



# Networking

## *Why Network?*

Think about the various circles of relations you have: family members; friends from home; hallmates; classmates; and other people with whom you exchange information about classes, food in the dining hall, upcoming social events, and more. These individuals constitute your personal network, and the information they share with you is often invaluable. A professional network is similar but has a slightly different slant. On one hand, professional networking involves the exchange of professional-development or career-related information; on the other, it becomes an avenue to building your professional reputation. Investing time in your professional network is part of being a success-oriented professional. Don't wait until you need these relationships to begin cultivating them! Frequently, the information you gain from members of your professional network is not available elsewhere. Becoming known as a resource for others is just as important in network building as is meeting new people; strive to give twice as often as you receive. You may have the reward of providing information that advances someone else's career...and such favors are rarely forgotten. *Remember:* A network is not a group of people with whom you communicate only when you need help.

## *Where Do Networking Relationships Begin?*

- Through introductions by people you know
- At networking or other social events
- Via **Grinnell College alumni events** (*see box*)
- Through **informational interviews** (*see box*)
- By participating in civic or professional organizations, either in person or online

## **Informational Interviews**

Informational interviews are opportunities to talk with professionals about their careers. Plan to limit each interview to no more than 30 minutes, and have questions prepared in advance. Request a meeting through an e-mail or telephone call in which you briefly introduce yourself, explain your goals, and set temporal and topical boundaries (e.g., "Would you be able to talk with me over the phone about your career and your career path for no more than 30 minutes in the next couple of weeks?"). For potential questions, see "Open-Ended Questions" on the back page. Remember to follow up all informational interviews with thank-you notes.

## *Networking Events*

Networking events are great ways to meet people and to become known. You will make a good impression if you:

- Talk with people before visiting the food table: It's difficult to shake hands while juggling a plate. (It's OK to have a glass of punch or water that can be held in one hand—and is helpful, too, if you have a dry mouth.)
- Pay attention to body language—others' as well as your own. Avoid staring at the floor or standing with your arms crossed; seek out individuals or groups who are gathered in an open manner.
- Introduce yourself with a firm (but not harsh) handshake and your "elevator speech" (*see box on reverse*).
- Be very cautious about consuming alcohol: Your reputation is your best resource!
- Follow up within a day or two on introductions which led to an exchange of business cards (or e-mail addresses) or otherwise seemed promising.

## **Grinnell College Alumni Networking Opportunities**

- GRINNELLINK Receptions
- Alumni events held in other cities
- Alumni visits to campus, especially Career Connections
- Employer information sessions
- Reunion Weekend or other reunions held on campus throughout the year



# Etiquette and Tips to Increase Your Network

1. Be genuinely interested in people.
  - Remember names and use them in conversation.
  - Stay on topic when you respond to questions (don't ramble), and end by returning a question to your interlocutor.
  - Help others through referrals by sharing your expertise and ideas.
  - *Listen!* Learn about the others. Ask open-ended questions (*see box for ideas*).
2. Whether you initiate a conversation or are introduced by someone else, make eye contact, smile, and offer a firm handshake and brief information about yourself (your "elevator speech").
3. Use titles (e.g., "Mr.," "Ms.," "Dr.," "Professor," "Senator") until you are invited to call others by their first names.
4. Ask for advice, tips, or introductions: do NOT point-blank request a job or internship lead. You want to appear confident and desirable, not insecure and desperate.

# Online Networking

LinkedIn and Forum (the Grinnell College alumni directory) are great ways to expand your network, especially if—in addition to using good etiquette—you follow the tips below.

## LinkedIn

- Use business-style communication (be more formal than you'd be on Facebook).
- Your "summary" should be an on-line version of your "**elevator speech.**"
- Make use of the LinkedIn Help Center and peruse other profiles to get a sense for what to include in a complete profile. (Find the Help Center in the footer of any LinkedIn page.)
- Recruiters increasingly use LinkedIn as a source of potential candidates for job opportunities. Assume you're having a direct dialogue with a recruiter in everything you post.

## Forum and LinkedIn

- Join groups according to your interests.
- Request introductions from your connections.
- Introduce your connections to others.
- Participate in discussions so others can get to know you.
- Reach out to new people in groups.

## Open-Ended Questions

(for Networking or Informational Interviews)

- How did you get interested in your line of work?
- What do you find most challenging/rewarding about your work?
- What do you like most/least about it?
- What did you study as an undergraduate?
- What was your career path after you graduated from college?
- What skills and traits are critical for success in your career?
- What particular trainings or certifications are necessary to do your work?
- How is a liberal arts degree particularly advantageous in your field?
- Who else could I talk with to gain more perspective or information?

## Elevator Speech

Your "elevator speech" is a brief (20–30-second) statement about yourself and your aspirations. It needs to be natural, and practice will ensure that you include the most important information. A good elevator speech provides:

- Your name
- The name of your employer or school
- Your position or major
- Your core skills or interests
- Your objective or goal