



## WHAT IS NETWORKING AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Networking is a strategy used to cultivate relationships to leverage in your career development process. These relationships can serve to provide information, support, and job leads. Networking occurs in a variety of formal and informal settings and consists of meeting and talking to people, asking questions, organizing information, and following up on referrals. An easy way to think about networking is how it can be an extension of just being friendly, engaged, and willing to listen to others' stories. The key to networking success? Build genuine relationships, gain leadership experience, and be proactive! Above all, networking could be what helps you land a job!

## NETWORKING MYTHS:

### ***I'm shy, so I can't network – FALSE!***

It's natural to feel awkward about approaching others and asking for their help. You may want to start building your networking skills by starting out with people that you know well. Not all networking styles may feel comfortable to you, but find an approach that works well for your style (perhaps e-mailing rather than cold calling). Part of the job search process for everyone consists of stepping outside of the comfort zone.

### ***Networking is bothering people who don't want to help you – FALSE!***

Most professionals are flattered to share insight about their careers. Additionally, sometimes employees receive incentives for referring people to their organization. Asking for help is an investment in your future success.

### ***Networking is phony and artificial – FALSE!***

Networking is an acknowledged and important part of the job search process. Even employers engage in networking by hosting information sessions. These events help them to gauge particular qualities of potential employees. Be yourself. Genuinely seeking assistance and information can get results.

### ***Networking is the same as asking for a job – FALSE!***

Do not confuse networking with directly asking someone for a job. People are much more willing to schedule an appointment with you to discuss a career path rather than to get you a job. Even if a contact does not have a direct connection to a job, there is plenty of valuable information to be gained. If a job opening becomes evident during your discussion, ask how you might formally apply.

### ***I'm not well-connected and I don't know enough people to network – FALSE!***

You will be surprised how many contacts you can generate once you begin to realize the abundant opportunities for networking. Acquaintances are more likely than close friends or family to give you direct information that will lead to opportunities. Never underestimate the influence and assistance that even the most unlikely contact might be able to provide.



## NETWORKING STRATEGIES:

### ***Think about who you know –***

Make a list of everyone you know—and the people they know—and identify how they could help you gather information for your career/job search. Everyone you know has the potential to know someone who can help you develop your career. Once you organize your initial list, work to actively expand your network. These people can include your friends, family, classmates, professors, current and former employers and coworkers, advisors, and mentors. Consider this: What are their passions/specializations/interests? What can you learn from them?

### ***Organize your contacts –***

Tip from the professionals: create a spreadsheet to assist you in maintaining your networking contacts. Be sure to include what they do, who they know, and how you met.

### ***Be prepared –***

If you are in the initial stages of your career planning, you may want to use your contacts for informational interviewing and career research. If you are in the later stages of the process, you might consider networking to obtain job leads, referrals, or advice on how to conduct your job search. Go into conversations knowing what you hope to get out of it. Have prepared questions available to facilitate the discussion.

Be sure to also review your accomplishments. Know what you are seeking and what you have to offer. Consider your skills, interests, and values. Knowing yourself will allow you to connect with contacts with greater ease and confidence and deliver the best impression. Practice your introduction or “commercial.”

### ***Decide how to connect –***

In today's world, there are many ways to connect with other professionals. If you already have the name and contact information for a person you would like to learn more about, consider the reaching out to them via phone, email, LinkedIn, or meeting in person. Whenever possible, face-to-face meetings are best. Remember to communicate professionally, introduce yourself, state your objective, and be polite. Use a style that is comfortable for you. If you leave a message or send an email, don't request that they contact you. Instead, let them know when you will be following up and then be sure to do so.

If you are interested in expanding your network, there are many ways through the School of Business, the University of Kansas, and through your community to network with others:

- Join a professional or student organization that relates to your career interests
- Volunteer and get involved in your community
- Speak to company representatives at BCS or School of Business events, even if you are not ready for a job!
- Attend company information sessions or tables and speak to the recruiters who run those events!
- Schedule informational interviews with professionals in careers that interest you
- Sign up for the School of Business Mentorship Program to seek out a mentor
- Create a LinkedIn profile—online networking is efficient and easy to use!
- Follow the social media profiles of companies or important people in fields that interest you
- Utilize the BCS Alumni Lists



## ***Be sincere and take the time –***

The best networkers are those that are sincerely interested in people. Do not seek out contacts just because they could some-how benefit you, but instead cultivate relationships with those you are genuinely interested in. Remember to be courteous, professional, and gracious at all times. Forming relationships can be time-consuming. One meeting is not enough to solidify a new contact, so keep in touch and make time for several interactions. Remember that networking is not about collecting contacts, but more about developing strong relationships. It should be quality over quantity!

## ***Use your communication skills and be gracious!***

Be assertive, but not obnoxious. Listen intently to the information and advice that is being provided to you. Always be sure to thank the networking contact for their time and assistance. It is often not the most qualified candidate that gets the job, but rather the one who has approached the job search process most effectively. Know yourself and what you have to offer and support your talents to the employers that you target.

## ***Conversation Starters –***

- "Hi, I don't know too many people here, so I wanted to introduce myself. I'm [name] and I work at [company]."
- "So, what brought you here today?"
- "What's your story?" It always sparks a fascinating and non-generic conversation.
- "How's your day going?"
- "How did you hear about this event?"
- "Hi, I see that you work at Company X. I've always been interested in their work, and recently saw a position open up that I'm thinking about applying to. Do you have any advice for me? What's it like working there?"
- "Hi, I've never been to this event before. You look like a regular—any tips you could give me on what to expect? What are the best sessions here?"