

WHITMAN COLLEGE ONLINE COMMUNITY

MAKING AND USING YOUR CONTACTS

Networking is about building relationships and connections in a purposeful way. How you approach networking contacts can have a tremendous impact on how willing they will be to provide you with helpful information. Remember to be professional at all times; first impressions are lasting so make yours a positive one. Listed below are tips to get the most out of your contacts.

Assistance you can expect

Alumni can assist students (or other alumni) by providing:

- Information about their company, organization or career field.
- Possible referrals to other professionals in their industry or organization.
- Consideration for an internship or job opportunity in their organization, if available.
- Information about the graduate school they attended or degree they attained.

Before you start networking, develop a career focus and update your resume

A resume is your “sales tool” to potential employers. It can also be used effectively in your networking contacts. Given to your contacts, it can demonstrate your accomplishments and help them remember you. They might also pass your resume on to others who may have an interest in your skills and abilities.

- Be sure your resume clearly represents your experience, knowledge and skills, particularly as they relate to the career field in which you are hoping to network/work.
- Have a member of the Student Engagement Center staff critique your resume. Mistakes on your resume will leave a poor impression. Include experiences that demonstrate expertise and interest in the field you are exploring.

Prepare and research

Obtain at least some basic information on the company or organization where the volunteer works.

- Being prepared and asking specific questions will enable them to give you more helpful information.

Network with your contacts

- Avoid a casual tone in your email or phone conversations.
- Always identify yourself as a Whittie and explain you received the contact’s name from the alumni database.
- Most of the alumni have included e-mail addresses. This is often the preferred method of contact and allows the volunteer to respond when it is convenient. Attach your resume, when appropriate.
- Contact the volunteer by telephone, typically at his or her place of business. Ask if it is a good time to talk or if he or she would prefer you to call back. Schedule a phone appointment for a specific time/date.
- Join the LinkedIn Whitman group and communicate with other group members.
- After making an initial contact with alumni, consider scheduling a meeting as a great way to obtain more information; you may have the opportunity to actually see his or her worksite. **Be respectful of the alum’s time and always be sure to dress professionally for the meeting.**

Sample questions

- What advice do you have for someone looking to enter your career field? What skills are required?
- Since I am interested in your career field, which employers would you recommend I explore? Who would you suggest I speak to? May I use your name when I contact them?
- What impact has your graduate degree (or graduate institution) had on your career? Would you recommend your graduate program?

Follow-up

Be sure to send a thank you note and express your appreciation for the alum’s assistance. Let the person know you appreciated the time and information he or she shared with you. Follow up by contacting colleagues or peers to whom the alum offered to refer you. Keep your networking contacts informed about your progress. This is a tremendous professional courtesy; do not take it lightly!