Alumni Job Search Intensive – Networking Transcript

Slide 1: Welcome to week 4 of the job search intensive program! This week we’re focusing on the all important topic of networking.

Slide 2: We’ll be discussing what networking is and why it’s so important in a job search, how to prepare to network, and we’ll provide tips for the networking process itself. Along the way we’ll hopefully allay some of the common fears people have about networking, and make it a more manageable and effective process.

Slide 3: Networking can be intimidating for a variety of reasons, including those listed here. Fear often holds people back from developing networking relationships and utilizing their network in their job search. It’s helpful to remember that networking is a commonly accepted business practice, and that if you’re prepared and professional in your approach, people will respond in a positive way.

Slide 4: If you’re inexperienced or uncomfortable with the idea of networking, here are some tips that may help. Create an organized strategy, with clear goals and expectations, and a specific plan and action items or tasks. Once you do this these just become part of your overall job search strategy that you have to accomplish. Set clear and appropriate goals and expectations for each networking activity. For example, if you’re going to a networking event, say that you will stay for an hour, and meet at least 3 new people, with the hope of connecting with someone who works at the XYZ company, or knows someone who does. In building your network, don’t forget to reconnect with people you may have lost touch with; old friends, all your family, former colleagues, even former classmates – here is where RIT alumni can be helpful. Use every opportunity to grow your network; go to events you normally wouldn’t attend, and really stretch yourself. Network virtually, as well as in person; be creative about connecting and meeting. Overall, remember that your networking should be strategic and purposeful with a clear goal in mind, that you should focus on developing relationships, instead of just asking for help, that you should always think about how you can help your networking contacts too, and that when in a job search, you should always have a networking mindset. This means that no matter your situation, ask yourself if this can be an opportunity to develop or grow your network.

Slide 5: So what is a network? Very simply, a network is a usually informally interconnected group or association of persons. Everyone has their own network - you have one already, though you might not think of it in those terms.

Slide 6: Think about it, you network all the time. How do you get information about a new car or about the next holiday trip? Why are you reading a specific book or why did you go see that particular movie? How will you find a baby-sitter at the last minute or get hold of that cook for your party? In many cases you will call on someone you know.
The point is to pass on information without strings attached and to help that person. **Networking is easy and advances your professional as well as your private life.**

According to networking expert Donna Fisher, if you never offer something, people won’t be willing to help you again. If you don’t make requests, then you won’t have a good feeling in the long run. And you also don’t give other people the opportunity to help you. If you never thank people, the fun and satisfaction of the party that helps you, will slowly fade away.

Giving includes:

- Giving feedback about ideas
- Being supportive, encouraging people
- Offering your expertise
- Brainstorming and contributing to ideas
- Sending information to others which you came across and which may be useful to others
- Introducing your contacts to each other

Slide 7: Networking for your job search is not these things, however. You don’t want to come on too strongly, or approach people with the expectation that they will do something for you, or especially ask them for a job. Doing this will stop your relationship building immediately and close doors in the future. Also, networking is not randomly cold calling people with whom you don’t have any connection, it’s about finding and building new connections through your current contacts. Think of a spider web; each of your contacts has potential new contacts that help you build your networking web.

Slide 8: Here are some important reasons to network in your job search. Gaining information on your targeted industry, including current trends, potential companies and possible career paths adds to your knowledge base and helps you become a more confident candidate – knowledge is power. You’ll gain a sense of where you will fit within the industry and each company, which will better help you sell yourself to potential employers. Talking with people in your targeted industry will get your name out there and open doors. Your new contacts are then more likely to think of you when they hear of openings that fit your qualifications. And most especially, remember that many jobs are never advertised at all, but filled by referrals, so it’s essential to use networking to gain access to that hidden job market!

Slide 9: You should have different categories of people in your network, who will serve different purposes. As you grow your network, determine what role they might provide for you, and of course, what role you can provide for them in return. I especially recommend that everyone have their own personal board of directors, or people who know you well and can serve in an advisory capacity as your career moves forward. This group can serve as a sounding board for new ideas, roles they think would be a good fit considering your strengths and weaknesses, and offer suggestions for personal and professional development that can get you closer to your targeted job. Some people just enjoy the
process of connecting, and not want to get more involved with your career development. And industry experts are essential to be sure you’re aligning yourself with and increasing your contacts within your targeted field.

