

## Six Quick Tips for Developing Successful Networking Skills

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One of the most important life lessons many alumni experience is the value of developing strong networking skills. Regardless of how we ultimately benefit from the consequences, the old cliché *“It’s not what you know, but who you know”* really is true.

Networking is simply the ongoing act of making new acquaintances and friends, and fostering those relationships by keeping in touch and providing mutual support.

A mentor once advised me that if I waited until I needed something in life to begin networking (like a new job) I was already about 2 years behind. The point is that building a solid network takes time and patience. A mutually beneficial social and business network requires conscious and constant work.

**Smart networking can strongly impact your ability to earn a good job in less time.** Start Networking and Stop Job Searching is actually the title of a new book a friend of mine is finishing. It’s a great mindset.

Here are a few tips that will help in your efforts to effectively begin building your own personal network.

1. Understand that networking amongst professionals is *NOT* just about asking for favors. Networking is a two-way endeavor. It’s about building mutually beneficial relationships. Yes, you’re looking for a job. But be cool about it. Before asking someone if they can help with your search, ask how you might help them. Ask about *their* career and how *they* got started. Ensure you understand exactly how they make a living. Show an interest in their world at the same time they may be about to help with yours. Keep it real, but be upbeat and optimistic, and sincerely offer to help them if you can.
2. Remember that when you are “networking” as part of a job search, it’s unlikely that the person you’re speaking with will be the person who ultimately hires you. It may be a friend of a friend of theirs who has a position. Don’t regard everyone you meet as a potential employer, and then blow them off if they don’t invite you to an interview right away. Remember that if you work it right, your network can include layers of people well beyond just the ones you know and meet.
3. A critical networking tool during a job search is a business card. Handing people your resume before they ask for it is bad form. Asking people to “pass around” your resume is old school. It rarely works, and can be an awkward request. Adult professionals looking for a new job don’t lead with their resume; they meet people, then share business cards or contact information. Once someone learns you’re looking for a new job, they’ll ask for a copy of your resume when the time is right.

The Citadel Career Center team can help with some ideas for a personal business card. It is a critical tool, and essential to effective networking.

4. Get out there and meet people! Join clubs outside of your usual Citadel activities. Attend local meetings where business professionals gather to network. Alumni club meetings (yes, they’re happy to have you), churches, Rotary Club, Chamber of Commerce events, etc. Your Citadel schedule limits the amount of off-campus meetings you can attend, but make the most of your weekends, holidays and summer breaks. Your odds of meeting people who might help are 95% better when you’re out

there making new friends and mixing it up. Pull yourself away from that laptop, put your iPhone on vibrate and get out there and talk to people!

5. By all means follow-up with everyone you meet and especially those who offer advice or take time to discuss your situation. A simple e-mail or phone call thank-you message will go a long way. That person will appreciate your thoughtfulness and executive maturity, and be motivated to help you beyond what might have been shared in your conversation. Don't burn bridges by not following up.
6. Get on LinkedIn.com. LinkedIn is THE online business networking tool used by professionals today. Build a smart, conservative online profile. Once you have a strong resume, attach it to your profile.

The transition from student to professional involves an understanding that the world no longer sees you as a dependent student. You're an accomplished Citadel Cadet or new graduate. No one owes you a job, and that ring does not entitle you to some degree of special help from alumni. The common courtesies and unwritten rules of professional networking now rule your day.

Think about some of these tips and how you might employ them. Find and read other books and articles on networking. A good networking style will allow you to interact with alumni and other professionals in a manner that will separate you from your peers still looking for someone to "pass around" their resume.

Good luck. The leadership skills, confidence and maturity you've acquired earning a degree at The Citadel will serve you well. I promise that learning to network effectively and patiently in a mutually beneficial manner will further magnify your future success and rewards.

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