Networking

Succeeding in a job interview requires that you successfully address four key issues:

- Why you want to work in the hospitality industry
- Why you want to work for this company
- Why you are interested in this position/function
- Why you should be hired

*Networking will help you successfully address these issues and ultimately lead to obtaining the position you want.*

**Networking: The Definition**

Networking is a systematic approach to building relationships for the purposes of:

- Learning about key issues, facts, and trends to help you define and articulate your career goals
- Obtaining referrals to resources and additional individuals that will help you learn of potential, or actual, job openings

In researching careers, the best sources of information you will find are professionals already working in the fields that interest you. They can offer inside views that cannot be obtained if you limit your research to reading. As a result, you will better understand the industry, the organization, and job functions while building valuable contacts now and for the future.

**The Successful Conversation**

A *networking conversation* is a meeting arranged with an individual who currently performs the job you think you might want, or who has specific knowledge of an occupation or career field that holds interest for you. The conversation is a low-stress situation where you have the opportunity to gather the data you need to make a realistic career choice and/or get advice for your job search strategy.

A “successful” networking conversation results in:

- Information on a particular function, industry, or geographic area, including the skill sets that are required for certain jobs
- An understanding of the organization’s culture which will help determine if this type of position is right for you
- A competitive edge in an interview – from talking with several people in a functional area or industry, you gain a strong understanding of current issues and specifics about a position that will help you in an actual job interview
- Leads to referrals for positions within the organization or other organizations – by having spoken with actual employees and hiring managers in the organization, you are seen as a “known,” rather than as an unknown (with greater risk factors)
- Names of those who are doing similar work
- Heightened confidence in meeting new people and in the overall interview process
Importance of Referrals
You will find it easier when writing a letter, or making the first phone call to a network contact, to be able to start with, “Susan (last name) suggested I contact you....” It is more comfortable for you, and for the person on the receiving end, to know that you are calling because a mutual friend, colleague, alumnus, etc., referred you to them. However, use a person’s name only if you have asked permission first. If you drop a name without permission, it can come back to haunt you. You would be surprised at how often it circles back to your referral sources that you named them as a way of gaining an entrée. Your contact could become annoyed or angry and refuse to help you in the future, as well as alert the new contact that you were unprofessional in your approach. Fortunately, most people will respond positively if you ask to use their name when building your network with additional contacts recommended by them.

How to Ensure Value from Networking (Win/Win)
Most people gain satisfaction from helping others and offering advice—and most people also like to talk about themselves and their work. However, it is important to remember that a successful networking conversation requires that you also give something back.

Listen attentively and understand the interests of the individual you have contacted. You will build a more lasting relationship if, as a result of good listening skills, you send follow-up information of interest to this person; perhaps an article you have read or a handout from class, etc. By giving back, you are seen as a professional equal; someone who can also be of value in this new relationship.

When you write your thank you note, make sure you explain what you did with the information you received; what action you took as a result of this person’s advice or referrals. Remember also that people don’t like feeling that you have used them, so let them know you appreciate their time as well as the information provided.

How to Build an Effective Network

Three Degrees of Contacts:
First Degree: You can build a powerful network of contacts by starting with the familiar: your family and friends, former colleagues at work, your classmates.

Second Degree: The next range of contacts would be with acquaintances: students in the Hotel School, guest lecturers in class, referrals from friends and other acquaintances—people you have never met, but with whom you have a mutual connection.

Third Degree: People you have no personal connection with, but with whom you are affiliated because of a common organization, i.e., alumni of the Hotel School, alumni of your undergraduate institution, members of professional organizations to which you have belonged.

Examples of Contact Sources
• There is a wealth of experience, talent, and expertise in your classmates. One strength of the Hotel School is how willing students are to assist each other. Take advantage of it! Many of your classmates also have spouses who may have worked in organizations of interest to you.
• The Hotel School Alumni Directory is online at: https://www.hotelschool.cornell.edu/alumni/directory/
• Professors from the Hotel School and from your undergraduate institution.
• The “Career Search” database of public and private companies can be found in Cornell’s library system. You can search by geographical area and industry and obtain contact information.
• Your former professional colleagues.
• Fellow members of former athletic teams, fraternities, sororities or military organizations.
• Alumni databases from your undergraduate institution and from student organizations you were active in.
• Former clients and vendors of your prior jobs.
• Family friends and other personal contacts.
• Guest lecturers at the Hotel School.
• The Hotel School Alumni organization, The Cornell Hotel Society, has regional, US, and international chapters. These contacts can be found on the Hotel School’s Alumni web site, http://www.chs.cornell.edu/regions.html
• You can generate contacts from professional organizations you belong to as well as from their websites. If you need to identify professional groups, look in the Encyclopedia of Associations in the library.
• Annual reports of corporations.
• Professional journals that publish articles in your career area of interest.
• Cities’ Chambers of Commerce.

