

Unit 7 Reading

Networking for Your Career

Networking is another stepping stone to taking control of your goals for your future. In the modern world, in fact, networking is becoming more and more important as we are seeing the amazing growth and popularity of many online networking avenues such as Facebook™, Myspace™, Twitter™, and LinkedIn™ to name just a few. Most of us are becoming quite familiar with social networking; however, the kind of networking that will be especially important for your future success is professional networking.

When we talk about professional networking, we are talking about the relationships that you are building with people who can somehow contribute and support your academic and career success. Maybe your current supervisor realizes that you are taking online classes in order to advance within the company and has supported you in this endeavor. This supervisor is an important part of your network. Maybe a classmate who is working on a similar degree program has suggested a class that you should take. This classmate is an important part of your network. There are many different ways to build a professional network; however, it takes time and ongoing effort, so it would be a good idea to start building or adding to your own professional network NOW!

Advantages of Professional Networking

- Career Opportunities

Many jobs are now found through professional networking, so it will be important for you to start building a strong network of friends and colleagues well before you are ready to make a career change or look for a new job. According to the United States Department of Labor, approximately 70% of all jobs obtained in the country are secured through networking.

- Advice and Support

There are many people out there who have been where you are now. As you add more people to your professional network, you are also building a strong support base for yourself. It is amazing how many people will be willing to offer your ideas and insights that will help you to reach your goals.

- Confidence and Trust

As you begin to build a strong network, you are building a foundation for your own success. Your network will consist of people who support you, people who know what you are capable of, and people you can trust and rely upon.

Powerful Networking Tools

Please explore the following resources to find out about powerful networking tools that are within your reach!

LinkedIn™ ~ LinkedIn is an amazing online resource that provides a wide variety of networking tools and opportunities. Read more about [LinkedIn at the WorkBloom website](#).

WorkBloom Networking Center™ ~ Take a Web Fieldtrip to learn more about building a personal network. Go to the [WorkBloom Networking Center](#) and review the many different networking resources.

Access the **Student Life** area of the university main page by selecting the **Community Center** tab located across the top of your campus page to the right of the My Studies tab. Explore this area to see how you can begin building a network of classmates, instructors, and professionals by getting involved!

- Clubs and Professional Groups
- Honor Societies
- Personal and Professional Growth Workshops
- Student Organization Fair

Building Your Professional Network

Use your goal setting and critical thinking skills to begin building or strengthening your professional network now while you are still in school. Before you know it, you will be completing your degree and focusing on the next stage of your career development. A strong network of family, friends, relatives, classmates, colleagues, and co-workers will be critical to your ongoing career success. Use this three-step approach to build your network:

ABC's of Networking

A. Act Now!

One of the most important things you should understand about the whole networking process is that it is something that takes time and effort. If you wait to begin building your network, you will be putting yourself at a definite disadvantage. Start building your network now!

B. Build a Strong Foundation

Even if you do not realize it, your network already exists at least to some extent. However, it will not thrive and flourish unless you pay close attention to it and care for it. Therefore, it is extremely important that you begin to recognize the critical elements of your network and to utilize them. You have family members, friends, and relatives who are at the core or first degree of your network. You now need to make sure this core group is strong and reliable by strengthening your relationships with members, helping members when you can, and also seeking help from members when you need it. Remember, a strong network is based on a firm commitment from all members! You should also keep in mind that this group is the foundation of your network, so you must constantly strive to add to and treat it as the platform upon which you will build a more expansive network.

C. Concentrate on Future Connections

According to Lisa Chau in her article *Networking, Social Media, and the Six Degrees of Separation (2012)*, one of the most important elements of networking is the focus on constant expansion. In other words, your network should be in a constant state of construction, and you should always be looking for ways to build out from your first degree contacts (friends, family) toward second, third and even fourth degree contacts. Maybe there is a neighbor you waive to as you are out walking your dog, how might you include this person as a second degree contact?

Who else might you want to meet or get to know at some point? What kind of people could help you reach your career goals? These would be your third and fourth degree contacts. Start making a list of future connections now and work with your first and second degree contacts to build your future connections.

Apply the ABC's of Networking by completing the following chart. Use this chart as a blueprint for building your professional network. Your goal should be to continue adding names in all three contact areas and to consistently increase your strength ratings by concentrating on building stronger contacts.

Seven Practical Steps for Networking

It is not hard to build a professional network, but it does take time, effort, and ongoing commitment. In fact, building a network is much like growing a tomato plant. In both cases, the first step is to plant the seed (Rothberg, 2013). However, you cannot stop there or the seed will never sprout and you will never get to reap the benefits of your plant or network. Really, the hard work comes once the seed is in the ground because it is totally dependent upon you for the care and nurturing it is going to need in order to grow into something strong.

But what are the seeds of networking, so to speak? How do you get started? Stephen Rothberg, author of *Networking for College Students and Recent Graduates: Top 7 Steps You Can Take Now*, offers some practical steps you can take in order to build or strengthen your professional network:

1. Volunteer Opportunities

Volunteering offers a wonderful opportunity for you to meet and work with people from all different backgrounds and occupations. Maybe you already work in a volunteer capacity, but you have never thought of it as an opportunity to network. One of the best ways for people to get to know you is for them to see you in action and this is just what takes place during any volunteer opportunity.

2. Explore Internship Opportunities

An internship can be a great way to get a preview of the career field you are pursuing, and it can also provide you with many skills and contacts that will benefit you in the long run. Explore the Web for excellent resources on internships.

3. Consider Employment Opportunities

Work environments provide some of the most beneficial networking opportunities of all. If you are already working, find opportunities to network with co-workers, supervisors, and managers. Let the people you work with know that you are going to school and are serious about making some career advancements. If you do not already work, start thinking about possible part or full-time opportunities that would help you to build skills and contacts related to your career area.

4. Identify Mentors

A mentor can be anyone who can offer you practical career advice, guidance, and ongoing support. In fact, the person you select for your informational interview may actually end up being a mentor to you. Think about people you admire, respect, and trust; these are the kinds of people who can provide strong mentoring relationships. Reach out, ask them for guidance, and be up front in letting them know that you want to learn from them. Mentoring can be an amazing process!

5. Advisors and Professors

Your advisors and professors generally have a wealth of experience that lies outside of the office or classroom, thus then can be extremely valuable additions to your networks. Get to know them by asking questions, trusting them, and seeking advice and guidance.

6. Professional and Organizations

Based on your career choice, become a member of a regional and/or national professional association that will allow you better network in career field. Example: For a human resources career, you might want to become a member of the Society for Humana Resources Management (SHRM).

7. Think Networking

Just about anyone you know can be a vital part of your professional network; however, it is likely that you often miss opportunities to add to your network because you are not —thinking networking. In other words, you have to let people know about yourself, your career plans and your educational goals. Once they see where you are headed, they will

begin to help guide you on your path. Never miss an opportunity to add to your network! That neighbor who walks her dog and waves at you, may be the best contact you could ever make.

References:

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