

Alumnae Networking Tips

Networking is about making a connection with another person, finding your common ground, and using that as a basis for a relationship. It is not about getting something from everyone you meet; it is about developing relationships, expanding your support team, building levels of respect and credibility, and gaining new information. Remember that networking is a two-way street. There is something in it for all parties; otherwise no one would want to be a part of it. Most people enjoy connecting and being able to help another person.

Expanding Your Network

In addition to Wellesley alumnae, your network might include family, friends, family friends, professional organizations, colleagues, church groups, athletic teams, and others you or they may know, who work in a field related to your area of interest, or who may know of someone who works in that field. Remember the concept of “six degrees of separation”; part of the purpose of developing a network is to gain access to other people’s networks. Part-time or temporary positions, internships and volunteer experiences are also ways to explore fields of interest, and expand your network.

Mobilizing Your Network

Once you have developed your networking list, we suggest that you call or write each person in advance to arrange an appointment, and then do your own research about the field and/or company. They are sharing their time with you, be sure you have given some of your time to them by preparing. Let each person on the list know what you are looking for, and specifically state the ways in which you hope this person will be able to help you; with specific job information, references, or even general help because you have no idea what you are looking for. The more you know about your areas of interest, what you can offer, and what you want to know from them, the easier and more beneficial the interaction will be for both of you. Be clear in letting them know you are interested in advice and information, not a job. Do not assume they will know what your needs are based on their connection to you or because of their level of professional experience. Have a resume ready to send if requested or for those you feel should have one.

Remember, they may not respond to your initial contact. Even though networking is a two-way street, the onus is on you for establishing the initial connection. You are probably not their highest priority, so they need to be yours. Continue to reach out to her (or him); you will be able to sense along the way who really does not want to talk with you. There is a line between assertive and annoying, but it is probably about three steps further along than you think.

A list of potential topics one might explore through networking:

- **Further information about the field:** what do they do, what is an average day like, what do they like/dislike about what they do? (There is an assumption that you have done some basic research about the field on your own.)
- **Current direction of the field:** where is it going, what might be some potential upsides or downsides to being in the field, what might be the level of job security?
- **How to get into the field:** what was their career path, what sort of background or training might be needed, what sort of experiences/skills/language/coursework should one emphasize, where one might look to find potential jobs?
- **Geographical information** - either about the field or other industries: what is hot where, who are the main competitors in the area? Or about living in that area/relocating: where to find what, what is life like in ___?

Maintaining Your Network

After the connection is made, be sure to follow through with anything you said you would do - send a resume, call someone they referred you to, etc. You should always write a thank you note within 24 hours, and then find ways to stay in touch with them periodically to maintain the connection. Networking is about making a connection, following through and following-up, but be willing to be creative and go with what is most comfortable for you. Do whatever helps you to stand out in the other person’s mind and make a positive impression. The strength of your network is based on your level of integrity, be true to who you are.