

# NETWORKING GUIDE



Middlebury College  
*Center for Careers and Internships*



# NETWORKING

Networking involves building and maintaining relationships with individuals who can share information and offer advice. Networking for professional purposes is tapping into the knowledge, information, and connections that others have to offer you in terms of your career goals.

People in your network can do the following:

- Show you the connection between majors and careers.
- Help you position yourself for internships and jobs.
- Advise you on where to look for an apartment in a new city—and more!

## WHY NETWORK?

**It's a great way to explore careers.** Talking to someone who has experience can help you determine if an industry, job function, or organization truly interests you.

**It can give you specifics about the opportunities you are pursuing.**

Networking to gather this information enables you to better articulate why you are a good “fit” for the position—and this makes you a more competitive candidate. Learning about key search criteria, priorities, and vetting procedures from someone who works for a given employer might help strengthen your application.

**Most opportunities are uncovered through networking.** More jobs are found via networking than through online postings or employer websites. Although you'll want to use all of these channels in your job search, your time is best invested in developing personal connections through your growing network.

**Hiring is risky and expensive for employers.** If you are referred to an employer by someone a person knows and trusts, then you are a “safer bet” and a more attractive candidate for an internship or job.

## BEFORE YOU BEGIN

**Set goals and understand your needs.** Utilize the *Self-Reflection* and *Career Exploration* guides to identify your interests, skills, and values to help you prepare for meaningful discussions.

**Do some research.** Learn about industries, job functions, and organizations at *go/careerpaths*.

**Identify contacts.** Use Midd2Midd, LinkedIn, professors, family, friends, etc., to choose contacts in the industries and/or organizations that interest you.

## COMMON FEARS AND CONCERNS

**“I’m afraid networking will be awkward. What will I say? What if I make a bad impression?”**

Prepare! Do your homework and plan in advance what you want to ask or say. Find out as much as you can about the individuals you are going to speak to or meet. Determine what you want to share about yourself to make a good first impression.

**“Networking feels like I’m taking advantage of someone to meet my own needs.”**

Networking is an ongoing process of building relationships. Whenever possible, try to extend your network when you *don’t* need something or when all you need is information or advice. This allows you to develop authentic relationships, so you don’t feel as strange contacting someone out of the blue for something that asks more of them. Always be clear about the kind of help you’re seeking without putting any unnecessary burden on the person.

**“Why would anyone want to help me when they don’t get anything out of it?”**

Networking is mutually beneficial. Those helping you will feel good knowing that they have been helpful. Also, most people love to share their experiences with someone who cares.

## NETWORKING DOES NOT MEAN ASKING FOR A JOB!

Networking is an essential part of your job-search strategy, but asking directly for a job is *not* effective networking. Learn from the information and advice offered to you—and if the contact is impressed with you and your conversation, and if they know of an opportunity, they may then be inclined to share that lead with you.

*Remember, letting people know that you are looking for a job is not the same as asking them for a job!*

## NETWORKING RESOURCES

### **Midd2Midd** ([go/midd2midd](#))

Midd2Midd connects Middlebury students, alumni, and parents, supporting mentoring, networking, and engagement within the Middlebury community around the world. Whether you're searching for a long-term mentor, reaching out for career advice, or sharing your perspective and expertise with others in the Middlebury community, Midd2Midd is your place to make things happen.

Midd2Midd hosts three programs: MiddConnect, MiddMentors, and MiddGroups. Each offers distinct features and benefits along with tools, useful features, and ample support.

With **MiddConnect**, alumni, students, and parents can ask questions, give advice, and share opportunities directly with one another. Students and recent alumni who want to network or seek career advice can reach out to alumni and parents who are ready to offer their insights and perspectives. Whether your goal is to connect about grad school or a job search, or to meet Middlebury alumni in a certain region, you can use MiddConnect to engage with the Middlebury community wherever you find yourself in the world. MiddConnect is designed to make networking and outreach easy. Set up your profile and run your search, and when you find someone you want to contact, simply hit “connect” and compose your message. Our platform helps you track your outreach, provides video chat and messaging tools, and even allows mentors to fine-tune their level of commitment.

