

Networking – The First Steps

So, a friend of a friend introduced you to someone who can tutor you in American History. You meet the tutor in the library and are introduced to her roommate, her roommate's boyfriend and someone on his club soccer team. Next semester, that soccer player's face is the only one you recognize in your geology lab. You reintroduce yourself and volunteer to be his lab partner. That's networking!!

Networking takes many forms and is done for a variety of reasons. Every time you meet someone you are potentially forming a mutually beneficial relationship. The differentiating factor is what you each hope to gain from each relationship. You may have a direct goal in mind for a particular exchange, such as landing a job, or you may just be looking for solid contacts that will come in handy down the road.

As a student, you want to seek out professional networking opportunities. Professionals in the accounting field are easy to access through New Hampshire Society of CPAs programs. The question is – how do you actually network?

It's not easy. Being comfortable in a networking environment takes preparation and practice. Once you find an opportunity, the first thing you want to do is learn about the kind of people who will be there. That will dictate what you should wear, what you should bring and what you should hope to gain from the experience.

If the event is a career fair, you'll need to bring plenty of resumes and dress professionally. Try to get a list of the firms or companies that will be attending. Then, identify the exhibitors you definitely want to talk to. With a little research, you can develop a few impressive questions that will prove you mean business.

Now for the hard part – when you get to the event, pick a person that looks non-threatening, walk up to them, introduce yourself and extend your hand for a handshake. The longer you stand in the corner looking at your watch, the harder it will get. No one expects you to be a networking expert; once you initiate the contact, the professional will start steering the conversation. Practice makes perfect – the more you do it, the easier it will become.

Other students are also networking targets. Peers in your discipline may not be your best friends, but pay attention when you're working on class projects together. Find out who's interning where, and ask questions about what they're doing. Let them know you'd be interested in any opportunities to get involved. They'll want to impress their superiors by providing quality staffing recommendations.

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