

## Robert R. McComsey Career Development Center



### **NETWORKING: USING THE SAXON CAREER VOLUNTEER NETWORK**

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*Hours: 8:30-4:30 Monday-Friday*  
*Walk-in hours: 1:00-4:30 Tues., Wed., and Thurs.*

Networking and informational interviewing are excellent resources for today's job seeker. Through **networking**, you can interact with and become known to key people who can provide you with information about job leads and other employment opportunities. **Informational interviewing** is a process which can help you collect useful information about a certain job, career, or organization of interest. Informational interviews can help you to network. Unlike job interviews, you do not wait for an employer to contact you; go ahead and initiate contact yourself. The Saxon Career Volunteer Network is a group of alumni who have registered with the CDC to provide career advice, a contact for resumes, and help with relocation.

#### **Why use the Saxon Career Volunteer Network?**

- Collect information about a job, career or organization that interests you.
- Expand your network of contacts and maybe even create job interviews.
- Discover new job opportunities.
- Become a more impressive job candidate by building communication skills and knowledge of your field.
- Discover job or career paths you didn't know existed.
- Find out about professional affiliations or trade newspapers you should have in order to stay up-to-date and well informed.
- Identify professional strengths and weaknesses.

#### **What is the difference between an information interview and a job interview?**

**First** and most importantly, you are not there to ask for a job. It is never appropriate to schedule an informational interview and ask for a job once you are there. In many cases, if jobs are available the Volunteer will let you know.

**Second**, people usually enjoy talking about themselves and their careers, especially to an attentive audience. Most of the people you contact will be willing to participate.

**Third**, you are in control. You are expected to have questions ready and control the flow of the conversation.

#### **Research: Finding Contacts**

*Saxon Career Volunteer Network* – the CDC has an extensive network of alumni in the career field or state you want to work in. All of them have offered to assist students like you.

*People you know personally* — friends, neighbors, relatives and teachers who are in fields you think you'd enjoy – or who KNOW people in fields you think you would enjoy.

*People you know by face, if not by name* – people you see around town or shopkeepers you interact with sometimes. Even if they cannot give you the exact information you need, they may know someone who can.

*People you do not know* – use the yellow pages, professional association listings, the Internet, or other resources available in the CDC Resource Library

## **Making contact**

You can network personally (which is preferable) or over the phone or email (a good alternative). Either way, it is a good idea to start by writing a letter or email to your potential networking contacts introducing yourself and letting them know how you found them. Make the following points in your letter:

- Emphasize that you are seeking information, NOT a job.
- Let them know how you got their name.
- Indicate that you realize the person is busy and you appreciate his/her time.
- Politely request a networking meeting or phone conversation at their convenience, and let them know you will take the initiative to call them.
- Include your resume as a way for the person to get to know you better, not as a potential job candidate.
- Start right out by establishing a professional and positive relationship with your contact.
- VERY IMPORTANT – **do not give the Volunteer the impression that you are mass-mailing them**. You must take your time with each contact and be personal.

After you mail the letter (or send the email) wait a few days and then call to set up a time to meet. You should always initiate the contact; do not expect the person to call you. Be ready to talk about your questions on the phone, in case the person is ready to talk the first time you call. Do not take it personally if the person does not have time to meet with you. A typical information interview could be anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour, depending on your contact; you may want to suggest a 20 minute time frame.

## **Preparing for the interview**

*Prepare your list of questions* (sample questions are included in this handout).

*Dress appropriately for a personal meeting*. You may want to dress one step above the regular dress of the field in which you are interested.

*Arrive on time*, and be prepared to stick to the time limit the two of you agreed upon. Have your list of questions in front of you and try to stay on track. Allow for spontaneous conversation, but remember the interviewee's time is precious.

*Ask open-ended questions rather than yes/no questions*. "What do you like best about your career" is better than "Do you like your career?"

*Pay attention to nonverbal cues*. They will tell you if the person is excited, bored, or getting short on time. Remember, they will also be able to read your body language.

## **Follow up**

Immediately following your interview, go over all information gathered and adjust your contact list (and possibly your career goal) accordingly. Be sure to send thank you cards as soon as possible after your appointment – this is extremely important since the person has donated time to assist you in your

career search. Also, it makes for a great impression if and when a job does open up, and if they are in a position to refer you.