**MiddMentors** is a one-on-one mentoring program with a mission to facilitate meaningful, productive mentoring relationships between alumni and Middlebury students. MiddMentors matches alumni volunteers with students based on shared interests, affinities, life goals, and other criteria.

Alumni share advice, insight, expertise, and support with students, who can join MiddMentors their sophomore year and can remain with the program through graduation. Participants drive the mentoring topics, which can range from navigating life at Middlebury to exploring careers and professional interests to pursuing a rewarding life path.

**MiddGroups** are online communities open to students, alumni, and others in the greater Middlebury community. They support community building and professional connections for sports teams, affinity groups, career fields, campus organizations, and more.

## **LinkedIn**

LinkedIn is a networking site for people who want to establish a professional online presence and connect with others. LinkedIn profiles tend to offer more detailed and up-to-date information and are a great resource for viewing career trajectories. Note: LinkedIn is *not* a social platform and should only be used for career exploration or professional networking purposes.

The more you build your network in LinkedIn, the more access you'll have to information and connections that might be helpful in your career planning and job/internship search.

1. *Create a complete profile.* If you do not already have one, we recommend you create one. LinkedIn provides many resources to describe the platform's benefits and to help you get started. For tips on building your profile, read the *Profile Checklist for Students*.
2. *Send connection requests.* Connect with friends, family, prior or current supervisors, mentors, etc. (first-degree connections). Your network will expand naturally as you discover people who are connected directly to these first- and second-degree connections.
3. *Join relevant groups and follow employers.* In the search box, enter a keyword that reflects your interests or a specific organization where you have applied for a job or hope to work in the future. You may filter by location, school, current companies, past companies, industries, and profile language.

## **Internships/Volunteering**

Internships and volunteer opportunities are great ways to meet new people and expand your professional network. Keep in touch with your internship supervisors, former colleagues, and peers—they are now all part of your network and may be able to help you in the future.

## Networking Events

Before you attend a networking event, try to determine who will be there and whether there is anyone you'd like to meet or any information you'd like to gather. Events hosted by the CCI are excellent opportunities to network with alumni and other professionals.

## FIVE STEPS TO ENSURE A SUCCESSFUL NETWORKING EXPERIENCE

- 1. Start your search broad, then narrow down.** Focus on three fields first: industry/career area, geography, and major.
- 2. Do your homework on the person and organization.** Use Midd2Midd and LinkedIn to learn as much as you can about the person/organization prior to making contact.
- 3. Write a message or email that is personal and targeted.** Clearly articulate what advice you seek and how the contact might be able to assist you. Note: It is inappropriate and impolite to ask a contact to hire you or to pass your résumé to colleagues. It is okay to ask how to improve your application and for recommendations on who an appropriate contact would be if you were interested in an existing opportunity with their organization.
- 4. Follow up with the contact.** If you have not heard back from them within a week or two, it is appropriate to follow up. Be polite and patient, but persistent.
- 5. Always show gratitude.** Send a thank-you message via the platform or email within 24 hours after speaking with any contact.

## HOW TO NETWORK

To network effectively, you'll need to be prepared and comfortable with two types of networking:

- **Informal networking conversation.** This happens in any social setting (family gatherings, weddings, college events, etc.) or any professional gathering (networking events, conferences, meetings, etc.) where you might be asked the question, "What kind of work do you want to do?" For these informal situations, be ready with your prepared "elevator speech" (your name, who you are, your interests and goals, what you can offer).
- **Planned informational interview.** This is a scheduled, brief conversation (in person, by phone, or by video chat) where you ask prepared questions to gather information about the person's career field, industry, job, or organization.

## Sample Introductory Email

Dear Mrs. Blue:

Thank you for serving as a Midd2Midd volunteer. I am a sophomore who is exploring a career in environmental law. I am in the process of deciding which environmental field to focus on and whether to apply directly to law school or work in a paralegal position for a year or two after graduation.

I wonder if you have time for a brief phone conversation where I might ask some focused questions of you as I consider my path forward. I am interested in your direct experience in this field, as well as your perspective on the pros and cons of various law programs, and whether it is wise to apply to begin law school immediately after graduation.

I am available most days at noon and in the early evening hours. Please let me know what time is most convenient for you. Thank you for taking time to share your advice.

