

The Golden Rules of Networking

1. **NEVER, repeat, NEVER ask for a job.** This is NOT networking. You can only ask for information, advice, expertise, opinion, or another contact. Do contacts know that you are looking for work eventually? YES. However, asking about leads or jobs can kill your relationship with a contact. Don't risk it!
2. **Ask people only for what they can easily and painlessly give.** Ask for a job, I'll send you to human resources. Ask for advice, I'll give you 20 minutes (and possibly a job lead). Ask for an hour of my time, I cringe. Ask for five minutes, I might give you my morning.
3. **Go in fully prepared.** From your research of the company and the contact, develop a list of questions. If emailing, don't inundate the contact with your list of inquiries. Instead, start with a question or two to get the conversation started. Be ready to talk about your interests and direction (your elevator pitch comes in handy yet again!).
4. **Have specific goals for each contact.** Think about *how* each contact can help you. What is the person's position? What information can your contact share with you? Before calling or visiting, write down the things you want to learn or accomplish. If you can't do this, you're NOT ready to network.
5. **Respect people's time and effort.** There are probably MANY other things contacts could be doing. Keep your communication short and specific. Ask if contacts are on deadline. Do not call contacts as they're looking to leave for the day at 5 p.m. Showing that you "get it" is key to looking like you're serious about entering their area of the industry. Your courtesy will reflect positively upon you! Respecting their time also means following up – stay organized, thank people for their time, and don't disappear when you should be sharing updates. Provide contacts with a return on their "investment" (the time and effort they have given you) while also staying "top of mind" for leads by keeping in touch.
6. **Be like a reporter – avoid asking yes or no questions.** Yes or no questions only give you a 50/50 shot at best. Example: "Do you have any openings?" "No." versus "What advice would you give someone who would like to work at XYZ?"
7. **Always let the other person feel like the hero.** Send a thank you. Follow up. Let your contact know what happened, that the advice was helpful, etc. Follow-up is perhaps the most important part of networking.
8. **Don't discourage easily.** It may take some following-up on your part to get the information you need/want or to find the person who can help you. Polite tenacity reads as enthusiasm.
9. **Every contact is a good contact.** Anyone working at a company of interest can at least answer general questions (what it's like to work there, what the hiring process was like, etc.). If the person isn't in the right department or role for your career aspirations, once you've developed a good rapport, your initial contact will usually be happy to connect you with someone else who is. Never underestimate the power of a referral and don't hesitate to speak with multiple people at a company. Having more people in your corner is never a bad thing!
10. **Most rules are made to be broken, even occasionally.** You will have to make some of this up as you go along. If you discover the contact you called has left the company for instance, ask the person who answers the phone your questions. **You will have to think on your own.** But that's what they'll pay you for later...