Slide 10: Here are some resources to find people for your network. RIT alumni are a great resource, as there are over 114,000 of them, and they are in every industry, field, and job you can think of. Two ways to find alumni are through the RIT Alumni Online Community, found on the alumni relations website, and by doing advanced searches on LinkedIn, as well as using their alumni site. We’ll discuss these in more detail in the webinar on using social media for networking. Professional associations are a natural fit for networking with people in your targeted industry and field, and there are associations for nearly every field. Joining a professional association gives you access to the membership roster, and since you have a common interest with these people, it’s natural to develop networking relationships with them. Again, think of how you can help other people as you reach out to them, and look for ways to get involved with the group as a whole, perhaps on a committee or at the annual conference, to create more opportunities for building networking relationships. If you’re staying in your current field, don’t forget current and former business and professional contacts, including clients of your former company. Trade shows and conferences are natural settings for developing networking contacts, whether it’s at the actual event or afterward – be sure to exchange business cards. And don’t forget your family, friends, and former classmates; everyone has their own personal network, so you never know who your next great connection will come from. People can be embarrassed or hesitant to approach family and friends, but remember to be professional, respect etiquette rules, reiterate that you will respect their relationship with the contact, and focus on developing relationships not asking for jobs, and you should be fine. Your community and volunteer contacts can be great networking resources as well, which is another good reason for getting involved with your community.

Slide 11: Again, it’s helpful to be organized in your networking process. Here are the steps to get you started. Take inventory, of your targeted field, and of your own strengths, weaknesses, skills and qualifications. Determine an overall plan, including specific career goals and who can provide the best assistance, in terms of information, feedback, advice and contacts, for your goals. Develop a brand that is focused to your career goals. Determine which channels will produce the best results for your networking goals and begin the process. As you go through the process, keep track of your progress and results. Are you moving forward and gaining helpful contact and information and are you advancing towards your career goals? If not, modify your process, tools and channels to get better results. And of course always have a networking mindset; no matter who you meet, think about how they might be able to be an asset to your job search.

Slide 12: We have discussed your personal brand in a previous webinar during week 2, but here’s a brief reminder of the key areas. Remember you’re a product that you’re selling to prospective employers, so you want to develop a powerful brand that sells your key qualities to your targeted industry and companies. These steps will help you create a strong brand.

Slide 13: Here’s an example of a strong brand statement, using industry keywords. Here also is a tagline.
A successful tagline should amplify your marketing message:

Who you are

What makes you special

Why the world should care

Slide 14: There are many types of networking, and many opportunities for you to gain new contacts for your network. Some of these are formal, like specific networking events or informational interviews you’ve set up, and others are informal, like volunteer activities where you are interacting with other volunteers, or even everyday contacts, like sitting next to someone on a plane. Some involve personal contact with one other person, as in an informational interview, and some networking is in larger groups, as in professional associations or at conferences. Again, we’ll discuss social media networking in another webinar.

Slide 15: Let’s talk more about informational interviews, as they are a very helpful tool in networking. The overall purpose of informational interviews is to gather more information on a specific job, field or industry and to help you clarify whether a particular job is something you’d like to pursue. Also, it’s always helpful to learn from someone who’s been down the road before you, and who may have had some of the same challenges.

Slide 16: Before you conduct an informational interview, you’ll want to determine your specific goals. In this type of interview, you’re the one in control, so you want to manage the process from start to finish. So your goals might be to gain certain knowledge about the industry or a specific company, or you may want a contact within a department of one of your targeted companies, for example. Once you have a goal, you can select an interviewee whom you feel can provide what you’re looking for. Reach out and set up the meeting, and then prepare in advance by doing research on the industry and company of your interviewee. For your research, Hoovers and Glass Door are good resources, and remember you have access to the RIT Wallace library resources as well. Draft a list of questions related to your specific goals. Rehearse your elevator pitch, so you can begin the interview with a summary of your career and current goals. Do take notes during the interview, and afterward, remember to follow up. Overall, during an informational interview remember you’re looking for information, advice, recommendations, referrals.

Slide 17: Your specific goals however may vary, depending on where you’re at in the exploration process, for example whether you’ve been able to narrow things down to a specific job title/position, or maybe just a field, or industry. You may even have a specific company in mind that you’d like to see if you would fit into, and would target your questions to this goal. Informational interviews are very broad based, and it’s up to you to determine what you’d like to get from each interview and interviewee.

Slide 18: In terms of outreaching to potential interviewees, a good process is to send an introductory email, introducing yourself and your situation, and especially providing a context for how you found them. If someone referred them to you, for example, you’d want to indicate that, or if you’re in the
same professional association. Be specific on the purpose of your proposed contact and what you hope to gain from the interview. And then indicate what you’re looking for, a meeting, and in what capacity, whether by phone, email or in person. Include a time parameter, and keep it short, so they know there’s no long commitment required.

Slide 19: Be flexible; say you can come to their office, or offer to buy them a cup of coffee on their way to work. You want to work around their schedule since you’re asking them for a favor. Remember people are busy, so be persistent, though not pushy, in your attempt to establish contact. Be sure to have your specific goals and objectives in mind, so you sound confident about what you’re asking. At the meeting, again have your questions prepared, and using a script is ok for these types of meetings. Always be pleasant, polite and professional, and don’t overshare about yourself, remember this is a professionally-based meeting.