Sincerely,

Michael Middlebury '22



## SAMPLE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

As you begin to explore careers, develop questions to discover your contact's personal experience and how the industry and its constituents function, the core responsibilities and required qualifications of your contact's position, and the typical career path. Basically, you want to learn the who, what, where, when, why, and how behind their position.

- How did you begin in this field?
- Why did you choose your employer?
- How does your organization earn profits or provide value?
- What differentiates your organization from its peers/competitors?
- What education or credentials are required for entry into this type of position?
- What types of extracurricular experiences would be good background?
- Are there professional organizations that would be useful for me to join?
- What is the range of your responsibilities?
- What aspect of your role do you like the most/least?
- What is the most rewarding part of your job? What is the most difficult?
- Do you primarily work alone or as part of a team?
- How does your work fit into the organization?
- Are you required to travel? How often?
- Will you walk me through a typical day? How about a typical week?
- To whom do you report? Who reports to you?
- What characteristics and skills do you believe are most helpful for success?
- What is the typical career progression for someone in your role?
- What are the opportunities for advancement?
- What trends may affect future opportunities in your field or industry? What is the employment outlook?
- How do you see jobs in this field changing over the next five or 10 years?
- What advice would you give someone trying to break into the field?
- Is there anyone else you would suggest I reach out to at this point in the process?
- May I touch base every so often to give you a heads up on my progress?

**For internship or job search advice**, develop questions to learn about the hiring process within an organization or industry and how to position yourself effectively.

- How can my liberal arts education help me stand out in this field?
- When you work with entry-level hires, what would you say they find most challenging, and where do they need to develop the most?
- How do people usually learn about job openings in your field?
- How can I market myself effectively for a position in this field?
- What would you say are the biggest challenges you and your competitors or peer organizations face these days?
- If you were me, what steps would you start taking today to become a strong candidate for positions that might open up?
- As I start to prep for interviews, are there particular questions I should be thinking about? What are the best resources for preparation?
- Do you have advice on how I can best position myself to get an offer? Is there anything I should be doing that I'm not, or anything generally that would help my chances?
- What is the interview process at your organization? How many rounds are there? What structure is used?
- Now that I've shared a bit about my interests, are there other people you might recommend my reaching out to?
- May I touch base every so often to give you a heads up on my progress?

## **SHOULD I FOLLOW UP AFTER NETWORKING?**

Yes! You should *always* send a thank-you email or handwritten note after you speak or meet with someone for networking purposes.

You may also wish to keep in touch with certain people over the long term, especially if you established a strong connection or think they might be a good resource in the future. In this case, share any updates or news with them that relates to your conversation(s), especially if you have accepted a position. If your career goals change, they may be able to refer you to new connections in their network. Long-term relationships are most helpful—the stronger your relationship is, the more you will be able to help and support each other throughout your careers.

## NETWORKING STRATEGIES FOR INTROVERTS

Networking can be especially difficult for introverts. If you are an introvert, good preparation and positive self-talk can help you overcome any apprehension about reaching out to people you do not know.

- Identify opportunities wherever possible for one-on-one networking (e.g., informational interviews, LinkedIn).
- Look to create valuable, deeper relationships with a few people, rather than compiling a long list of connections you don't know that well.
- Learn about the people you might be meeting in advance. Think of how you might approach them or how you can help each other.
- Focus on discovering commonalities.
- Show your preparation and the depth of your research and reflection by preparing specific questions in advance.
- Prepare your "elevator speech" in advance. Find nonverbal ways to show you're engaged (e.g., nodding your head, body position, smiling).
- Allow yourself downtime between conversations; find a quiet place to debrief, reflect, and regroup.
- Focus on your successes and try not to overanalyze the conversation.
- Practice. It may not feel natural at first (or ever!) but over time you will develop the skills to succeed at networking.
- Try to interpret your nerves, sweating, and increased heart rate as a positive thing. Your body is preparing you to perform by giving you the adrenaline and cortisol to do what you need to do.
- Reflect out loud. As an introvert, you do a lot of reflection in your head, which means the other person doesn't know what you're thinking unless you tell them. Practice saying what you're thinking.
- Remember that the other person might be an introvert, too.

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