

What is networking? Networking is developing a supportive system of shared information and services among individuals and groups having similar interests. Your professional network is the group of people you count on for professional advice, guidance, and support.

Perhaps even more important, networking is a way to increase your ability to impact the critical issues you care the most about. A strong professional network makes everyone who cares about these issues better at what they do.

Set yourself up to be a networking ninja...

- 1. Develop an elevator speech** that is focused on your networking goal, highlights the key things that make you an asset to the individual or organization you're networking with, and is concise and coherent.
- 2.** Be sure to set **clear goals or outcomes** before you go into a networking situation. Know what you want and what your target needs. Do your due diligence prior to the networking event – do online research, find others who know them and ask questions, etc. Finding the sweet spot between your wants and their needs leads to great things.
- 3.** Create a **solid follow-up plan**. If you say you'll send something or make a call, do it. Thank the folks you meet with handwritten notes. Take the time to be responsive, personal, and reliable.

Be sure to consider all perspectives...

- ✓ Approach networking as the **purveyor of services** you offer not with an expectation of what you may receive.
- ✓ Don't be passive; don't be aggressive. **Be genuine**, interested in others, and interesting to talk to.
- ✓ Don't monopolize a conversation. **Listen twice as much as you speak**. It is more important that you learn about their needs than that you share your own. Questions to consider:
 - Why did they choose to do the work they do?
 - What have they learned throughout their career?
 - What has surprised them the most during their career?Build a genuine relationship and find a shared experience.
- ✓ **Don't drink** (or be very cautious about how much you drink and think carefully about the messages you are sending.) Discussing a potential opportunity in someone's organization is taken more seriously when you're holding a bottle of water rather than a glass of wine.
- ✓ **Networking when you're in a role** is hugely important and impactful. Whatever your role, learn to do your job well. One of the best ways to do that is to find amazing people who are doing an awesome job already and learn from them.
- ✓ **No one is irrelevant**. Find the person sitting alone or not talking to anyone. Chat them up. You will be remembered. Also keep in mind that administrative assistants and support staff are often the most in-the-know people in an office or organization.
- ✓ Don't overlook your own **social contacts** as part of your professional network.

Manage your digital presence...

- ✓ Take the time to set up or update your **LinkedIn** profile. You'd be amazed at how many employers and professional contacts will search for you on this site.
- ✓ **Do a thorough self-search.** The first step in managing your digital footprint is becoming aware of what you are up against. Run searches for information about you that is available for potential employers to see.
- ✓ **Try to take action.** If you find information that you fear will undermine your professional credibility, contact the site's owner or webmaster and ask that the content be removed. Also remove tags from photos of you.
- ✓ **Accept that you can't get rid of everything.** In cases where damaging references appear to be permanent online fixtures, be ready to discuss the topic in a job interview. While your online transgressions might not come up, it helps to be prepared.
- ✓ **Don't be your own worst enemy.** Remove questionable content you have posted on your own personal websites. Consider setting your social-networking site profiles to private and blocking comments. If you maintain a website or blog, closely review every piece of information you've presented about yourself.

**Think of your entire life as a networking opportunity.
Be brave, be honest, be open, and be deliberate.**

Words of Wisdom from Those Who Have Been There...

When people ask me about getting a job in DC, I always encourage them to first use their built-in networks: people from TFA, graduates of their schools, friends of friends, their own congressperson's staff... people who might want or feel some obligation to talk to them and then ask those people if there is anyone else they should talk to.

-Catherine Brown, former roles include Domestic Policy Director, Hillary Clinton for President and Senior Education Policy Advisor, Committee on Education and Labor

My advice is always this: look around for what existing jobs you think sound perfect for what you want either now or down the road. Reach out to the person to see if you might be able to take them out to coffee or meet them in their office for a short informational interview. The basic message (don't hold back, gotta be effusive/borderline corny) is that you think they and their job are incredibly cool and you would love to be able to do what they do one day. You would love to know more about what their work is like day to day, what their proudest accomplishments are, how they got where they are, and any advice they can share with you as you set out in this field/new city. And anyone else who is doing incredible work that you should be aware of/ in touch with. Honestly, it sounds so awkward, but people do this work because they have a passion for it and rarely get a chance to hear how cool they are and to talk about what they are actually proud of accomplishing.

Second, if you do find a perfect job, organization, or mentor, and you have the ability: volunteer. Approach them with the offer of an incredible resource: you. And negotiate something that works for you: e.g. I would love to dedicate 3 days/week for 6 months to your organization. I believe in what you do, I think I could learn an incredible amount from you, and I'd like to both contribute to your work and build my resume and experience so that I might be better positioned to work here or somewhere similar in the future. And negotiate a title, make sure you have some check-in times with the person you're reporting to for feedback/guidance, and some clear deliverables you can own and do a good job on. The title costs them nothing. Then you have something on your résumé, a great reference, and mostly - if and when they have a job opening, you will be the first person they think of.

- Laurel Dumont, Founder & former Executive Director of The Center for Collaborative Change