

Networking has become an essential component to job searching. Most employers are looking for ways to cut through wasted interview time. Networking provides an opportunity for you to make connections with potential employers. 74% of employers are looking for personality traits that would be a good fit for the company. In order to effectively network in person, you must consider the following:

1. How do I properly prepare for a networking event?
2. What does my attire and body language say about me?
3. How do I effectively engage in a conversation?
4. How do I follow up with an employer after the event?

How do I properly prepare for a networking event?

Do your research!

It is essential that you prepare for a conversation with an employer by learning about what the company does, and what interests you about that company. Employers enter into a conversation with the expectation that you can speak to their company. Be sure to research what the company does, what projects they are working on, and what interests you about working for that company. You can research companies using the following:

- Company websites
- Social media
- Articles

Consider who your audience will be at the networking event. Do your research about who will be attending the event. Is it human resources hiring managers, project supervisors, etc? It is important to know who will be in the room and what they could possibly like to have conversations about.

What does my attire and body language say about me?

Professional dress shows that you take pride in presenting yourself well. Research the dress code for the networking event and be sure to follow it. Over dressing is always better than under dressing to make a good first impression with an employer. Try not to carry items with you- bags, coats, etc. Use the coat check to store your items.

How do I properly shake hands? Employers remember the impression of confidence you make with your handshake. Be sure to smile and make eye contact as you shake hands. Shake hands firmly to show confidence.

How do I connect with people? Look for people standing on their own to start a conversation. They are likely to appreciate that you've recognized they are on their own and have started a conversation with them. Ask them a question about what brings them to the event. This is a useful conversation starter. If you are attempting to join a group of people already in conversation, move close to them and start to listen to the conversation. Most groups of people naturally will make space for you to step into the group.

How do I effectively engage in a conversation?

The key factor to remember when engaging in a conversation with an employer is to show them what you can do for the company, not what the company can do for you. Employers know that you're going to pitch your skills to them- most want unexpected questions instead. This allows you to show your personality and not just pitch your resume vocally. Ask a question related to your research- for example, "I read in ___ that Company X is working on a ___ project. This is an area that really interests me and I'd love to talk to you more about it."

Ask open ended questions! This allows the conversation to flow. For example, asking an employer "Are you currently hiring graduates?" is a closed question as the answer is either "yes" or "no." Instead, try asking a question such as "Can you tell me a little about the company's culture?" This allows for more discussion between you and the employer. Do not ask to learn more about the company itself by asking "What does your company do?" This shows the employer that you have not done your research, and therefore, do not have specific interest in that company.

When the employer is asking you questions, be sure to answer confidently. Before attending the event, make a list of your strengths and craft talking points with specific examples. If you feel that you do not have a specific skill that the employer will be looking for, craft a response that will show you are open to learning it- for example, "I don't have much knowledge of X but I can do Y and it's similar." If an employer asks you a question that you do not know the answer to, don't tell them that you don't know. Instead, phrase your answer with "Yes, and..." This turns it into a positive response instead of saying "I don't know that."

Employers are seeking a good fit for their companies. This means that you must engage in an effective conversation to show your personality and skills. Do not just ask the employer if they are hiring and give them a copy of your resume.

How do I follow up with an employer after the event?

Employers remember the end to conversations, so it's important to close the conversation confidently. Consider the following:

- Thank them for their time
- Give them another handshake with eye contact
- Tell them you are looking forward to hearing from them, or having a continued conversation
- Ask for their business card so you can follow up with them personally

If the employer isn't taking resumes at this time, one option is to close the conversation with a comment that you will drop off your resume in person to them later in the week. This shows that you are taking the opportunity seriously, and that you are interested in working for the company. You can also do this via email if their office is not local to you.

Follow up conversations create an even stronger opportunity for you to be presented with an unposted job. Often employers have opportunities in mind when they are meeting people, but do not post them. They want to meet potential candidates first, and then present the opportunity to the candidates they like in a follow up conversation.