In developing your contact list, think broadly. If you want to move to Boston and you can’t find alumni in your field, contact any alumni and ask for referrals to other alumni or colleagues. You will be amazed at how fast you can track down leads.

If you’re feeling unsure about networking, ask some of your classmates to relate their best networking story.

How to Construct Your Network

You can begin your network in several ways:

Send an E-mail
E-mail has become the preferred way to touch base. Writing an e-mail allows you to compose your thoughts carefully. It serves only as a means of introduction and may not yield a written response. Therefore, you must take responsibility for the follow-up. In your e-mail state that “I will call you next week to set up an appointment.” Then make the telephone call the next week. Be selective, and keep your list of contacts manageable by sending your e-mails out at timed intervals. The advantage of writing an e-mail before calling is that the individual you contact can learn something about your experience and interests prior to his or her conversation with you. However, since most working people receive hundreds of e-mails per week, you may need to remind the person of your e-mail when you make the follow-up phone call. Note the day you sent the e-mail so the person can readily retrieve it to re-read your introduction. Be sure to make the phone call during the week you stated in your e-mail.

Write a Letter
This may still a viable option as again, most people receive many e-mails daily. The rules above apply.

Make a Telephone Call
Many students have discovered that direct calls are quicker and more productive than e-mails/letters. When you telephone a contact, explain why you are calling, and ask to set up a phone or personal appointment. Have a 30-second introduction ready. For example:

“Hello, my name is Jane Wong. I’m an MMH student at the Hotel School and I was referred to you by (first name/last name) (or, I located your name on the Career Contact and Alumni Network). I’m calling because I’m interested in real estate and consulting, and I’d like to talk to you about your experience in the field. Could we set up a time to talk for about 15 minutes?”

Alternately, you can ask to meet in person: “I’ll be in San Diego during January break, and I’d like to meet with you then, if you are available.”
Do not ask the person to answer your questions about the field during your initial call, but be prepared to start the conversation immediately if they say, “I can talk right now. What would you like to know?”

The key advantage of the telephone contact is that it saves time for both you and the person you are calling. Most people conduct business via the phone and find it easier to schedule a call than to schedule a meeting. However, a face-to-face meeting is the best option because the individual can get a much better feel for who you are and will better remember you later.

Regardless of the method you choose, you will need to explain your purpose in requesting the interview. Remember, your purpose is to gain information as you investigate a particular field, not necessarily to obtain a job.

The Conversation

Overcoming the Networking Jitters
The prospect of asking for help can be daunting. Some students find it awkward to make telephone calls to those they don’t know. Keep in mind that people are usually very willing to give advice. Everyone likes being regarded as an expert!

- Remember that the purpose of your conversation is to provide you with facts and perspectives, not a job. If you focus on finding a job, you will put others on the defensive because they either aren’t in a position to help you or feel uncomfortable because they don’t know you well enough.
- When you contact alumni you will find they want you to succeed. It is a reflection on the Hotel School and on its alumni when you succeed.
- You are building relationships. You are developing advocates for your professional life. Understand that it may take 70 conversations to turn up the three or four who will truly connect with you and want to ensure your success.
- Practice with a friend before making your first phone call.
- Prepare a 30-second pitch to explain your purpose for calling, and make a list of your questions. The more focused and specific you are, the easier it is for the other person to help you. If you ask a question such as, “Can you tell me about the consulting field?” the person will not know where to begin and will believe you haven’t done your homework. Make it easy for the person to help you in just 15 minutes of their time.
- Believe it or not, it really does make a difference if you smile into the phone. Your voice, tone, attitude, and self-confidence will improve markedly.
- Start with the contacts you know best. Sharpen your focus and practice your conversation with those who are the least threatening to you, or with those whom you believe are the furthest from your career target.

You will be pleasantly surprised at how easy it is to connect with people!

Preparation
If you want to be taken seriously when you call a contact to whom you have been referred, it is essential that you have done sufficient research to have a basic knowledge of the field and job function.

- Do your homework by using the library resources and talking to students who have worked in the field. You will begin to identify gaps in your knowledge from which you can make a specific list of questions.
- Do not ask broad questions such as, “Could you tell me about revenue management?” or “What’s the best way for me to look for a job in San Francisco?” For examples of good questions, see the Sample Questions below.
- Be prepared to give a 90-second pitch about your experiences and desires.
- Be current in the field by doing a Lexis/Nexis search for recent articles about the company.
How to Start the Conversation
When you schedule a phone appointment, be sure to call at the appointed time. Have your questions in front of you and keep the conversation to 15 minutes unless the individual chooses to extend the conversation.

