What is networking?

Networking in the job search process is about building relationships with people, and using these relationships to find new career opportunities.

Why network?

The majority of jobs filled in any given year are not advertised and one of the key strategies for tapping into this 'hidden' job market is networking.

How do I network?

Establishing and building relationships takes time and effort, so you need to factor this in as a long term element of your job search plan. The sooner you engage in it the better.

You can start to develop strategic relationships by putting yourself in situations where you will be rubbing shoulders with key people in your target industry. This includes becoming a student member of your relevant professional association, joining and actively participating in relevant online forums or discussion lists or volunteering for relevant organisations. More suggestions are noted in the what employers want section of the website.

Networking Tips

The idea of networking can present a number of problems. The following tips address some common concerns amongst students.

I feel uncomfortable with the idea of networking; it feels like using people

- Networking is about building professional relationships with people who may have short and long term benefit to both parties
- Networking is reciprocal, you may not realise it at the time but the other person may learn as much from you as you do from them
- Do some preparation first – be clear about what you want to ask
- Build rapport by encouraging the other person to talk about themselves – their background, how they got into their current role, their observations of the industry they work in before you ask too many questions
- Be prepared to talk about yourself if they ask – your study, what you’ve enjoyed, your career goals, and what you think are your strengths
- Always follow up with a thank you note or email – think about something you could share with the other person eg an interesting and relevant article you’ve read as a way of thanking them for their time

I don’t like the idea of asking other people for a job

- Never ask for a job, most people don’t have the power to give you a job anyway. Ask for information (because that’s free!) and 10 minutes of their time so that you can ask them some pre-prepared questions about their experience of the industry you wish to join.
As a result of your networking, you may gain some great ideas or leads about organisations that are hiring, consider these a bonus but not the entire aim of your networking ventures.

I don’t know why experienced people would want to talk to me

- Organisations are always seeking potential candidates who are bright, enthusiastic and knowledgeable. Employers are interested in students and graduates with very good communication and problem solving skills. The way you conduct your networking is an indicator of these skills.
- Experienced people in industry are also interested in the views of students and graduates as you’ve more recently studied and been exposed to new ideas and theories. You are also more aware of how young people think and most organisations are keen to engage with potential staff and customers who may fit your demographic.
- Most people remember what it was like to start in their field and are happy to support new graduates with some guidance, they often express the opinion that they wished they had someone to talk to when they were in your situation.

I don’t have any contacts or networks I can tap into

- Networking is often associated with contacts who can be utilised through your parents, high school or residential college. This is just one method of developing your contacts.
- Many people don’t necessarily have these sort of contacts and will start from scratch by making approaching people in professional associations, organisations of interest, business councils, relevant conferences, previous places of employment and through academics. Careers Fairs and employer presentations and other career events on campus are also good places to start your networking.

I’m from another culture / country. What is culturally acceptable in a networking situation in Australia?

It’s difficult to be definitive about this. However, it is true that certain behaviours or expectations in one culture or country may be very different in another. Try not to make many assumptions about what you are used to back home will work well here. Learn by observation and seek out a mentor who can guide you through some networking situations and give you feedback.

Some of the areas of social contact that can be quite different include:

- Handshaking
- Appropriateness of clothing and personal hygiene
- Level of eye contact
- Facial expressions, smiling
- Tone of voice
- Physical space between people
- Breaking into a conversation or moving away from a conversation
- Eating and drinking while talking to someone
- Respect for more experience people or older people
- Levels of formality and informality and use of humour
- Amount of time spent building rapport
- Speaking directly and to the point
- Attitude to time and punctuality
- Giving and receiving business cards
- Protocols about mentioning other people and their information
- Attitudes to authority, hierarchy, bureaucracy and self promotion
- Attitudes to asking questions or clarifying information
- The importance placed on which school and university attended
- The importance placed on family, region, religion