

ALUMNI ASSOCIATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

NETWORKING GUIDE



INTRODUCTION

Professional networking may not be everyone's favorite activity, but there's no doubt that it's fundamental for career exploration and key to professional success. Networking allows you to build relationships and broaden your outlook and perceptions, and in doing so, also helps others. You can connect with others through networking to share information, resources, knowledge, and skills.

Networking helps you gain professional allies and access unique information on various industries, employment trends, and career opportunities. It's the most effective way to meet influential leaders and stay up-to-date on changing trends in your field. A strong professional network prepares you to make career moves at appropriate points in your life. Research has shown that up to 85% of jobs are filled by networking! Networking is key to advancing each step of your development and career.

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GOALS OF NETWORKING

While networking may help you land a job, the intended goal should extend beyond this and reflect a genuine desire to connect with your contact. There are three main goals you should keep in mind when networking. All of these goals will lead to your ultimate objective: building relationships.

1 | COLLECT INFORMATION

Aim to find information not readily available online or in printed sources. Ask your connection about their career journey — how did they get to where they are? What insights can they share about their company or industry?

2 | GIVE / RECEIVE ADVICE

Ask your contact to share advice — what skills should one develop to succeed in their field? What experiences or activities would they recommend to prepare for a career in their industry?

3 | LEAVE A POSITIVE IMPRESSION

To build lasting relationships, leaving a good impression is crucial. When a contact views your interaction favorably, they are more likely to communicate future opportunities to you.

Be careful not to approach networking as transactional, and never ask for a job! All connections you make should be steps towards building, preferably lasting, relationships with others. Ideally, these relationships are mutually beneficial — before approaching a potential connection, understand what value you can add. What skills, resources, or knowledge can you share with someone?

WHERE TO NETWORK

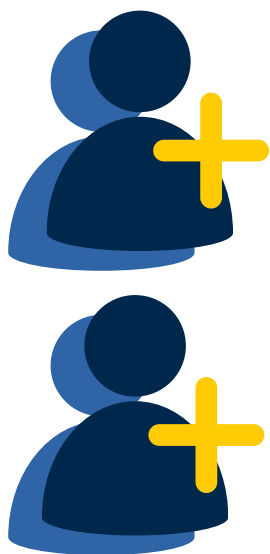
Networking can happen anywhere. More formal networking venues include conferences, professional association events, industry panels/meetings, and alumni club events. Networking can also occur in less formal settings, including at gatherings with friends and family, on an airplane, or at the grocery store. If networking in these settings isn't readily available or you don't think they're for you, you can always create opportunities to network by contacting your existing contacts.

HOW TO NETWORK

Don't be shy! Tap into the network you already have or contact people you want to learn from. Approach networking prepared; understand what information you're seeking and what you're bringing to the table. Know the answers to "Tell me about yourself" and "How can I help?" While a massive network isn't necessary to be successful, your network is likely already bigger than you realize. The steps below will help you grow your existing network and build meaningful and lasting relationships.

1 | IDENTIFY CONTACTS

While anyone can become part of your network, you want to be more strategic about identifying contacts to join your professional network. First, determine what information you're looking for — are you looking to understand a specific industry better? About an employee's experience within an organization? Establish what information you're searching for to help narrow the wide pool of potential contacts.



WHERE TO START WHEN IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL CONTACTS

- Look immediately around you at your friends, family, neighbors, and colleagues.
- Look to people you've met through professional organizations, industry events, and social networking sites.
- Identify industry experts or people in positions that interest you.
- Attending an event in person? Try finding an RSVP list beforehand and identifying attendees who can provide the answers you seek.
- Look to your social media network, particularly LinkedIn. Find other U-M alums using LinkedIn's Alumni tool (<https://www.linkedin.com/school/university-of-michigan/people/>).
- Consult the Alumni Association's Alumni Directory (<http://community.alumni.umich.edu/directory>) to find fellow Michigan graduates.

2 | PREPARE FOR CONNECTIONS

Set up an organizational system in a spreadsheet to keep track of your professional contacts and your communications with them. This includes their name, organization, email address, phone number, how you found the contact, date, and form of first contact (e.g., at an Alumni Club event or via LinkedIn), date and form of response, meeting date(s), thank you notes, etc. Understand what information you want to gain from each contact and be sure to track the knowledge exchanged.



CREATE YOUR PERSONAL PITCH

Create a personal pitch for yourself. It should be concise and notable, while conveying important and relevant information about yourself in 90 seconds or less. Preparing this ahead of time allows you to be in control of your first impression. The personal pitch should inform the listener who you are, what you care about, and any accomplishments that are relevant to them. Avoid sounding rehearsed and make your personal pitch authentic and relevant to the listener. Try using our Alumni Directory (<http://community.alumni.umich.edu/directory>) to find fellow Michigan graduates.

