Networking, Informational Interviews, and Job Shadow Strategies

The Maroon Advantage TOOLKIT
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The reality is that people hire who they know and who they trust so it’s essential to build a community of people, known as your network that will help you showcase your value in the workplace so you can achieve your career goals. In terms of job searching, networking is the number one way to go! The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) consistently reports that 80% of jobs are never posted publicly. This is known as the hidden job market and further illustrates the necessity of networking to discover opportunities by building meaningful professional relationships so you can be in the know.

This module will help you understand the different ways to build professional relationships, starting with the Colgate alumni as your warm network. The power of personal relationships is incredible and every professional stands to benefit from developing a network so they can be seen and heard in the job search and career advancement process.

The goal of this section is to give you concrete action steps so you can begin building your network, or enhance your existing network, to help you move forward on your career develop-

Colgate Alumni

Colgate alumni discuss the necessity of networking in this video. (Click on the video to watch)

Keith Ferrazzi - What is Networking?

Known internationally as a master of networking, Keith Ferrazzi is a renowned business owner, consultant, author, and public speaker who teaches the power of networking worldwide. Enjoy this video to help you understand the importance of networking in your career development strategy. (Click on the video to watch)
Build Your Community by Networking

Building professional relationships is not something you do only when you need a job or a promotion. Networking is used to gather information for a variety of personal and professional needs from finding great childcare in a new city to researching career opportunities. Don’t wait until you need a network to build one. Developing meaningful relationships should be a regular part of your life as a success-oriented individual. Just like friendships, the most authentic and significant professional relationships evolve over time.

Consider networking as an opportunity to build your community and a chance for you to serve as a resource for those in need. You have a built-in network of fellow Colgate alumni with whom you already share a common bond. Start by reaching out to these warm leads as you strengthen your networking skills and your confidence. Before you know it, networking will come with ease and you’ll enjoy the power of communicating with others in the workforce to create lasting relationships.

We believe networking is the most critical component of a career development strategy so you will see references to networking throughout the Toolkit.

Colgate Career Advisory Network iCAN:

Responding directly to the alumni request of providing more direct and easy access to one another for career development, Colgate has launched iCAN. This career advisory network is easily searchable and should be your first point of departure when beginning to develop your professional network.
Social Networking

The next Toolkit section focuses on social media resources for job search and career management, but social media can also be a networking resource. It can be tempting to network solely from behind your computer screen. You may have a myriad of friends on Facebook and multiple professional connections in your LinkedIn account, but unless you are seen and heard in-person while you network, you won’t be as effective in achieving your career goals.

The reality is that people hire whom they know and whom they trust and these types of professional relationships evolve from face-to-face encounters. While the power of social media networking is a very important part of your overall strategy, you must get out there and meet people if you want to make a positive impression that will lead to a career opportunity.

Plan to spend 80% of your networking time cultivating and pursuing in-person relationships so you can showcase your strengths and your value-ad in the world of work. Use social media to initiate leads but follow-up in-person whenever possible. Stay tuned for detailed social media strategies in the next section.

The Power of the Non-Threatening Informational Interview

What is an Informational Interview?
An informational interview is an interview YOU conduct with a person who currently has a job you think you might want, or who has specific knowledge about an occupation or career in which you are interested. The purpose is to provide a low stress situation where you have the opportunity to gather data you need that will help you make a more realistic career choice. While its purpose is to get information, NOT a job, informational interviews can serve the dual purpose of being a networking strategy by circulating your name and face among potential employers.

How Does an Informational Interview Differ from A Job-Hunting Interview?
Informational interviews differ from job-hunting interviews in the following ways:

**Purpose:**
The purpose of an informational interview is to get information, not a job offer.

**Control:**
You get to ask most of the questions based on the information you decide you need.

**Pressure:**
You have much to gain and little to lose in an informational interview so you should feel less pressure than you would during a job in-

**Focus**
The focus is on the person who you are interviewing and his/her expertise rather than on you and your qualifications for a job.
Why Should You Do Informational Interviews?

Informational Interviews can provide you with valuable information for job hunting and career planning that you could not get any other way. They:
- Present you with up-to-date facts about an occupation that can help you in your decision-making.
- Inform you about the skills required for certain jobs so you can match them with your own.
- Demonstrate how people feel about their work so you can assess how you might feel if you did the same job.
- Provide you with valuable networking contacts to utilize when you are doing your actual job search.
- Help develop your communication skills and self-confidence in talking with professional people in a low pressure interview environment.
- Teach you occupational “buzzwords” unique to the career field of your choice.
- Give you an edge in future interviews by providing you with inside knowledge not known by all of your competition.
- Develop basic skills similar to a targeted job search which you will be conducting later.

Does Informational Interviewing Really Work?

