Networking

Mobilize Your Network
People are perhaps the most important source of information about new jobs - or, for that matter, careers. Therefore people become your primary research source. There's still a great deal of truth to the familiar phrase, "It's not what you know, it's who you know." Today, though, the more accurate variation might be, "It's not only who you know, but also what you know that counts."

You'll be approaching various people for information. You won't be asking for a job . . . yet. You're after hard facts right now. These facts will be invaluable to you when you pursue the employers you've targeted.

At this point you may be saying to yourself, "I don't know anybody! I'm doomed!" Don't panic. Nobody begins life with a full complement of professional associates. In fact, "starting fresh" may work to your advantage.

So. . . what is networking?
What it is NOT?
Why do it?
Reasons why people hesitate to do it
Making your contact list
A dozen tips for networking
Tips for informational interviews
Networking web resources
Networking groups

So. . . What Is Networking?
Connecting with people and then nurturing the resulting relationships
Tapping into the hidden job market (learning about job opportunities that are never advertised!)
Learning about career fields and jobs
Pooling resources from an ever-growing number of sources
Being creative in expanding your contacts
The most effective means of finding a job

What It Is NOT?
Asking for a job
An interview for employment
A guarantee of employment or employability
Business card swapping at a meeting or conference
Cold-calling people out of the phone book or the alumni network

Why Do It?
Most jobs are never advertised (about 10-15 % are advertised in print and another 10-15 % online).
KNOWLEDGE! Learn about positions, companies, industries, career fields, career paths, current trends and predictions NOT with the primary focus to secure a job!
Get a sense of your "fit" within the field, company, position.
Get your name out there and open doors. Your contacts are likely to think of you for suitable openings.
Gain confidence in your ability to describe your interests, skills, values AND articulate in subsequent "real" interviews why you are the ideal candidate for a given position.

Reasons Why People Hesitate to Do It
Fear of rejection - using appropriate networks and techniques, this is unlikely. What's the worst that happens if someone refuses to meet or speak with you? Move on to someone else but don't give up too quickly. An email and follow-up calls over the course of a week or two are not overdoing it.
Fear of failure - there is no failure when the goal is appropriately set. What is your goal in networking? NOT to find a job, but to gain the exposure and competencies listed above, to learn as much as possible, and to build relationships.
Fear of sounding / appearing "stupid" - networking and informational interviewing are sound, legitimate job search techniques. If you are prepared (knowing yourself, knowing a bit about the target industry or company, and having intelligent questions to pose), you will effectively articulate your goals and come away from each "meeting" with information and additional contacts.
Fear of bothering / taking up someone's time - think of networking reciprocally! You are wisely utilizing someone's time. Your contact would not agree to meet with you if s/he weren't willing to help. That contact may come to you for help sometime in the future, and you will undoubtedly return the favor!
Fear of making a negative impression - unlikely if you are well prepared for the meeting. However, just like a "real" interview, you might not connect with the interviewer. Focus on positives and the
goals you have set for the meeting.

**Fear of being asked questions** - It is very likely that you will be asked questions about yourself and your career goals. Be prepared to answer sincerely.

**Fear of overstepping boundaries** - think of informational interviewing simply as a way to gather information; prepare questions that engage your contact and result in better mutual understanding. Stay away from inappropriate questions such as personal salary inquiries or requests for specific job help. Everything else that enhances your understanding of a person's career, current position, company or field is legitimate.

**Fear that it is a barrier to a "real job" or that it doesn't count!** Too many people network their way to their next job through this process for it NOT to count! For younger alums and career changers, this is the best means to learn about careers, jobs, companies, trends, and more. For other job seekers, it is a critical step towards making the connections that may count immediately or at some future time.

**Making Your Contact List**

**Use DukeConnect.** DukeConnect is a computerized database that provides names of alumni/ae and parents who have volunteered to act as advisors to Duke job seekers. Even if you don't know the person you're calling, the two of you do have something in common; that alone is usually a valid reason to initiate contact. Ask yourself: "who would you rather help out, a person from Duke, or someone with no obvious common denominator?" Don't be shy. Explore every possible lead.

**Seek out both those who've been out for some years and those who are more recent grads.** Sometimes people near your own age have the best, most practical information as a result of just having gone through the process themselves.

**Contact the employers themselves.** Calling the offices of a potential employer can produce many interesting results. Someone will talk with you. Even if you end up talking to someone in personnel, you will begin to find out valuable information.