Before reaching out, ensure you've done your homework. Identify at which level you should pitch your networking. For example, don't pitch to the president of an organization if you're far down the ladder. Know what goals you want to achieve by connecting with a specific person. Write down questions you want to ask and prepare to answer their questions — don't forget that networking should be mutually beneficial.

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

An informational interview is a conversation with someone working in an area of interest to you. It's a valuable tool to learn about their role, career path, and field/industry. While not a formal interview, an informational interview should be treated like one. Dress the part and do your research ahead of time so that you can ask informed and relevant questions.

While asking for a job during an informational interview is inappropriate, you are likely meeting with someone who influences hiring decisions, so making a good impression is important. Consider asking some of the questions below to make the most out of this opportunity:

- What was your career path to get to where you are now?
- What prior professional experiences have helped you most in this role?
- What are some of the major responsibilities in your role?
- What is one thing you wish someone had told you before entering this field/industry/role?
- What education, training, or skills does your job require?
- What advice would you give someone considering this type of role/field?
- How are hiring decisions made in this organization?
- What do you like most/least about your work?
- What is a typical day/week like for you?
- What emerging trends/issues do you see in this field?
- In what ways is this field/your role changing?
- Do you recommend anyone else for me to contact?



3 | REACH OUT

Reaching out to your contacts can be daunting, so keep it simple! Send short, concise messages demonstrating your interest in the contact and your purpose for reaching out. Remember your three main goals: collect information, give/receive advice, and leave a positive impression. See a few examples below to get you started.



EXAMPLE OUTREACH MESSAGES

Dear Sally,

Following your career has been a pleasure, and I enjoyed hearing you speak at this year's company retreat. I was particularly impressed with your strategy around new employee engagement. If you have time, I'd love to take you to coffee and learn more about your career path in the Human Resources field. Thanks so much,
Maize A. Blue

Hi John,

It was great meeting you at last week's Chicago Michigan Alumni event. I had a great time chatting with you about our time at U-M. Your LinkedIn profile mentions that you oversee Learning & Development for all St. Mary's Health System staff. As someone who manages Learning & Development at a small growing company, I'm interested in learning how you manage this for such a large organization. Let me know if you're ever free to grab coffee!

Best,

Maize A. Blue

4 | CONNECT!

Set up a time to meet with your contact. It's unnecessary to specify a time limit (they'll let you know how much time they have available), but if you feel compelled to do so, ask for no more than 30 minutes. Come prepared with your personal pitch and questions, but allow conversation to happen naturally. Take notes during the meeting to show the contact you're paying attention and to ensure you're retaining the valuable information you're receiving.

If you're attending a networking event, aim to keep conversations going by asking open-ended questions. Try not to dominate one person's time, but rather have shorter, quick conversations with many people (but don't unfairly cut any conversation too short). Try mirroring the behaviors and body language of those you speak to to help them feel at ease and show interest. Be sure to exchange contact information or take note of names and employment locations so that you can connect after the event.



MIRRORING

Mirroring is replicating the gestures, body language, expressions, tone, cadence, etc. of those you're conversing with. Mirroring is typically done subconsciously, but you can leverage it to maximize your networking opportunities. If you're networking at a professional event, take cues from those around you — if they're not eating, you should abstain from doing so too. Mimic the non-verbal cues of those you're speaking with to reflect your engagement and interest in what they have to say.

5 | FOLLOW UP AND MAINTAIN THE CONNECTION

After meeting with your contact, don't forget your final goal: leave a positive impression! Follow up with a thank-you note and any relevant information you agreed to share. If you haven't already done so, connect with your contact on LinkedIn. If you've established a good rapport, continue to build the relationship by occasionally sending updates and checking in for advice at key points in your career.

EXAMPLE THANK YOU NOTE

Dear Sally,

Thank you so much for meeting with me today. It was wonderful to talk with you and learn more about implementing new employee engagement programs. I was particularly fascinated to hear about the in-role learning aspect. I appreciate the contacts and resources you suggested, and will let you know what happens when I follow up with them.

I look forward to talking with you again in the future.

Sincerely,
Maize

SOURCES

- Stanford Graduate School of Business: Networking
 - <https://www.gsb.stanford.edu/alumni/career-resources/job-search/networking>
- LiveCareer, 200 Informational Interview Questions to Ask
 - <https://www.livecareer.com/resources/interviews/questions/informational-interview-questions>
- Vault Guide to Networking
 - <https://vault.com/vault-guides/networking>
- Northwestern University Career Services: Networking and Informational Interviewing
 - <https://www.mccormick.northwestern.edu/career-development/documents/getting-started/job-search/networking/ucs-networking-guide.pdf>
- University of Chicago, Graduate Career Development: Networking
 - <https://grad.uchicago.edu/career-development/career-development-resources/networking-resources/>
- Georgetown University, Cawley Career Education Center: Networking: Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How
 - <https://careercenter.georgetown.edu/major-career-guides/networking/networking-who-what-where-and-why/>