

CENTER FOR CREATIVITY & CAREERS

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Networking Basics

What is Networking?

Networking is meeting people, getting to know them, allowing them to get to know you, and hopefully building lasting connections that may or may not result in professional or developmental opportunities. Those who are good at networking understand that there is give and take. Meeting professionals in your field of interest will allow you to hear first-hand information about what that career is like. Network in order to:

- Explore careers, an industry or an organization
- Prepare for an interview
- Learn about additional schooling, potential internship or job opportunities

Preparation

1. Have a Goal

Ask yourself, “why am I going?” Know what you want to discuss or learn. Come up with two outcomes you hope to get out of the event—say, meeting three new people or learning more about two different topics. Be prepared to discuss what you want others to know about you. Make sure you are comfortable speaking about yourself in a positive manner.

2. Dress to Impress

Ask the event organizers for the dress code. Follow the dress code, but pay attention to being put together and organized. If you are unsure, dress up. Pick something that makes you feel good—a great dress or those new shoes you’ve been wanting to wear will help you exude confidence in what can be an uncomfortable setting.

3. Bring Business Cards

Contact the Center for Creativity and Careers if you’d like us to make business cards for you. Include your full name, cell phone #, email address, expected graduation year, major(s), LinkedIn profile link (if you have one), and career interest areas.

o-career@coe.edu or 319-399-8581

4. Find out Who Will be Attending

Do some research so that you know some basic information about who will be there. That way, your conversations and questions can be that much more in-depth.

5. Practice your “30-second” introduction or Elevator Speech. Be ready with an interesting self-introduction:

- Your year in school and major
- Your career interests and goals
- One thing you are currently doing to work toward your career goals

While You're There

6. Make an Effective Introduction

When you meet someone new, introduce yourself by making eye contact, smiling, stating your first and last name, and giving a firm but brief handshake. Then, listen for the other person's name (believe me, it's easy to miss when you're nervous), then use it two times while you're speaking. This will not only help you remember her name, but also appear sincere and interested in the conversation.

7. Listen First, then Speak

Here's a networking secret: Let the other person speak first! Most people don't realize this, but the person who talks about herself first is only being half listened to. If your counterpart is preoccupied with what she's going to say when it's her turn to speak, she'll only be partially tuning in to what you're saying. But by asking the other person questions first, she'll be much more relaxed and focused when the conversation turns to you.

8. Show Sincerity and Interest

Have a few good questions in your back pocket. Asking the other person about her background and work will show her that you're interested in more than just your own job opportunities. The best questions are ones that can't be answered by just "yes" or "no," such as:

- How do you like working for your company?
- What's your primary role at your company?
- What projects are you working on right now?
- How did you get involved in your field?

9. Get to the Point

When it's your turn to share what you do, state it in just 2-3 sentences. You can delve into greater detail later on, but people will lose interest very quickly if you can't cut to the chase. Similarly, avoid using industry jargon. The key to effectively networking is to build rapport, so if someone can't understand what you're talking about, a connection won't happen.

10. Take Notes

You probably won't remember the important details of every conversation, so it can be helpful to write them down. After mingling with a few people, find a corner of the room to subtly make notes on the back of each person's business card about who she is, what you talked about, and any follow-up you want to do. Remember, the purpose of a networking event is to connect with people in the future, and this will make following up with them much, much easier.

After the Event

11. Follow Up

A few days after the event, send follow-up emails to anyone you met that you'd like to continue networking with. Make sure to personalize each email, letting each person know you enjoyed meeting them and mentioning something that you talked about. A tip: One of the quickest ways to stop a connection is to send someone a generic LinkedIn invite. Include a message to remind them that you just met. This is also the time to suggest any follow-up, for example, to ask your new contact to meet up for an informational interview or a job shadow.

Networking is one of the greatest tools you have in your job search, and by being prepared for the event, professional once you get there, and proactive with your follow-up, you can make sure you get the most out of it. Beyond that, just try to relax and have some fun!

<https://www.themuse.com/advice/9-tips-for-navigating-your-first-networking-event>

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Networking: More Good Advice

Be prepared

Just as with a job interview, know what you want to discuss. What makes you interesting? What will make others remember you as a person they would suggest for a job? Maybe you have excellent organizational skills as a result of your involvement in a professional organization. Maybe you are a gifted public speaker. Be prepared to discuss what you want others to know about you. Make sure you are comfortable speaking about yourself in a positive manner. Some people have a difficult time affirming to others that they are organized, or a good public speaker, or any other positive attribute. Practice this with a friend or colleague. You will need to come across as authentic and confident or your words have little influence to the listener.

Be interested in others

Be prepared to do lots of talking, but also listen to others. Have you ever had the feeling that you were not heard? It feels awful and you probably remember the situation. Other people do too. So make sure to listen and take an interest in what they have to say. We often evaluate others by their ability to hold a conversation. So be sure that the conversation is a two way street.

Organize yourself

At most networking events, professionals distribute business cards. It is important to keep track of where you received these cards. One way to remember is by simply writing the event and date on the back of the business card so that they are easier to keep in an organized format. Send a hand-written card or email after the event to keep in touch. Send a note of appreciation if someone has given you a referral. Always mind your manners and offer your assistance to them as well.

Smile

A smile will get you attention. A smile shows others that you are friendly and accessible. Would you feel comfortable approaching someone who was not smiling? Think about a shopping trip. We tend to talk to the salesperson that smiles and welcomes us because we see their smile as a sign that he or she will be friendly and helpful.

With careful planning and some practice, networking can become a fun and exciting way of meeting other people to enhance your professional and personal life. Remember, you are networking all the time and in the most unlikely places. Have fun and enjoy this opportunity to advance your career.