**Read trade magazines and newspapers.** Authors of articles and those featured in articles are potential contacts. If you have done a thorough analysis of an article or profile and convey that knowledge in a letter, you might be surprised by the kind of positive response you get.
Join a professional association or club. Every industry has one or a number of professional associations or clubs. Membership in these clubs or participation in meetings is often open. Go to these meetings and talk to the people there. They will be impressed by your interest and dedication. You will add their names to your contact list.

Attend trade shows and conventions. Professionals you speak with may not be prepared to talk about specific career opportunities, but they will most likely take the time to give you information about their companies.

A Dozen Tips for Networking

Generate a list of everyone you know personal, professional, academic. Think BIG! Do NOT discount someone simply because you think s/he doesn't know anyone. S/he probably knows more people than you think. Don't forget there's DukeConnect.

Categorize your list and prioritize the categories by significance (most likely to be knowledgeable/helpful) OR by comfort level (most familiar to least.)

Create a database or file of contacts related to your career interests.

Maintain manageable records.

Do your homework: know a little about the person and his/her company before you make contact.

Know yourself: skills, interests, values, personality

Inventory your accomplishments

Research careers, companies, industries

Plan and practice your opener. Discuss with a friend, colleague, or counselor first if desired.

Make your move! Send an email or letter first; follow with a phone call. Or simply CALL! Assign yourself a daily quota. Be persistent but not pesty!

Follow-up! Call again within a week if no response. Arrange a "meeting" in person or by phone. Ask for 30 - 45 minutes only. You could get even luckier!

Set the tone. Know why you are calling and what you hope to learn (industry information, career exploration, job search advice, graduate or professional school guidance, etc.) You are NOT asking for a job!

Ask for names of others. Most important question: Whom do you recommend I contact for additional information?

Send a thank you note within 48 hours! Email is OK! A personal letter can be very effective too!
Maintain connections. Nurture the relationships by staying in touch and letting them know where you "land!"
Be patient. Networking takes time. Never stop networking!

**Tips for Informational Interviews**

**Plan for the meeting:**

DO dress as if you are going for an interview. Be professional.
DO schedule 30-45 minutes for the conversation and be aware of the time. Watch for clues that it is time to leave.
DO pay attention to your thoughts and reactions. If you feel excited and energetic, this may be your niche. If not, expand your contact list.
DON'T ask for a job now - even if you are bursting to do so.
DON'T book too many back-to-back interviews. Your contact may want to introduce you to some hiring managers or executives.
DON'T talk about only you. The more the contact talks, the more you will learn.
DO write a thank-you letter within two days. Now you can ask the procedure for applying for a job.

**Some Sample Questions**

How did you get started in this field? What has your career path been?
Is there any advice you would give someone just entering the field?
What kind of lifestyle choices have you had to make?
Has your work experience differed very much from what you expected? In what ways?
What influenced your career most?
What major satisfactions do you derive from working in this field?
What are some of the issues/problems that you must deal with in your work?
If you had to do it all over again, what changes would you have made along the way?
Could you tell me a little about the management style here?
What do you most enjoy about your work? Least enjoy?
What is a typical day like?
What is the future for this industry?
What qualifications/competencies skills are needed to break into or advance in this industry? What other skills are valued in this industry? What types of experiences do you look for in candidates?
What strategies would you be using if you were in a job search for a
position in this field?
Would you be willing to critique my resume?
What types of questions should I expect when interviewing for a job in this field?
Would you be available to do a mock interview?
What next steps do you recommend?
Whom else should I contact?

And if your contact offers to pass along your resume: ask if s/he would be willing to share those names with you and allow you to use his/her name, so that you can make the contact yourself and be able to follow up appropriately and consistently. A good word from your initial contact wouldn't hurt either.

**Networking Web Resources**
- A Good Network is a Circle of Friends - [Part One](#), [Part Two](#)
- The QuintCareers Networking Resources: [The Art of Networking](#) and [Networking Your Way to a New Job](#)
- Brand Yourself in Your Networking Contacts' Minds
- Making Connections

**Networking Groups**
Some people find local networking groups to be of value for the support they offer during a career crisis. They can be useful in provide resources, sharing tips and strategies, contacts, and stories. They can also function as gripe sessions where little is exchanged except the grim details of a lay-off and its impact. A caution: carefully check out your local groups and test them out. If the session is poorly moderated and organized, mostly negative in focus, or consists mostly of people venting their frustrations without positive and productive efforts to produce results, then find a different group. Choose one where there is a positive facilitator, where gripping is limited and comprises only a small portion of each meeting, and where speakers are selected to offer motivational support for career and job changers.

**LinkedIn** ([look for "LinkedIn Live" events in your area in addition to online connections](#))  
**Riley Guide to Networking Support**