Slide 20: Here are some additional tips for the informational interview. Keep business etiquette in mind; respect the time you’ve allotted and dress professionally. Remember this is your interview, so maintain the flow of the conversation, but do listen more than you talk; you’re trying to gain information and advice. Be sure to ask for recommendations based on your goals. Also see where you may be able to help them, based on what they tell you, as networking is always a two-way street. You may want to bring a resume to leave with them, and for this type of situation, a networking resume is often a good option. See our webinar on resumes for more information, and there’s a sample on the job intensive website.

Slide 21: Follow up is especially important after an informational interview. Of course you want to formally thank the interviewee with a thank you note or email. But you also want to take their advice; reach out to contacts they’re recommended, check out resources, join groups, etc. And then follow up again to let them know you’ve done what they recommended; this is a great way to make them feel appreciated, and that their advice mattered. There may be opportunities for you to connect further with this contact, for additional meetings if they’re willing, perhaps even to shadow them at their job if appropriate. The important thing to remember is to take time to develop this relationship, don’t just think of this as a one-time, 15 minute interview where you picked their brain for everything they could offer. Sometimes networking relationships take time to bear fruit, and take nurturing.

Slide 22: We’ve also talked about your 60 second commercial in a previous webinar on other marketing materials. But this is a very helpful tool for networking, so we’ll briefly go through it again. Also called elevator speech, this is something you will develop & carry with you wherever you go. It’s a tool for selling yourself, it emphasizes your value / brand. You use it during networking, also in interviews (tell me about yourself). You can develop different lengths for different situations, and will go back to your branding statement as a basis for developing your commercial.

Slide 23: Your 60 second commercial summarizes your experiences, skills and future goals. A good commercial tells where you’ve been, briefly, and shares what you have to offer in terms of specific skills and experiences as they relate to your targeted job, field and industry. And it is forward thinking, emphasizing where you want to go.
Slide 24: Here’s what you should include in your commercial. You want to focus everything to your targeted job, industry and field, and emphasize how your qualifications make you the best candidate for this job. When using your commercial, always be enthusiastic, ask for networking introductions, and then say thank you.

Slide 25: Here are some additional tips. It’s helpful to write it out and practice, so you can incorporate and make it part of you. Prepare 2-3 versions – a base one that is 60 seconds, one for the telephone – 30 seconds, and one for a job fair – 15 seconds. Be sure to emphasize the benefits or value you offer, and always end with a sentence that tells what you want to do now. Tailor your commercial to specific situations to emphasize your relevance.

Slide 26: Here’s some additional advice, and a few examples that show how people give relevance and context to their commercials, emphasizing their targeted accomplishments.

Slide 27: Here are some networking tips. It’s easier to think of networking through social media, or email, but don’t neglect the power of meeting people face to face. They can get a stronger sense of who you are and what you have to offer, and will feel more comfortable making a recommendation on your behalf. Concentrate on developing a relationship rather than having a brief one-off conversation. Remember to always have that networking mindset, and follow through, keeping people informed. Reach back out when they have been helpful, when something they’ve suggested works, when you have a new idea, when you’ve met someone who might be interesting or helpful to them, when you are learning something that might interest them, when you can think of something that might be helpful to them. People will appreciate your efforts and respond positively.

Slide 28: As you network, approach new contacts as you would in any other situation, at a party for example. Listen and ask questions, be likeable, try to find commonalities and mutual interests, and make small talk; try to be comfortable. Make every exchange a two-way street; have something to discuss or offer, give something of value to them, as you get something of value in return.

Slide 29: Think of yourself as a general contractor, helping others build their networks with your own connections and offering ideas that can help them. Again, consider creating a networking resume for networking events and situations. Keep organized in your networking, and keep up with people you meet.

Slide 30: A word about networking post 2000. It seems all our activities have been speeded up with the advance of technology, and this can apply to networking as well. You may find yourself fitting in quick phone chats or emails with people for whom this will work best. Again, keep yourself flexible and adaptable to people’s situations and preferences.

Slide 31: Perhaps above all, don’t harbor a rescue fantasy in which your contact produces an opportunity for you based on a single networking meeting – more realistic to see these meetings as planting seeds, which you’ll nurture into future opportunities through patience, mutuality, follow-ups, idea-sharing and a spirit of generosity.
Slide 32: Here’s a brief quiz to test your network preparedness, with some helpful guidelines. If you’re well prepared, you’re ready to go!

Slide 33: That’s it for this webinar. As next steps, view the webinar on social media networking, and this week’s suggested assignments. As always, let me know if you have any questions.