

NETWORKING

It is estimated that around 70% of jobs are not advertised. Networking is one of the most valuable and powerful strategies a job seeker can employ to access these 'hidden' jobs. Networking involves simply identifying and making contact with people and organisations to assist your job search. It is a two way process – you should look for ways to help those who help you.

WHO TO NETWORK WITH

Everyone you know is a potentially valuable contact. If you think about all the people YOU know, then add all the people THEY know....you start to see that there are many people who could assist you.

Begin by listing:

- friends and acquaintances
- neighbours
- fellow students
- work colleagues – past and present
- sporting and other mutual interest contacts
- teachers, tutors and lecturers.

The list will grow once you start talking to people.

GROW YOUR NETWORK

- Join a professional association and attend professional development seminars, discussion forums and information evenings. Many have student chapters on campus.
- Attend conferences, workshops and exhibitions relevant to your chosen industry.
- Join your alumni and maintain contact with your fellow students.
- Do voluntary, temporary or casual work – wherever you will meet people.

PREPARE TO NETWORK

The aim of networking is to gather information and ideas about jobs, organisations and employment trends and to meet people who may be in a position to hire you, alert you to vacancies or provide you with referrals to other contacts. It always involves you communicating with someone about yourself and your needs.

- Know and be ready to discuss your skills, interests and career aspirations.
- Practise introducing yourself and being an attentive listener.
- Before meeting with a new contact, research their organisation.
- Prepare some questions to ask.

SOME AREAS OF INTEREST TO DISCUSS MAY INCLUDE:

- current trends in the industry
- the culture of the organisation
- career structure/ opportunities in the profession/ company
- skills valued by the employer
- where your skills might contribute to the company
- ways of getting into the profession/ company
- other contacts that may be useful
- how he/ she broke into the field
- professional publications that might be useful to read
- companies in the field that are expanding.

BUSINESS CARDS

Even if you don't have a job, you need a business card. It should include your:

- name
- contact address
- telephone and email
- qualifications

Keep the cards you are given and write some relevant information about the contact on the back (later!) Compile a file and follow up these contacts.

SKILLS FOR SUCCESSFUL NETWORKING

You need the ability to:

- leave your comfort zone
- initiate introductions
- converse with strangers
- use open questions
- request and accept feedback
- follow up leads, ask for assistance
- be persistent (don't give up!)
- be enthusiastic – show people how determined you are to succeed
- be organised

NETWORKING VIA THE INTERNET

The internet is increasingly being used as a networking tool. Sites such as LinkedIn are set up to facilitate networking for professional purposes. However many students have their profile on a social networking site such as MySpace or FaceBook. Be aware that many employers are viewing these to inform their impression of potential recruits. Take care that the information you provide will only enhance their opinion of you.