

NETWORKING AND INTERVIEWS



Networking and interviews are both important parts of the working world. You'll have many opportunities to meet new people and you want to make sure you are always putting your best professional foot forward. This guide will help you with some basics of networking and interviewing to ensure that you shine now matter what situation you find yourself in.

HAVE YOUR ELEVATOR PITCH READY

Whether you are getting ready for a networking event or an interview, it's a great idea to have your elevator pitch – or a few of them – ready to go. An elevator pitch should include a couple of sentences about you, what you are doing now, and where you want to go next. It should be pretty short – think about what you would say to someone you are traveling with for only a few floors in an elevator (get it?!). Especially if you are starting to look for a job, make sure to mention that when appropriate. People won't know what you are hoping for new – job or otherwise – unless you tell them about it.

There are many articles about why and how to get your elevator pitch ready, but here are some we like to get you started:

- [Service Year Alliance's Storytelling Guide](#) - *This might be too long for an elevator pitch, but could help you in figuring out the key points of your story!*
- [The 15-Minute Method to Writing an Unforgettable Elevator Speech](#)
- [I Walked into an Interview with No Elevator Pitch—Here's What Happened](#)

Once you have ideas about what to say, remember to practice! You may feel silly saying this out loud, but the more you actually practice, the easier it will be, and the more confident you will sound!

NETWORKING BASICS

For some people, networking is no big deal, and for others, hearing the word makes them want to curl up under a blanket and never come out. If you fall more towards the "this-is-the-worst" end of the spectrum, use our simple tricks to help you get started! Whether you love it or hate it, networking is an important part of building and keeping a professional group of contacts that will help you with current work and future opportunities. As with all things, practice makes it easier!

How To Find Events And People

For many people, their current job and contacts are the basis of their network. Each time you move to a new job, you carry some connections with you and your network continues to grow. If you are just starting out or are looking to expand your network beyond your work, here are some suggestions to get started:

- **College alumni groups.** If you are a college grad, there could be an alumni group in your city that you can join. If there isn't a group, your college still may have a list of alums in your area or a list of alums in the industry you are hoping to connect with. Many people are willing to be contacted for questions, so reach out to your alumni office to learn more.
- **Young professional groups.** If there is a particular industry you are interested in, do some research to see if there is a group in your location specifically to help young people build networks. For example, [Young Nonprofit Professionals Network](#) has chapters in different locations throughout the US.

- **Service Year / AmeriCorps Alums chapters.** Of course, connecting with other service year alumni is a great way to build your network! Alums go on to do many types of work so they are a great source of advice and connections in a variety of industries.
- **Volunteering.** Finding a cause that is important to you and volunteering is a great way to connect with others that care about the same thing. Volunteering is great practice talking to new people – you’ll build your networking skills while you do some good for your community!
- **Classes.** Taking in-person classes is a great way to brush up on some skills or learn something new while also networking. You can look for classes specifically in your industry, or something totally for fun – no matter what, you’ll be meeting people and making new connections.
- **Newsletters and Listservs.** There are many lists you can join that will keep you updated about happenings in your area or about the industry you are in. It’s a great idea to stay informed about your industry – news makes a great conversation starter when networking! Do some research and join some listservs to keep up to date on news and events.
- **Social Media.** Connecting online is a great way to find events that you can join. Follow people or organizations that you admire in a professional capacity to stay in the know. It’s fine if you have different accounts for professional and personal use – just remember that what you post online lives on forever!

NETWORKING DO’S AND DON’TS

So you’ve gotten yourself to a networking event – great job! Now what? Don’t stress – networking is just having conversations. Think of it as making friends, professionally! Below are some conversation tips and tricks to help you get over the initial jitters of talking to new people and give you a foundation to make connections.

Make sure to...

- **Dress for success.** Make sure to look your best at an event. See if there is a dress code listed for the event. If not, business casual is likely fine for an after work event. Wear something that makes you feel confident!
- **Ask people about themselves.** The easiest thing to do is ask open ended questions about someone to get them talking. Check out some ideas for conversation starters in the “Informational Interview” section. It’s likely they will reciprocate with questions for you to keep the conversation moving – that’s why your elevator pitch is important!
- **Be honest.** It is always smart to put your best foot forward when you are meeting new people. Make sure though, that you are being honest about yourself and your skills and experiences. Just like with a resume, you want to highlight what you are good at but not lie or embellish – it will hurt you in the long run!
- **Find connection points.** It’s possible that you will talk with someone that has experience or skills that aren’t in line with the industry you are hoping to get to, and that’s okay! You never know when someone will have some wisdom to share or a connection for your future. Also, if you know someone else that is interested in that work, offer to make that connection. Even as you are starting to build your network, you can be a connection point for others!
- **Follow Up.** If you meet someone helpful at an event or otherwise, it’s appropriate to ask for their contact information to follow up. Say something along the lines of, “It’s been really great talking to you about _____, and I’d love to follow up with you to learn more. Do you have a business card?” If someone is at a networking event, they are also there to network, so they will likely be more than happy to share contact information. If you ask to follow up, make sure that you do. A quick email to say, “It was great to meet you at _____ and I look forward to staying in touch” is perfect.



Make sure you don't...