### **Sample Questions**

1. In your position, what do you typically do in a normal workday?
2. What training or education is required for this type of work?
3. What personal qualities or abilities are important for this position?
4. What part of your job responsibilities do you find rewarding? Challenging?
5. What are the possibilities for advancement in this field?
6. Is there a high demand for people in this field?
7. What advice would you give to a person thinking about this field?
8. Which professional journals and organizations would help me learn more about this field?
9. If you could do it all over again, would you choose this field of work? Why or why not?
10. What are some of the trends or new issues affecting your field?
11. How has your college education related to what you're doing now?
12. If you were to switch careers, what else would you feel qualified to do?
13. How would you describe the typical atmosphere at your workplace?
14. What is the best way to break into this field?
15. Can you recommend someone else that I could speak to? (You should always ask this question as a way of building your network).

***See sample letters on following pages.***

**Sample Letter/Email to someone you've never met**

July 1, 2010

Chip Weaver  
17 Kenyon Park  
Alfred, NY 14802

Mr. Bonte Woldenhamer, Marketing Associate  
Zip Company  
111 Main St.  
Anywhere, USA 12345

Dear Mr. Woldenhamer:

This summer I will graduate from Alfred University with a degree in Business Administration, and I believe my skills and interests lie in the area of sports marketing. I would like to talk to professionals working in the field of sports marketing to discover exactly what the jobs are like from people in the field.

Your name was in a very interesting article I recently read in *Swimming World*, "Seven Steps to Prime-Time Coverage." I am writing to you in the hope that you will be able to help me by either spending half an hour with me or by referring me to someone in the area whom you would recommend.

I will call you within a week to arrange for a meeting, or to get your advice for a referral. I have enclosed my resume for your review. Although I am not looking for a job, I thought it might be useful as a way of informing you of my education and background. I understand you are busy and appreciate your help. I look forward to talking to you.

Sincerely,

(signature)

Chip Weaver

**Sample Letter/Email to a Saxon Career Volunteer**

July 1, 2010

Aidan Shaw

100 Powell Campus Center

Alfred, NY 14802

Cindy Johnson

1234 Main Parkway

Columbus, OH 12345

Dear Ms. Johnson:

Mark McFadden from the Alfred University Career Development Center suggested I contact you as part of our alumni network. As I look toward my graduation in May from the School of Art and Design here at Alfred, I was hoping that you as an alumnus might be able to give me some information about the art scene in Columbus.

As a means of letting you know a little about my background, I have enclosed my resume. As you might be able to tell, I am particularly interested in photography and printmaking, but any hints you can give me as I relocate to Columbus will be greatly appreciated.

I realize your time is very valuable, but would it be possible to set up a 20-minute phone conversation at your convenience? It would be very helpful for me to learn from your experiences and your knowledge of the Columbus area. I will call you within a week to follow up, and hopefully we will be able to schedule a time to talk. Please feel free to contact me by phone or via email (Shaw@alfred.edu) if you'd like. Thank you and I look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,

(signature)

Aidan Shaw

## **Sample Phone Script**

**If you have been referred to your contact by someone, your opening might sound like this:**

*"Hello, this is Aidan Shaw. Dr. Jane Smith of the Political Science Department at Alfred University suggested I call you regarding the possibility of setting up an information interview. I am trying to meet with people for information and advice on breaking into the field of library science, and Dr. Smith thought you might be an excellent source of career information. Is it possible we could set up a 15-20 minute meeting or phone conversation?"*

**If your contact agrees**, ask if they have any dates and times that might be convenient, but be ready to suggest a time and date of your own. Unless the contact suggests a different meeting place, it is safe to assume you will be meeting at his/her place of business. Be sure you have clear directions. Before the actual meeting time, send your new networking contact a letter or email confirming the time, date and location, and thanking him or her for being willing to take the time to meet with you and share expertise and advice.

**If your contact does not have time** to meet with you, or does not wish to for any other reason, you might reply:

*"I certainly appreciate the demands on your time. Could you suggest another person in your company or your field that may be able to speak to me?"*

**If you have come up with the contact name on your own and have not been referred, your opening might sound like this:**

*"Hello, this is Aidan Shaw. I am calling because..."*

- *...you were listed as a Saxon Career Volunteer through the Career Development Center*
- *...I saw your name in an article I read recently*
- *...you were listed as a mentor for the Society of Human Resource Management*
- *...of your expertise in the field of arts management*

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Alfred University

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