Networking

You no doubt have heard of “networking”, but do you know what it really is and how it can help you? Simply, networking is the process of gathering helpful information from a network of contacts to assist you in planning your career. Through networking, you build personal contacts that will help you to learn first-hand about your career options and to connect you to potential employers. You don’t have to know scores of people who are all incredibly important. Anyone can network successfully—all it takes is preparation, a modest investment of your time, and enthusiasm. And, as an Aggie, you are already a step ahead of other college students because you are a member of one of the world’s largest and most effective networks—the Aggie Network of students and Former Students!

Networking Benefits

• **Focus your choice of major or career direction.** Get the inside story from those who are actually working in the industry. Gain insight into the positives and negatives, the industry’s future, and unique skills that are valued.

• **Give you advice about your job search.** Speaking with those in your career field can help clue you in on the right techniques to learn about job openings and how to effectively present your qualifications.

• **Validate your choice of career.** Confirm whether or not your chosen major is right for you before making a serious mistake.

• **Refine your interviewing skills.** Take the opportunity to speak with a variety of professionals about your career interests and goals. This will help you to become more comfortable engaging in conversations with contacts, and it will improve your interview questions and answers.

• **Uncover information about a specific employer or job.** Websites and printed literature can only give so much information. Go beyond these resources and learn the organization’s culture and expectations.

• **Step 2: Decide what your purpose will be in contacting your network.** This will depend upon what stage of career planning you are in. If you are in the early stage of career planning, then you may be exploring major or career directions. If you are in the latter stage of career planning and are conducting a job search, your purpose is to obtain advice on how to conduct your job search to get job leads. This will include specific information about employers, work environments, qualifications, and referrals.

• **Step 3: Carefully review what you have to offer and what you are seeking.** Knowing yourself better will enable you to speak easily with more self-assurance to your contacts, and it will help you to make the right match with jobs and employers. Examine your achievements, professional and personal interests, and important values.

• **Step 4: Practice introductions of yourself that you will use in meeting your networking contacts.** You will want to use a shorter thirty-second introduction for situations such as career fairs and receptions when there is little time to talk. A longer sixty-second introduction works well during a meeting with one of your networking contacts.

Getting Started

• **Step 1: Develop a list of potential contacts.** These can be fellow classmates, Former Students, parents and other family members, parents of classmates, professors, advisors, current and former employers, guest speakers, Career Fair representatives, members of professional associations, and other organizations to which you belong, and web-based networks.
**Informational Interview**

**CALL** to verify the name of the person you would like to contact (if it is not a referral). Work like a journalist - how do you spell their name? Find out the gender.

**WRITE** (by e-mail or letter) to notify the contact of your intentions and that you will be calling soon to follow up. Let them know date/time when **you** will call. Do not send your resume at this point.

**CALL** to set up the informational interview and give your 30-second introduction.

"Howdy, my name is Aggie Student. I’m a psychology major at Texas A&M University, and I will graduate in **May 20XX**. I am interested in learning more about careers in human resources and hope to obtain some experience in this field before I graduate (or enter this field when I graduate).

Thank you for your assistance.

Name
Phone Number"

**Note:** If you call to set up an appointment and you get voicemail, leave a message stating the purpose for your call and that YOU will call back on (day) at (time).

When you meet with your contact, respect their time and spend more time listening than talking. Remember... they are the experts. Make sure you send a Thank You note that evening, before you go to bed.

- Your sixty-second introduction elaborates on your background and interest.

  "I became interested in the human resources field last summer when I interned at The Greater Houston YMCA and I got to know the Human Resources Director there. I had always planned on following the traditional route to graduate school, but her job really fascinated me. She worked in all aspects of employee relations and hiring; she was sincerely interested in helping people. I liked the variety of her job and the fact that she was a very positive influence in the YMCA. When I returned to school this fall, I decided to add a business class and I also joined the Human Resources Management Association. I have enjoyed my business class; it’s a good complement to my psychology classes. Next semester I will begin taking courses as a management major, and I hope to obtain an internship in human resources next summer."

- Informational Interview Questions:

  1) How did you get to where you are today?
  2) What characteristics/skills make for a good ________?
  3) How would you describe the culture of your organization?
  4) If you were starting your career today, what would you do differently?
  5) Any myths you want to shatter for me?
  6) Where do you see opportunity areas, needs?
  7) Who else does this? What other companies? Who else should I be talking to?
  8) What advice do you have for someone like me?

- During an informational interview do not ask for a job- ask for advice and information.
- Maintain a record of all contacts, the information you gained, and the follow-up activities recommended by your contacts.
- Keep a notebook log of your activities to help you stay organized.

**Sample Networking Log:**

**Contact Name:** Scott P. Smith

**Company or Organization:** 3M

**Address:** 555 3M Blvd., Austin, TX 77555

**Referral Source:** Karen Jones

**Date of Meeting or Contact:** 09/28/20XX

**Key Points I Learned:** 3M focused on innovation, hard work, and integrity. 15% rule very important. Wide variety of products manufactured and sold around world.

**Suggestions from Contact:** Take a class in new product development.

**Thank-You Letter Sent:** 09/30/20XX

**Suggested Contacts:** Brett Baker of Motorola

**Next Steps:** Look into recommended class.

**Contact Brett Baker for information interview.**

**Aggie Networking Resources**

- **Online Directory of Former Students** - lists all former students of Texas A&M University by major and graduation date, also includes last known contact information. Computers in the Career Center are directly linked to the directory of 270,000 alumni.
- **Local Aggie clubs** - find your local A&M club and attend social events weekly.

**Additional Resources**

- What Color is Your Parachute? by Richard Bolles
- Power Networking by Donna Fisher and Sandy Vilas
- A Foot in the Door: Networking Your Way into the Hidden Job Market by Katharine Hansen
- Networking by Meg Heenehan
- Networking & Your JobSearch by Margaret Riley Dikel, located at www.rileyguide.com
- Networking and You by Leigh Turner, located on the Career Center website
- The printed publications are found in the Career Center library.