- **Focus only on your job search.** If you are looking for a job, it's fine to mention that. People won't know unless you say something! However, don't monopolize the conversation by only talking about your job search. Networking is about making professional relationships for the long haul, not just your next job.
- **Over-use your connection.** Whether you meet someone at a networking event or know them from a previous job, make sure they aren't the only person you are relying on to build your network or help you in your job search. Of course, trusted advisors are great to help you get started, but it's up to you to do the hard work for yourself. Also, if you reach out to a contact and they aren't getting back to you, you can follow up once, but probably not more than that in a short amount of time. People get busy and sometimes aren't available to follow up with you, and that's okay.
- **Only make asks.** Similarly to not over-contacting someone, make sure every time you contact someone, you are not only asking them for something. You can keep in touch with important contacts by sharing an article you think they will like, congratulating them on a work-iversary (LinkedIn has reminders for those!), or giving them an update about some current projects you are working on.

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

A great way to kickstart a job search or follow up after meeting someone at a networking event is to ask for an informational interview. This is a chance for you to ask someone about their career path and get some advice on next steps for yourself. Here are some steps for conducting an informational interview:

- **Make the ask.** Send a brief email to start, and make sure to mention how you know them. Remind them of the networking event you met at, or if you got their information from a mutual contact, mention who it is. Ask for 20 minutes of their time to start – either talking over the phone or meeting for a coffee in person if that would be easier for them.
- **Prepare.** Get ready for this interview like you would a real interview. Research your contact (on LinkedIn or their work's website) and the organization they work for. Make sure you know some basics so that you don't waste your time asking them things you could find out by googling! Also, have your generic resume ready in case they ask for it. This isn't a job interview so there is no need to stress about being perfect, but practicing like it's a real interview will help you when you get to that stage.
- **Conduct.** Just like when networking, make sure that you ask open ended questions. Don't spend time talking about you or your journey – you are there to learn about them! Below are some conversation starters if you aren't sure where to begin. Also, make sure to be respectful of time – stick to the time you said you would, or ask if they have a few more minutes to spare.
- **Follow Up.** Make sure to send a thank you note or email after your meeting. They took time to help you, so thank them for it! Mention something they said that was particularly helpful. Also, if it seems appropriate, you can ask for others contacts that you might be able to speak with as well.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

If you aren't sure what to ask when networking or doing informational interviews, here are some ideas to get you started:

- *How did you get into your field of work?*
- *What has your career path been like to date? Is it representative of most people in this kind of position?*
- *What are the future prospects in this field?*



- What trends do you see developing over the next few years?
- What do you enjoy the most about your job?
- What advice would you have liked to have heard when you were starting out?

JOB INTERVIEWS

Congratulations! Making it to the interview round for a new position is a big deal. Preparing for a job interview is similar to preparing for networking or an informational interview (so read the info above!), just a step further in seriousness.

- **Prepare well.** Think through questions that might be asked in the interview and prepare your answers. Jotting down bullet points can be helpful. Also, make sure you aren't using the same example for each question – think through all of your different work, volunteer, and educational experiences and pull out accomplishments and lessons learned from each. Again, have your elevator pitch ready for that "Tell me about yourself" kick-off! Here's [Glassdoor's list of 50 common interview questions](#) to help you prepare. Finally, prepare questions to ask them!
- **Show up.** Make sure to dress appropriately – err on the side of being more professional and more conservative if you really aren't sure what the dress code is. Make sure your hair, nails, and shoes are neat and tidy - little details could matter! Give yourself more than enough time to get to your interview, and find a coffee shop or place to hang out if you are too early. Head into the interview about 10-15 minutes early, but be ready to wait if they don't start until the scheduled time. Bring a pen and notebook, a few copies of your resume, and a list of printed references. Remember to silence your phone!
- **Interview and Follow up.** Take a deep breath – you are going to be great! If you are given a complicated or multiple part question, don't be afraid to ask to have it repeated or to say it back to them and ask if you understood it correctly. Remember to share a variety of your experiences and not use the same example over and over. At the end, ask the questions that you prepared. Remember to make sure your questions aren't things you could have googled. If there is anything unclear about the job or a question that came up in the interview, don't be afraid to ask that as well. After the interview, send a thank you within 24 hours to each of your interviewers. An email is fine, but a handwritten note is also a great way to stand out!

PRO TIP: If you're a fan of the handwritten note, it can be helpful to bring a few thank you notes with you to the interview and find a nearby coffee shop to write your thank you notes immediately after the interview. You can buy stamps at a CVS and drop the letters in the mail on your way home.

There are many articles you can read about preparing for interviews – check out [this one from The Muse](#) and this one from [The Balance Careers](#) to start. It is smart to prepare as best as you can, but be sure you [do some self care](#) and get some sleep as well to keep you cool, calm, and collected, and ready to ace your interview!

FINAL THOUGHTS ON NETWORKING AND INTERVIEWING

When it comes to job hunting, networking, and interviewing, you'll get a lot of advice and some of it may be conflicting, so go with what speaks most true to you and to the industry you are trying to get into. Here are the main points to remember, from our perspective, when it comes to networking and the job application process:

- Know your elevator pitch.
- Have a general resume ready for any situation (like networking), but tailor your resume for each job you apply to.
- Do your research on your job, industry, interviewers, etc.
- Put your best self forward while still being honest about your experience and your abilities
- And be confident! You'll be great :)

