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CAREER SERVICES RESOURCE CENTER:
BUILDING YOUR NETWORK

CAREER SERVICES AT TEXAS A&M AT GALVESTON
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WHAT IS NETWORKING?

Networking is a communication process involving the exchange of information, advice, and referrals. It's a reciprocal process with a purpose in mind. Savvy networkers are good at making connections, building relationships, and nurturing relationships.

When looking for a job, savvy networkers make connections for acquiring employment information and leads by using the telephone and Internet, working professional meetings and social gatherings, writing and following up letters and email. They build relationships by engaging in informational interviews and following up on referrals. They nurture or manage networks by staying in touch and exchanging information, advice, and referrals with their connections.

WHY SHOULD I NETWORK?

Networking is the key to penetrating the hidden job market. It will minimize your time and risks. The more you know about an industry and company, the better your chances of landing a job. The more people you've networked with in the industry and company, the more you'll know. Companies tend to realize that they need to hire someone long before they create a formal job description and resort to posting the position. Furthermore, often by the time jobs are posted, they have already been filled. Networking allows you an earlier chance at an opportunity, at a time when you can still help shape the job description and influence the level and pay range. You'll face less competition. Networking also gets you access to people you might not have been responsive to a direct approach letter, and is even more effective if you've been referred by someone the person trusts.

WHO SHOULD I NETWORK WITH? HOW DO I NETWORK?

Start with people you already know. You can consider this your A group:

1. **Family**—parents, aunts, uncles, cousins, brothers, sisters, other relatives
2. **Friends**—neighbors, former neighbors, Christmas card list, parents of classmates, peers
3. **School**—classmates, teachers, counselors, administrators, former students, club members
4. **Employment**—employers, colleagues, supervisors, subordinates, customers/ clients, competitors
5. **Professional**—lawyers, doctors, dentists, clergy, professional societies, bankers
6. **Community**—Chamber of Commerce, clubs, associations, social/sport/hobby clubs, religious groups, community leaders/public officials, librarians, consultants

During this initial round of meetings, you will ask about and get referrals to people your contacts think will be relevant resources for you, such as professionals working in your field of interest or people who work for organizations that interest you. These people will become your B group.

Your B contacts may or may not know of any specific job opportunities, but they can provide valuable information about current needs in your field, where your skills might fit, what you should emphasize in your presentations, what you need to learn, and resources that you can access. The B contacts, if impressed by you, may introduce you to other B contacts and possible to people in the C group.

The C group consists of people who could hire you if a need existed in their company and you seemed to be qualified. While there may not be an immediate opening, networking with these contacts may lead to an interview down the road, as well as to other introductions.

Networking involves prospecting (identifying and building networks and developing a strategy), networking (linking and expanding your networks to establish contacts that lead to informational interviews) and informational interviewing (acquiring key information, advice and referrals that will lead to job interviews and offers). Strategically, a telephone call may suffice to set up a meeting with an A group contact, but an approach letter combined with a phone call to set up an appointment, is usually a more effective and appropriate method of contacting a B or C contact. Remember, the first rule in conducting informational interviews is never to ask for a job. Thus, your approach letter should not be accompanied by a resume, as you do not want to label yourself as a job applicant and limit your chances of obtaining a meeting.