Networking is about developing relationships or connections. You are not likely to get very much from someone if you just speak with them once.

Networking is about giving and receiving. It is about getting out and talking to people, gaining new information and insights, and developing relationships with them. Networking can start from a casual or chance connection with someone, setting up an informational interview, or corresponding through emails or websites.

Before we go into detail about any of the different ways to network, there are some basics with which you should be familiar.

Networking Basics

What is your purpose?
Is it to find out more about a career field or position? To create opportunities for employment? To develop a strategy to advance your career? To connect with professionals in your field to share best practices or gain referrals? Knowing your purpose will help you focus your discussions.

What is your employment goal?
This could be very broad or extremely fine-tuned. The more you know about your career goals, the more direct advice you can expect to receive. However, do not put off networking even if you do not have a clear career path. Networking and asking for general advice can help you clarify your career goals.

Me in 30 Seconds
It is a good idea to know how you want to introduce yourself. Your personal pitch, or commercial, will focus on your skills, accomplishments, expertise or knowledge and personal qualities.

Start a Conversation
Ask open ended questions, and listen intently to what the other person is saying. Talk about something that interests the other person and watch for signs that they are no longer interested in speaking with you or about that topic.

How to start a conversation

Open with a shared reality:
The weather, a class, being a student at BYU

Comment or ask about a prop:
A picture, the food, an event

Use the introduction/question opening:
“I’m new here. What do you like best about...?”

Ask about their career path:
“How did you get started in your career at...?”

Ways to Network

Casual or Chance Connections
Any situation can turn into a networking situation, just think of all the places where you can meet new people:

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Start a conversation, use your 30 second personal pitch, and begin to develop a relationship. As appropriate, ask if you would be able to keep in touch with this person, and exchange contact information.

Reports show that anywhere between 20% and 80% of all jobs are found through networking. Although the number is probably somewhere in the middle, the fact is, networking is a very important part of your career search.
Informational Interviews

An informational interview or scheduled meeting can be highly effective. Let them know how you got their contact information and why you are hoping to meet with them. Ask if there is a convenient time when you can come to their office, or schedule a time to communicate over the phone if that is more convenient for the person.

When attending an informational interview, dress the part. Treat this as you would a job interview; they will not take you seriously if you do not take yourself seriously. Be prepared with questions you may want to ask, be a good conversationalist, and stick to the amount of time for which you asked. At the end of the meeting, ask them if there is anyone else in the organization or industry with whom they would suggest you meet.

After your meeting, send them a thank you note. An email is convenient, but a handwritten note provides a nice touch. Follow up with anything they suggested you do. Remember you are a reflection on the person who referred you as well as your University. Be polite, professional, and do not pester them.

Additional Resources

The internet can also provide great ways to network. Some favorite resources include:

LinkedIn is the Facebook for your career. Connect with students and professionals, and join networking groups. Look for BYU Career Services and Alumni groups to extend your networking.

http://www.linkedin.com

Alumni Career Networking Tool houses contact information for thousands of alumni. Perform a search and find contact information for people who match your interests. For access, go to

http://alumnicareers.byu.edu

Take a Cougar to Lunch is a program sponsored by the BYU Student Alumni Association. Sign up to meet and visit with an alumnus during a lunch appointment. They may meet you on campus or other close locations. Sign up at

http://lunch.byu.edu

Follow up on your networking connections

No matter how you started your networking relationship, keep the relationship alive beyond your successful job searches. As appropriate, share things that may be of interest to them, including how their assistance helped you. If there is anything you can do to help them, offer to be a resource to them in the future.

Questions you might want to ask when networking:

1. How did you get your job?
2. What qualifications/skills did the interviewer look for?
3. Did you have an internship?
4. How do you like your job?
5. What is it like to work for your company?
6. How would you describe the company culture?
7. What do you think is the future of your company?
8. If you were in my situation, to whom would you send a resume?
9. If you could do it again, what might you have done differently?
10. What additional advice or referrals can you give me?