

How to Build and Maintain a Professional Network

Many people talk about “networking”, but what do they really mean? In Career Services, we are referring to the process of connecting with people in your profession to develop positive relationships.

What can these “contacts” do for you? The goal is simple: people within a profession are the first to hear about job openings, firms that are growing and trends in the industry. Your network can help you secure your first job; advise you in how to advance; keep you current on the latest trends; successfully job hunt at any stage in your career. Of course, at some point you in turn will become an important component of someone else’s network.

Some architectural firms can receive as many as 200 resumes each week. How can you distinguish yourself among the crowd? **Always** mention a personal connection to the firm (if you have one.) Include phrases in your cover letter such as “Ms. Ponce de Leon suggested that I contact you...” Reach out to alumni/ae who are employed by firms of interest to you. Talk to faculty members who may suggest additional contacts. This, in a nutshell, is the best way to utilize networking as an effective job search tool.

At any given time, about 80% of all available jobs are not posted in the classifieds or on job boards, says BH Careers International, a New York career-management firm. An astonishing 60% of the people surveyed by BH said they got their last job by networking.

Here are 9 tips to help you build your own professional network of contacts:

1. Prepare an "elevator speech." Write a summary of what you want people to know about you that can be delivered in less than 30 seconds. Be upbeat and succinct: who you are, what you do, what you're looking for.

GSD students have several opportunities throughout the academic year to meet alumni/ae at career events. Since you have only one chance to make a first impression, practice your elevator speech in front of a mirror, and then on friends, before taking it to a networking event.

2. Use your existing ties. Begin by tapping existing contacts, including faculty, friends, family and ex-colleagues. Don't overlook the importance of connecting with GSD alumni/ae. Visit: <http://www.haa.harvard.edu/> to find alumni/ae in your field.

Spread the word that you're looking for a specific type of job and ask for names of contacts who may be able to offer advice. Set up face-to-face meetings. Be sure to ask every person you meet for two or three more referrals. ("Do you know anyone else who might be helpful for me to meet? Can I use your name?" can be effective questions.)

3. Target trade groups. Join the dominant trade or industry group in your area (e.g. AIA, ASLA, APA, and BSA.) Consider volunteering on one of the group's committees to meet members.

4. Show interest in others. Career experts say the secret in forging a strong connection is to take an interest in the other person. Ask questions and encourage your contacts to talk about themselves and their business experience. Try to listen as much as possible rather than dominating the conversation.

5. Don't ask for a job. Instead, seek advice. People are more likely to be generous with their time if you ask for their counsel. If you seem qualified for an opening, they'll refer you to the right person to set up an interview.

6. Build relationships. Strangers won't put their reputations on the line for you. Build ties with a new contact before asking for help. Take the time to have a face to face meeting and follow up with a thank you note.

7. Don't be selfish. Remember networking is a two-way street. If you see an article of interest to one of your contacts, send a copy to him or her with a personal note.

8. Follow through. It is very important to write a proper thank-you note to your new contacts. In many cases, you can e-mail it, but don't assume the content is any less important than in snail mail. Update the other person on how your meeting went with someone he or she referred you to.

9. Maintain your network. Cultivate ties even when you aren't job hunting. Remember, the majority of jobs go unpublished, so you may hear of an exciting opportunity.

Adapted from:

"Experts Offer Their Tips for Fruitful Networking" by Stacey L. Bradford, [The Wall Street Journal Online](#), 2005.

"Why Networking Is Still The Best Way to Job Hunt" by Eileen P. Gunn, [The Wall Street Journal Online](#), 2005.

Check the following books in the GSD Career Office for more information:

"Networking Magic" by Rick Frishman, Jill Lubin and Mark Steisel, Adams Media, 2005

"Creating Women's Networks" by Catalyst, Jossey Bass, 1999