- Treat the in-person or phone interview similar to a job interview; be punctual, professional in conduct, dress for business. You are representing the entire Hotel School when you conduct informational interviews.
- It is best to start the conversation by introducing yourself and asking the person if this is still a convenient time to talk. You are seeking advice, information, and contacts. You are not asking for a job.
- Be very clear about what you are expecting from this person. The more specific you are, the more they can assist you. For example, you might say, “I have experience in marketing, but I want to move into consulting. I know I have the analytical and project management skills, but I’m having trouble communicating this in a compelling way to prospective employers. Would you be willing to help me think through my interview strategy and how I might more effectively translate my background?”
- Always end the conversation by asking if the person can suggest someone else for you to contact. It could be someone at the same company or at another company. The next person will be more receptive if a colleague has referred you.

Sample Questions and Topics

Career Paths:
- Could you describe your career path? What jobs did you hold before your current position?
- Why did you develop your interest in this career?
- What related jobs/career paths might I explore? What other fields could you see yourself moving into if you made a change?
- What types of jobs are MMH students hired into? What would the career trajectory look like after a couple of years in that first position? In ten years?
- How did you get hired into your first position after graduate school?
- How have you managed your work/life balance?

Job Content and Responsibilities:
- Could you describe your day-to-day responsibilities? How do you spend a typical workday or week? How much time are you with people versus working with data?
- What do you like most/least about your job?
- Could you describe your work environment/corporate culture?
- Could you describe the organizational structure (formal and informal) of your workplace?
- How many people report to you? To whom do you report?

Career Preparation:
- What is the skill set employers would seek in a new MMH hire? What personal abilities are important for success?
- What courses or training have been most helpful to you?
- If you could do anything differently in your career preparation, what would it be?
- What is the starting salary one can expect in this field?
- Can you recommend sources for more information (books, publications, journals)?
- Are there professional associations that are particularly helpful?
- Is there anyone else you could refer me to who is doing similar work in another company that I might contact for additional insight?

Voice Mail Etiquette
Before you leave a voice mail message think about what you want to say. Have your bullet points prepared for questions to ask if you reach the contact. If you get their voice mail, prepare different bullet points for
leaving a message. Speak directly into the phone, loud enough to be heard. Speak clearly and concisely. You should practice leaving a voice mail message before the real thing!

Every effective voice mail message should contain:

- **Greeting**: Include your name and affiliation with the Hotel School.
- **Reason for calling**: Make it specific. For example, "My name is Joe Student and I was referred to you by (first name last name) or, I found your information listed in the Hotel Alumni Directory. I am an MMH student, and I would like to speak to you for a few minutes about your work at ABC Company. I have been exploring opportunities in companies similar to yours and would like to learn your perspective on the job function, the company, etc." When you are reachable: Tell the person when you can be reached (blocks of time on particular days) or ask the contact to leave you a message with convenient times when you can return the call. Avoid playing phone tag by offering specific times you know you will be reachable or ask the person to send you an e-mail with a convenient time to call back.
- **Closing**: Thank them in advance for their time, repeat your full name, and leave your phone number and e-mail.

If the person doesn’t return your call or send you an e-mail, call them back. You can call a person three times before being considered an annoyance.

**Important Follow-Up**

**Keeping Good Records**
You will be amazed how quickly you can forget whom you called when and at what company unless you keep excellent records. Many students develop a spreadsheet with column headings that include: name, company, phone, e-mail, address, date of action and action taken, thank you note, follow-up needed, and by when. These records become crucial to you when, six months down the road, you decide to check back with a contact that was particularly helpful to you at the time. It is also critical that you follow-up with whatever you say you will do during the conversation.

**Thank You Notes and Giving Back**
- It is very important to send thank you notes to anyone who assists you with your career or job search.
  - It reminds the contact of your conversation and of your need for their assistance. Comment on something that was of particular interest to you in the conversation.
  - It gives you an opportunity to give back. If, during the conversation, the contact talked about an issue that you have knowledge of, or if you can find information of interest to the contact, include it with your note. It could be an article you read or results of a class project, or the name, phone, and e-mail address of someone you think would be helpful or of interest to your contact. When you give back, it puts you on an equal footing. In a sense, you become a professional colleague.
- A thank you can be e-mailed, but sometimes it is more effective to send a hard copy hand-written note to the workplace.

**Periodic Communications**
In the process of building up your network and having conversations with many individuals, you will probably "connect" particularly well with a few of your contacts. One of the ways to build a long lasting network of colleagues is to keep in touch with them periodically. When you are on your winter externship, drop them a note or send an e-mail and bring them up-to-date on what you are learning and experiencing. If you have graduated, let them know where you accepted employment and what you are doing in your position. By maintaining a dialog, you build stronger relationships for the future when you may need assistance again whether it is for another job search, to source employees for vacant positions in your organization, or to exchange and share professional information.