

## Networking

Networking, yes, can be a scary word with terrible connotations. But networking is not evil. Most of the time, “networking” simply involves you being a pleasant person to work with. That way, over time you cultivate a growing group (or network, if you will) of contacts. That’s the slow and steady approach, a good way for people who are shy or introverted to start out. With these contacts, you can share your career goals and find more people to talk to learn about your target industry.

College creates a second level of networking. Every university worth its salt (BU included) has a strong alumni network. This is safe networking. The people you’re contacting have probably heard the same “BU forever” as you. They’re likely to help fellow Terriers since they were in the same place once.

If your general life contacts are a spider web: spindly but strong and connected to each other in all sorts of crazy ways, then the college network is more like small town neighbors: you can go to any one of them and ask for a cup of sugar (or industry know-how in an informational interview), end up at the same block party (alumni weekend or football game), but mostly you leave each other alone.

LinkedIn, Career Fairs, and conferences create a third type of networking: networking for the go-getters, the ultra-extraverted. This type of networking can take nerve and charisma. Since you’re often contacting people with no connection to you and thus less obligation to be nice to you, it’s possible to flop. If it’s done wrong, you might be accused of schmoozing or hobnobbing.

With this type of networking, don’t go straight to the top. Find someone with the job you want within ten years. Connect with them on a personal level. “I saw your LinkedIn/website/article and I’m really interested in pursuing a career in a similar path. Would you be willing to meet and talk about how you got to where you are today?” You’re not asking for a job. You’re not going above anyone’s head, you’re just meeting people and learning about stuff.

That’s what the real goal of networking is: to learn. And, if you do it well, this knowledge will help you get a job.

The best and most effective networking is genuine. Your contacts will be able to sniff out inauthenticity from a mile away and it’ll be way more pleasant for you. If you’re having fun, it’ll easily become part of your everyday life instead of a chore.

Main lesson: networking is not evil. If you just think of it as talking to interesting people, it can even be fun.

## Career Fairs

At career fairs, you have the opportunity to talk many employers about available positions, the company culture, and more. The companies at career fairs are there in a recruiting capacity: most will have currently available relevant jobs and they're interested in hiring BU students.

Since companies are going out of their way to connect with students, make an effort to attend any recruiting events and career fairs your target companies host. At the event, say hello and make a connection. That simple gesture shows you value the company and are willing to sacrifice your time to learn more.

### Prep

Don't get overwhelmed by the number of people and don't try to visit every company. Look up the companies in advance and find ones that interest you.

Do some research to show your awareness. Come up with questions beyond, "what do you do here?" Have intelligent, researched questions to stand out from other candidates and show you are actually interested and invested in this company.

Revise your resume in advance:

- Tailor your resume to your target companies. Make sure to have relevant industry experience at the top and show your interest through organization.
- If you're interested in multiple types of positions, make different versions of your resume to target each of those positions.
- Print out copies of your resume(s), put them all in a folder.

Be prepared to talk about yourself. Come up with a 20-30 second pitch that addresses your background, experience, and goals/trajectory.

### What are your goals at a career fair?

Learn about the companies. Put a face to your name. Be remembered (for good things). Be polite. Show interest in the company through research and intelligent questions. Show you know your stuff.

### What to do?

Dress nice. Check the event. Some career fairs have a more relaxed dress code, but either way, wake up a few minutes earlier so you have time to comb your hair and put on a nice pair of pants (and real shoes. And a nice shirt).

Since career fairs are all about quick contact, presentation is as important as your resume:

- This includes appearance but extends presentation from your handshake to how you talk about yourself.
- Smile, show interest, and have a concise, informative pitch you can use with recruiters.

Focus on the companies you're most interested in. However, if there are long lines at all of your target companies, make contacts at some of the less crowded tables (if you're at all interested in the company). You'll be able to have more of a conversation. And, with less competition, you'll be easier to remember.

Don't just drop off your resume, talk to the recruiter. If they don't know much about your particular field, ask to talk to someone at the company who might know more. Respect recruiters' (and students') time—recruiters have to talk to hundreds of students.

## **Follow up**

Take notes on each company, the positions available, and application information. Rank the companies: which are most interesting and appealing to you? Which would best position you to achieve your long-term career goals?

Organize contact information and due dates for any application materials. Then send a short, personalized thank you note within 24 hours to any employers you talked to.

## **The Follow-Up Email**

Write a thank you letter to all employers you spoke to. Thank them for their time and attendance. Be specific about where you met, and what you discussed in the conversation. Follow through on anything you said you would do: provide any promised information. If you had discussed other connections, remind the recruiter (politely) about it. IF you want to keep in long-term contact with the person, request them on LinkedIn AFTER sending the email.

### **An example:**

Dear (name of recruiter),

Thank you so much for taking the time to attend Boston University's COM Internship Fair on November 4. It was great to meet you and learn more about (company's name). Our discussion about (whatever specific topic you discussed) was so helpful. I did some research after our conversation and I'm really impressed by (your company)'s (project) for (some topic). I'm really excited about the opportunity to apply my (specific skills you mentioned) on similar projects. As per our discussion, I submitted my application for the (name of) internship online.

Thank you again for your time.

Sincerely,

Your Name

Signature with school, major, & contact info

## Informational Interviewing

Informational interviews are one-on-one conversations with the goal of learning more about a company, position, or career path. Like job interviews, they can be on the phone, in person, or on Skype, but are often most effective in person. These are traditionally short meetings (about a half hour long) and are great ways to make contact and learn about industries. They're a particularly good way to get feedback on your experience as it relates to your career goals or potential career paths.

Informational interviewing is not just for students—use it throughout your career to stay up-to-date with industry trends and opportunities. Moreover, these are a great way to grow your network—if done right, informational interview contacts can be valuable connections throughout your career.

### Why?

- Practice interviewing or get more information for a job interview.
- Learn about entry level jobs in the field and career paths.
- Learn about industry trends, values, goals, issues, and keywords.
- Get feedback—your contact might send you in a direction you weren't expecting.
- Learn who else to connect with.

### Who should I talk to?

- Second- or third-degree connections on LinkedIn (and real life)
- Alums with similar career paths
- People in a company or industry you're interested in who you have something in common with

### Prep

- Email the potential contact. Say you're impressed by their career path and you're interested in talking to them. Specify that this is informal—not a job interview, not asking for a job.
- Try to set up an in-person meeting. Coffee shops are great places: they're informal, you have something to do if you're nervous (drink coffee), and they keep the meeting short (which is probably better for your contact).
- Do some research. Find out more about their background and the industry.
- Come up with questions to ask. Consider what you want to learn. Are you trying to figure out if a career path is right for you? Do you have an interview with a company and want to find out more about it? Are you trying to learn more about the industry in general?
  - Think about their career path, how they got to where they are, what was significant in their career, degrees, advice, company culture

## **During**

- Be polite. Be prepared for some small talk.
- Guide the meeting. You're the interviewer here, so you'll have to lead: ask questions, keep things on track if necessary, but be willing to go where the stories take you.
- DO NOT ASK FOR A JOB.
- Bring copies of your resume, but do not distribute unless they request it first.
- Ask who else you should be talking to, who else they can connect you to.

## **Follow up**

- Say thank you, send a thank you note!
- See if they'll connect with you on LinkedIn
- This doesn't have to be a one-time meeting. Stay in touch, especially in regards to ways they've helped you