campuscareercoach.com)

### 1. Identify who you know.

Try to come up with a list of at least 15 people you would consider “strong contacts” - people who know you and whom you believe would be willing to offer you advice and assistance.

Start with these 15 personal contacts. If each of those 15 contacts introduces you to three additional people you will have 45 contacts. If each of those 45 contacts introduces you to three additional people, you will have 135 contacts. And, if each of those 135 contacts introduces you to three additional people, you will have 405 total contacts.

Okay, so the process isn’t quite that mathematically clean, but you get the picture: People who know you know lots of other people, too; many of whom might be valuable contacts for you if you can connect with them. Sociologist Mark Granovetter calls this the “strength of weak ties.” Your closest friends and family are your strong ties (people you know and who know you very well). Your acquaintances, and other friends and colleagues of your friends and your family are your weak ties (people you don’t know and who don’t know you, but who know people you know and might be working in fields or companies that interest you

For example:

- Your best friend (a strong tie) doesn’t work for a company you are targeting, but your best friend’s next door neighbor (a weak tie) does. If your friend introduces you to the neighbor, you will have a contact in that company.

As you can see, networking is a relationship-building process. It takes time, energy and attention, and it is an essential part of your search for employment.

### 2. Connecting with those you know and those you want to know

There are many ways to connect with those you know and those you want to know, including using social media, traditional media, and good, old-fashioned person-to-person contact!

**Using Social Media:** You are very likely connected to most of your Strong Ties via some form of social media (Facebook, Google+, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.), which means that you are also connected to your Weak Ties through these same social media. For professional purposes, we recommend connecting with contacts via professional social media like LinkedIn.

**Join the LinkedIn groups** for alumni of your college or university, members and alumni of your fraternity or sorority, relevant professional organizations, etc. There are thousands of groups on LinkedIn. Join those that are closely aligned with your professional interest and see who you might find in these groups.

**Follow recruiters and other industry-specific professionals on Twitter.** Many recruiters use Twitter to promote job and internship opportunities, recruit candidates and build general awareness of their companies and employment opportunities.

**Subscribe to blogs that are relevant to your job search and/or professional interests.** The possibilities to connect that exist in social media are endless. You just have to pursue them. But, social media is not the “end all-be all” solution for networking and professional relationship building. Sometimes going “old school” and using more traditional media is the right way to go.

**Using Traditional Media:** The telephone, email and postal mail are also still good ways to connect and communicate with people. Don’t hesitate to pick up the phone and call (even if it’s a cold call!), send a targeted email, or deliver materials by postal mail or in person if the circumstances warrant. It is easy to hide behind the curtain of social media rather than reach out with a more personal effort. Sometimes that personal effort means being there “in person.”

**In person:** People help people and people hire people, so the more face time you can get with people who can assist you the better! Be ready with a good firm handshake; look them square in the eyes with confidence and be ready to engage them in conversation. Initiating conversation, particularly to people you do not know personally, can be unnerving. The only way to beat those nerves: Practice, practice, practice!

The best way to start leveraging your contacts is to engage them in conversation – in person, on the phone, via email, or via social media. The only way to engage them in conversation is to ask good questions – in person, on the phone, via email, or via social media.

### **3. Ask good questions**

Your professional networking contacts will be far more valuable to you if you tell them how they can help. The more information you can provide them about what you want and what you offer, the better able they will be to refer you to employers and other contacts that might be of assistance.

If you want help, ask questions your contacts will be able to answer. The more specific your questions/ requests, the easier it will be for your contacts to know if they can help.

**You cannot assume that your networking contacts know what you want.** You need to provide them with that information so that they can help you in your job search.

The following are some good sample conversation starters/information gathering questions:

- What skills/qualities/experience do you look for in entry-level candidates?
- How do people get started in your industry/field/profession?
- Would you be willing to look at my resume and tell me what you think?
- What advice do you have for someone trying to get started in [field/profession]?
- What are the most common mistakes you see job seekers make in pursuing employment in this industry?
- What challenges do you think I will face trying to pursue a career in [field/profession]?
- What tools/resources do you suggest I use in my search for employment?

### **4. Maintain your network**

Remember to thank those who have helped you and maintain your network even after you are employed