



NETWORKING – Essential to Your Job Search and Career Development

Students often share frustration about networking: “Networking seems really scary! Everyone says, ‘you’ve got to get out there and network,’ but what does that even mean? What do I do? When do I start? Why does networking matter so much?”

What Is Networking and Why Does it Matter?

Let’s start with what networking is and why it matters to both your short-term job search and long-term career development. Networking is the process and practice of building and maintaining professional relationships to enrich your career development, contribute to your professional community, and engage in continuous learning. Networking matters for many reasons, but **job seekers** should know that **approximately 75% of jobs (across all industries) are filled through some form of personal contact.**¹ The wise job seeker spends as much or more time networking as they do apply for jobs online.

When do I start Networking?

NOW! The practice of networking should happen **before, during, and after your job search.** You should work on building and maintaining your professional network every week. The process outlined here will help you define your short and long-term networking goals, identify existing connections as well as people and organizations you want to engage with, and get started building your network. Ultimately, networking will help you to learn about and leverage opportunities for career development.

Phase 1: Set your Networking Goals and Gain Industry Knowledge:

- Identify and learn about the jobs within your industry that you can apply for NOW – at this stage in your career. Use resources like [Handshake](#)², [LinkedIn](#), [Indeed](#), and [Glassdoor](#). Landing a job like this is a **short-term networking goal**.
- Identify and learn about the jobs within your industry that you want to work toward during the first 3-5 years of your career. This is a **long-term networking goal**.
- Identify employers of interest, professional organizations (national and local), community organizations, industry thought leaders, relevant news sources, and continuous learning resources. Follow these on [LinkedIn](#) and begin learning about the industry you want to join.

Phase 2: Prepare to Communicate and Connect

- [LinkedIn](#): use your updated resume to create or update your LinkedIn profile. It should showcase your current skills, education, and experience.
- **Prepare your Pitch:** Develop your personal introduction or “pitch” so that you are ready to communicate your career goals and how you can bring value in the kinds of job you want. Refer to FVTC’s [Your Elevator Pitch](#) for more guidance.
- **Identify Current Connections:** These are people you already know who could help you grow in your career – connect with them both in person and via LinkedIn.
 - Family members and friends – learn what they do, where they work, and who they know.
 - FVTC instructors and staff who know you.
 - Managers and co-workers from current and past employment.
 - Fellow FVTC students!
 - Past teachers, coaches, faith leaders, mentors, etc.
- **Identify People of Interest:** These are people you want to connect with. Try to identify 10 prospects or more.
 - Referrals from current connections.
 - People working in your industry *or* in jobs that interest you; identify things you have in common like current connections, FVTC alumni, community organizations, or past employers.
 - Prepare connection request emails and LinkedIn messages.

¹Zippia. “25+ Important Networking Statistics [2023]: The Power of Connections in the Workplace” Zippia.com. Feb. 23, 2023, <https://www.zippia.com/advice/networking-statistics/>

² Handshake is available only to FVTC students and alumni. If you are an alumnus of another college or university that uses Handshake, contact that institution’s career services office to determine if you can obtain Handshake access through your alma mater.

Phase 3: Outreach to People of Interest

- Connect with the people you identified in Phase 2.
- Use LinkedIn and send a brief personalized connection request message.
 - Introduce yourself.
 - Explain your connection to the person (common connection, FVTC alum, etc.) and your career goals.
 - Briefly describe how your education and work aligns with their employer/career.
 - Ask to connect.
- Be patient and professional! Not all your outreach efforts will yield connections, but many will.

Phase 4: Request an Informational Interview

- The informational interview is an informal conversation with someone working in an area or organization you want to learn more about. It is NOT a job interview. Your objective in an informational interview is to LEARN more about the job type, career field, employer, or industry you are interested in.

Sample Informational Interview Request sent via email or LinkedIn:

Subject: Fox Valley Technical College Marketing Student – Informational Interview Request

Dear _____:

My name is Susan Foxworthy, and I am a marketing and business operations student at FVTC. I am interested in learning more about careers in market research and multi-platform campaign development. My instructor [Name] told me about your work with Magna Insurance and suggested I contact you.

I am interested in learning about your marketing work within the insurance industry and would like to schedule an informational interview with you. Specifically, I hope to gain a better understanding of the qualifications and experiences I will need to pursue a career in marketing.

Would you be willing to connect with me for 20 minutes by phone or virtual meeting to discuss these topics and answer a few questions about your career path? Please let me know some dates and times that will work for your schedule. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Many thanks,
Susan Foxworthy (she/her)
(555)555-5555

- **Prepare for your Meeting:**
 - Review your industry and company research.
 - Familiarize yourself with the interviewee's LinkedIn profile.
 - Prepare your introduction or "pitch" and identify your goals for the meeting.
 - Prepare several open-ended questions to ask your interviewee.
- **Sample Informational Interview Questions:** Keep it professional but get creative! Here are some questions to get you started:
 - What are your main responsibilities?
 - How does your role/position fit within the organization?
 - How/why did you become interested in what you do?
 - What part of your job/project are you most excited about right now?
 - What advice would you give to someone preparing for a career in this field?
 - What skills do you think are most important for success in this career?
 - What kind of education, training, and/or experience does your job require?
 - Do you have any recommendations for other people I should meet with to learn more about this field/industry?
 - Are there any questions I am not asking that I should be?
 - Can we keep in touch? May I send you a LinkedIn connection request?



- **Conduct the Informational Interview:**
 - Introduce yourself using your 30-second “pitch.”
 - Thank the interviewee for meeting with you.
 - Explain your goals for the meeting.
 - Ask your questions and take notes!
 - Manage time effectively—you asked for 20 minutes, be sure to stay within that timeframe.
 - Conclude the interview by saying “thank you” and asking to stay in touch/connect via LinkedIn.
 - Create an entry in your Career Journal listing key learnings and potential connections.
- **Follow Up:**
 - Send a thank you email within 24 hours of your meeting.
 - Follow up on the advice and/or connections they suggested.
 - Keep in touch and update them on how you took their advice, your career progress, etc.

Phase 5: Expand Your Network

Networking is a continuous process that will fuel your life-long personal and professional growth. We never stop building relationships. Once you have your first few informational interviews, continue building your network by making connections and building and maintaining relationships. You can do this by getting involved at work and within your community. Look for opportunities that align with your goals and your values and then dive in! Here are some ideas to get you started:

At work:

- Take on cross-functional assignments:
 - Look for opportunities to work with other teams and departments.
 - Sign up for training and development opportunities.
- Volunteer to participate in workplace committees, project teams, or task forces:
 - Safety Team
 - Wellness Committee
 - Mentoring Programs
 - Represent your employer at a job fair.
- Participate in Employer-sponsored activities:
 - Social gatherings
 - Sports teams or Fitness groups
 - Charitable Events sponsored by your employer.
 - Junior Achievement

In the Community: Join a community group that aligns with your values and goals—the possibilities are endless!

- Professional Organizations
- Big Brothers/Big Sisters
- YMCA
- Habitat for Humanity
- Environmental Organizations
- Congregations of faith
- Coach a sports team
- Volunteer at your child’s school

Check out volunteer opportunities with FVTC Student Life: <https://www.fvtc.edu/college-overview/student-life> or with Volunteer Fox Cities: www.volunteerfoxcities.org.

As you build relationships and contribute to organizational success at work and in the community, your network will expand along with your sense of belonging and your ability to make an impact!