Many survey sources report that 65 - 85 percent of job seekers’ success comes from networking and direct company contacts*. At least 60 percent of all jobs – (The Wall Street Journal reported as high as 95 percent) - are found by networking.

A. Key Goals of Networking

1. Develop ongoing reciprocal relationships and gather information to make better decisions about your career now and in the future.
2. Ensure people you meet (or already know) understand what value you bring to organizations and what you currently want to do.

B. Understand the difference between Networking and Informational Interviewing

Networking = Developing long-term, reciprocal relationships based on mutual exchange of information. During networking, the conversation should be focused as much on the other person as it is on you. Never stop networking throughout your entire career.

Informational Interviewing = Once you have done a good amount of networking to gather information and create a target list of organizations and potential roles that are a good match, then it is time to secure informational interviews with people who might have the power to hire you if they see your value or already have an opening. By this time, all the research and networking you have done so far will be of great value to you. You will be more confident.

Getting Started

1. Clarify your goals
   Work on clarifying your career goals and communicating those goals to others. If you are not sure about exactly what you want to do, identify two or three areas of strong interest. People don’t usually want to hear “I’m not sure what I want to do – can you help me figure it out?” That puts a lot of pressure on the other person.

2. Know your elevator pitch and positioning statement. Practice. Prepare an elevator pitch - a concise description of what you do, what you can deliver, and what you want. Be prepared to state it in the amount of time it takes to ride the elevator with a stranger (or passing the bread at the lunch table). Practice out loud. Don’t wing it! You only get one chance to make a good first impression.

3. Think through what you want to say the first time there is contact with someone over the phone. For example: “Susan Smith suggested I give you a call. I am an MBA candidate with a background in Financial Accounting. I’m graduating in August and I have decided to explore consulting opportunities. Susan told me that you made a transition from accounting to consulting and I’d very much appreciate hearing about your experience. I don’t expect you to know of any openings just because I am calling, but I’d really appreciate hearing your perspective about the consulting arena. Could we meet sometime in the next 3 weeks?”

4. Research ahead of time
   As usual, research the organization that the person is affiliated with ahead of time. If you are too pressed for time to do in-depth research, do “quickie” research. Google the person – google the organization. Do a quick search on www.netadvantage.com or your favorite company info site.

5. Be prepared to lead the conversation
   You are the person who wants to connect. Be prepared to take the lead in the conversation. If your brain freezes, ask a question about them. Show genuine interest. Remember, networking is about building reciprocal relationships. Find out how you can help the other person.

6. Have questions and networking topics prepared ahead of time
   Identify thoughtful questions that ensure you get the info you need. Make judgments about the type of questions based upon the context of the situation. It can also be helpful to have a list of companies you are targeting to share with the person. They may have other ideas of companies for you to target and/or may offer to open doors for you. Be careful not to make the person feel pressured so approach it lightly. For example, you may want to simply ask if your list looks appropriate. For networking conversations, be prepared with specific industry topics or ideas to launch interesting conversations about. The point is to keep the door open so you can talk more when you follow up.

7. Always consider how you might be able to help the other person.
   Is there particular information that would be of value or interest to them? Is there an article you could send to them or a person you could put them in touch with? Are they trying to solve a business problem that you might be able to help with? Or, perhaps they mention an upcoming vacation and you are able to offer a great travel tip to them.

8. Save the best for last. Save your best contacts for informational interviews versus networking. Your best contacts will be people with influence at your top target companies. Although these meetings are “informational,” you should treat them as real interviews since many of these meetings can lead to getting hired.

9. Say thanks. There is still nothing like a (neatly) hand-written note. Don’t let the convenience of email win out over courtesies that are greatly appreciated. Use email for follow-up contact, or to reciprocate with information. Remember, give back whenever you can. Networking is a two-way street. Help your contacts in return.


* Taken from The New Job Security by Pam Lassiter