Yes! Informational Interviews work because most people:
- Enjoy talking about their jobs and career fields.
- Are flattered that you ask their advice to assist you with your own career and future.
- Are empathetic about career transitions because they have experienced them.
- Like to help others because it makes them feel good.
How to Ask for an Informational Interview

People are bombarded with multiple emails daily, so distinguish yourself from the masses by picking up the phone and requesting an informational interview so the interviewee can hear your voice. Even if you just leave a voice mail message, this gives you a distinct advantage over someone else who only sends an email request.

Practice what you will say ahead of time and consider writing a script you can refer to so you leave an articulate message. Speak slowly and clearly and be sure to include your contact information for easy follow-up. Here is a sample request for an informational interview you can conduct by phone:

“Hello Mr. Jones, my name is Jane Doe and I’m a 2010 Colgate alumna. I got your contact information from the Colgate Career Advisory Network website and would like to ask if you would consider a brief informational interview. I’m very interested in growing my career in the sales & marketing arena and I would like to learn more about your career path since we share similar interests. I would like to conduct a brief 20 minute interview with you by phone or I could come to your office in the City since my current job is also in Manhattan. Thank you for considering this and I look forward to hearing from you. Again, my name is Jane Doe and I can be reached at (999) 999-1234 – that’s (999) 999-1234. Thank you so much and have a great day.”

It’s essential to leave your name and contact information but the golden touch is mentioning the commonality you share as Colgate alumni. There are many ways to connect with people who are non Colgate alumni as well. Consider mentioning who referred you or how and why you found this person compelling. Find a way to intrigue the person enough with your message so they respond to your call.

Sometimes a direct phone line is impossible to get and you will be screened by a receptionist or gatekeeper at a company. In this case, do send an email or a well crafted letter – but keep it brief, to the point, and actionable so you make an impact. When you are granted an informational interview dress the part and it’s always better to be overdressed and professionally presentable than underdressed. Even if you are meeting for coffee in a café, the first impression you make will be long lasting.

Come to your informational interview with questions prepared in advance and a pad to jot down some notes. Keep it low tech and avoid using your laptop or iPad for taking notes so you can build rapport and maintain eye contact in a personal way. The most impressive candidates do their research in advance and ask relevant questions that illustrate they have done their due diligence. Remember, first impressions are long lasting so informational interviews provide an opportunity for you to showcase your professional best.

Here are some basic informational interview questions to get you started but always customize your interview based on what you want to know about the individual and the industry.
Sample Informational Interview Questions to Ask When Meeting with a Network Contact

** Note – you should always customize your questions based on the individual and their career field but this basic list of questions will give you a solid point of departure.

- Tell me about your career path and how you landed this position.
- What are the various jobs available in this field?
- What types of training do companies offer those who enter this field?
- What kind of experience and/or educational background is desirable for this field?
- In what ways is your occupation changing?
- How is the economy affecting this industry?
- What is the employment outlook in your career field? How much demand is there for people in this career?
- How quickly is the field growing and what are the growth areas of this field?
- Do you anticipate future opportunities in your company?
- What parts of the country offer the best opportunities in this field?
- What are the opportunities in this career like in [geographical area you are most interested in]?
- What is the typical entry-level (or experienced-level) salary in this field?
- What are the salary ranges for higher-levels in this occupation?
- Is there a salary ceiling?
- Aside from such visible compensation as money, fringe benefits, travel, etc., what kinds of mental dividends (such as job satisfaction) does this career yield?
- What do you find unique about your career field?
- From everything you’ve observed, what problems can you cite regarding working in this career?
- What skills or personal characteristics do you feel contribute most to success in this industry?
- What sacrifices have you made to succeed in this field, and do you feel the sacrifices were worth it?
- When people leave this career, what are the usual reasons?
- What are the typical entry-level job titles and functions?
- What entry-level jobs offer the best opportunities for the greatest amount of learning?
- What are the most significant characteristics of this industry?
- What trends in the field would be most likely to affect someone just entering this career now?
- What kinds of people experience the greatest success in this field?
- What is the most important thing that someone planning to enter this career should know?
- All about your interviewee’s job:
  - What is your exact title?
  - Do other people in your company with the same job title that you hold have the same responsibilities?
  - What was your title when you first started here?
  - What precisely do you do? What are the duties/functions/responsibilities of your job?
• What is your job like?
• To what extent is it you expected it would be? How much job security do you have in this position?
• What is a typical day like?
• What kind of hours do you normally work?
• Do you have to put in much overtime or work on weekends?
• Are the time demands of your job specific to this company, or would anyone in this career be expected to put in the same hours?
• Do you ever take work home with you?
• What kinds of problems do you deal with?
• What do you do if you can’t solve a problem on your own?
• Do you have to deal with a significant amount of conflict in his job?
• What systems are in place for dealing with conflict?
• What constraints, such as time and funding, make your job more difficult?
• What kinds of decisions do you make?
• Describe some of the toughest situations you’ve faced in this job.
• To what extent do you interact with customers/clients?
• What percentage of your time is spent doing each function?
• How does your time use vary? Are there busy and slow times or is the work activity fairly constant?
• Which other departments, functional units, or levels of the hierarchy do you regularly interact with?
• How much flexibility do you have in determining how you perform your job?
You can close the interview by asking for advice about your career path and for any suggestions they may have for you about growing your career. But don’t start with this line of questioning – earn the trust of your interviewee and be intuitive about when it’s time to talk about you. Don’t assume they will be willing to distribute your resume but ask if they will take a look at it and offer constructive feedback. If they are interested in what you have to offer they will come forward with counsel and possibly connect you with additional professionals in the industry so you can grow your network. It’s always wise to ask if they have other contacts in their industry that they can recommend for additional informational interviews. Take advantage of this opportunity to grow your network and meet new people.

