

Networking

How did you get your job? I landed my position through a friend of a friend of a friend. Ever heard this one before? This scenario is an example of networking.

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Networking is about establishing relationships to help tap into a hidden employment market containing many unadvertised jobs and internships. Talking with people in your target field is the best way to explore your career options, gather information, and understand how to market yourself to potential employers. Regardless of the industry or type of position you are seeking, networking can significantly increase your chances of finding a great opportunity.

If you are like most college students, you may be uncomfortable with this job search method at first. You may feel as though you don't know anyone in the work world. You may be hesitant to begin calling people you've never met. You may be unsure about what to say when talking to a networking contact. Once you learn the basics of networking and start making a few contacts, you'll begin to see positive results and feel more comfortable with this job search strategy.

Knowing What You Want

Prior to communicating with people in your network, you must answer a few fundamental job search questions.

- What industries are you targeting?
- What positions interest you the most?
- What are your specific career goals?
- What skills are you marketing to potential employers?

Knowing the answers to these questions will help you effectively communicate your career direction to your contacts. Contacts will be able to help you more if they have a clear understanding of your career plans. Also, be sure to spend some time preparing a brief introduction about your background, experience, skills, and goals. Practice this introduction so you can deliver it with confidence. You are now ready to compile a list of potential contacts. Write down the names of all the people you know:

- friends
- family
- neighbors
- former co-workers
- professional colleagues
- faculty
- contacts from professional organizations
- counselors/advisors in career management services
- recruiters/staff you have met at campus presentations
- Florida Tech alumni
- anyone else you know!

Now you can put your list in order. Place the people who are most closely connect-

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ed to your future career field at the top. You should start with this group as they will be able to share the most relevant advice and information. At first, you may be hesitant to begin calling the people on your list. However, you will be pleasantly surprised to learn that most people are very responsive and enjoy helping others. If you are considerate and respectful of people's time, most networking contacts will help you.

Making the Connection

You can communicate with a networking contact by phone, a letter, e-mail, social networking site such as [LinkedIn](#), or in person. To initiate contact, you can call directly or write a letter and then follow-up by phone. When calling a contact, be sure to leave a clear and concise message about your connection to the person and what you would like to discuss. Occasionally, you will have the opportunity to talk with a contact in person at a company presentation, professional association, or other event.

Here are several suggestions to follow when you are communicating with your contact:

- Ask the contact if it is a convenient time to talk or if you should arrange another time
- Be sure to have your introduction prepared and be clear and concise with your delivery
- Prepare a list of questions prior to talking with the contact
- Mention how you identified the person
- Know what information or advice you are seeking
- Do some basic research about the contact's employer and industry
- Ask the contact if you can send them your resume
- Gather contact information such as the spelling of their name, mailing address, phone and fax numbers, and an Email address
- Expand your network by asking the contact to refer you to other potential contacts

Ask the contact if you can keep in touch periodically throughout your search

Keys to Successful Networking

Here are some final tips for successful networking:

- Always send a thank-you letter after someone has helped you
- Organize your efforts by tracking who you've contacted, the date of the contact, and the outcome or action step which resulted
- Notify your contacts when you have found a position
- Be helpful to others when they ask to network with you!
- Consider everyone you meet a potential networking contact
- Seek out new networking contacts by asking for the business card of any potential contact
- Join a professional organization related to your career interests (e.g. a student interested in working in the Space program might join the American Institute of Astronautics & Aeronautics)
- Be enthusiastic and positive when talking to your networking contacts

Networking is all about building relationships with others. It is a two-way street and only works if you are willing to give as well as receive career information and advice. Expect your contacts to call you in the future when they need your help. Keep in mind that networking doesn't end once you have found a position. You are encouraged to view networking as an ongoing process where you continue to establish professional contacts. With a strong network in place, you'll be ready to make a career move at any time.