

Tips for Networking

What is Professional Networking? Networking is about making connections. It involves the exchange of information between you and another person in your field of interest.

Who do I “network” with? In addition to obvious people such as recruiters who come to the career fair, think outside the box in terms of networking. There is a wide range of people who can help connect or advise you about opportunities in your professional field such as:

- On-campus recruiters (these folks come to career fairs, corporate information sessions, technical talks, formal networking events)
- Alumni (alumni come back to campus for a variety of events such as reunions, technical presentations, award ceremonies, fundraisers. Many schools, including UMass, have an alumni association that offers an online connection to alumni.
<http://www.umassalumni.com/s/1640/alumni/interior-2col.aspx?sid=1640&gid=22&pgid=509>
- Faculty/Staff
- People you meet at professional conferences
- Family, friends, neighbors, acquaintances from religious institutions, sporting teams, the gym, etc. (Does your uncle work for an engineering company? How about the family whose pet you cared for or lawn you mowed? Keep in touch, talk about your classes, projects, interest)
- Co-workers (Other students, especially lab or team mates will be key connections in your future. Ask yourself: what kind of teammate am I? Would a current teammate recommend me to their employer in a few years? Why or why not?)
- LinkedIn, other social media that is directly related to your field of interest (AICHE, ASME...)

What kind of results can I expect from networking? Don’t expect that someone else is going to “get you a job”. You must get yourself the job by presenting your skills, competencies, knowledge and personality well. However, networking CAN help provide:

- Leads on openings at specific companies
- “Inside information” on what a company is looking for when hiring
- The name of a contact within the company such as a hiring manager or HR person
- Career advice on what type of path to choose in order to meet your career goals
- Names of companies who are doing the type of work you are interested in

What do I say when I am “networking”? Many people feel awkward at networking events, not knowing what to say or how to present themselves without sounding like a salesperson. However, being prepared with some general information will help you feel more confident in talking about your career interests. Possibly the best thing to remember is to “keep it real”. Start as you would any conversation, by introducing yourself, then be prepared to follow up as the conversation progresses. Don’t forget to ask about them as well. Questions like, “What is your job like”, “What does a typical day on the job look like for you” “How long have you been in the field” or “What types of problems do you encounter” make

the conversation a two-way street. Make sure you have thought about the following things in advance and practice them out loud.

- Name, major (or degree), and school level (senior, junior, sophomore)
- Your career area of interest. (It is important to find the balance between being very specific yet staying open-minded about career fields. For example, if you are interested in working with high-end sound systems and you are at a networking event with BOSE, you should be very specific about your interest. However, if you are talking with a neighbor who works at a company that manufactures medical devices, you should broaden the conversation to talk about your interest in gaining experience in a manufacturing environment.)
- A brief summary about the **relevant** classes you have taken. This will vary depending on the person you are talking with. For example, if the person works for a specialty materials company, you might talk about your polymer class. However, if the person works for an oil refinery, you might talk about your process design or controls class.
- A brief summary about any relevant projects or internships you have had.
- Activities that demonstrate teamwork, technical writing, leadership skills.

Examples: Depending on the nature of the networking event, your level of preparation will vary. If you are going to a formal networking event, career fair, or professional conference, you should definitely spend some time researching who will be in attendance so that you will be able to tailor your conversation to match the needs of the various attendees. For example: Imagine that you are going to the Society of Women in Engineering Conference and you are participating in the Abbott Networking Night. Your “pitch” could sound something like this:

Hi, my name is Jessica and I’m a senior Chemical Engineering student at the University of Massachusetts. I am very interested in the pharmaceutical field and am doing a biochemical engineering concentration that includes specialty classes in bioprocessing. Last year, I went on a plant tour of Bristol Myers Squibb which really got me interested in working on the manufacturing side of bioprocessing.

Or, if you are at a sporting event and find yourself sitting next to the town engineer, you could say:

Hi, I’m Dan, I will be graduating next year with my degree in Civil Engineering from UMass Amherst. I am interested in structural engineering and am looking to gain some hands-on experience in the field. I’ve had classes in concrete design, soil mechanics and water/wastewater systems. I’m also the captain of the concrete canoe team. I would love the opportunity to apply some of these principles to a real-world environment.

Other General Tips for Networking:

- If you will be attending a formal networking event or career fair, ask the event coordinators for a list of attendees so that you can research the type of work they do
- Know the dress code for the event. (business casual vs. suit and tie) Bring breath mints!
- Remember to ask for business cards
- Follow up with contacts after the event. A nice email or LinkedIn note goes a long way!