**It’s Never Too Late to Pursue a Job Shadow Experience**

Another strategy for being seen and heard in the industry is to request a job shadow opportunity. It’s never too late in your career to ask for a job shadow – this tool is not just for students and recent graduates. Many career changers are using this as a way to learn about new career fields they are considering.

Similar to the informational interview, you reach out to your contact and request a brief job shadow experience that would be convenient for them. Perhaps you are interested in shadowing an attorney and would appreciate observing them in court as you consider whether law school is the right option for you.

Some professionals will go above and beyond and grant you an opportunity to observe a full “day in their life” on the job. Others will invite you to observe for a brief period which may include lunch or a coffee break. No matter what they offer, be gracious and act professionally as you will be seen in the organization and possibly introduced to other key players. This is not, however, a time for you to hand out your resume or interject your opinions in staff meetings you are observing. Be a good listener, don’t offer your ideas unless your opinion is sought out, and use the opportunity to determine if the career environment and position is a good match for your career goals.
Following-up and Stewarding Your Network

Every contact you make with a network connection deserves your gratitude and follow-up. The hand-written note is a lost art and can really distinguish you so consider sending one instead of just a quickie email. No need to send gifts or flowers – that can be overkill and inappropriate. But it’s wise to ask your network contact – “Please let me know if there is a way that I can be helpful to you in the future.” It’s possible you can pay-it-forward in some way and this will really set you apart as a professional and open the door for future networking encounters with this person.

Out of sight is out of mind, so be careful to keep your growing list of network contacts updated so they can keep you in mind when opportunities arise. Send an occasional card or leave an upbeat voice mail message. No need to ask for anything, just bring them up to speed about your progress and thank them for their assistance. The follow-up is crucial to maintaining and stewarding your network contacts for the long run of your career journey. You may cultivate mentors and a team of individuals willing to serve as resources on your career journey. The power of networking is limitless so enjoy the process of building your community.

Everyone Should Have a Business Card

The professional business card exchange is an age old technique that helps people stay connected and remember who you are after a quick encounter or introduction. Even if you are unemployed and job searching, you should create a personal card with your name, cell phone, and email. No need to put a title unless you have a specialty area already and are focusing on that industry in your job search.

Always go packing with your business cards and hand them out when you meet new people and be sure to ask for their card in return. This is your ticket to a follow-up and a more fully developed network connection that could be influential down the road. Remember, the process of building relationships is incremental and exchanging cards can be the first step in the process.

Keep your card design simple and clean unless you are pursuing an artistic profession and want to showcase your creative flair. Inexpensive business cards can be made with the Microsoft Word template. Have your template page copied on card stock at your local copy story and professionally cut so the edges are crisp. Vista Print online is also an inexpensive option for business cards so you can network effectively with this very important tool.
Networking Cultivation Sources

- Start with your warm network: friends, family, Colgate alumni, etc.
- Turn your social media online network into in-person connections.
- Seek out people you don’t know by getting referrals from your warm network.
- Develop some stretch relationships by initiating some cold calls.
- Remember to ask for suggestions about additional contacts from every person with whom you meet.

How Do I Get Started?

More Keith Ferrazzi wisdom - check out his brief video.

How Do I Feel Uncomfortable Networking?

More Keith Ferrazzi has some great strategies in this video.

How Do I Turn an Initial Contact into Ally?

Ferrazzi food for thought in this brief video.

Books that Will Make a Difference in Your Networking Success

Check out some of our favorite books for additional strategies about networking, informational interviews, and job shadow strategies.

- Never Eat Alone by Keith Ferrazzi
- Who’s Got Your Back: The Secret to Finding the 3 People Who Will Change Your Life by Keith Ferrazzi
- The Networking Survival Guide: Get the Success You Want by Tapping into the People You Know by Diane Darling
- Make Your Contacts Count: Networking Know-How for Business and Career Success by Anne Baber & Lynne Waymon
- the Fine Art of Small Talk: How to Start a Conversation, Keep it Going, Build Networking Skills, and Leave a Positive Impression! by Debra Fine
- Brag! The Art of Tooting Your Own Horn Without Blowing It by Peggy Klaus