

6 Tips for Networking with SU alumni

The SU alumni network can be a great resource as you navigate your early career. Alumni tend to be incredibly helpful to fellow SU grads; they offer career advice, job market insights, and crucial industry information that can set you apart from your competitors. Sometimes, connecting with an alum can even result in a long-term mentoring relationship or a job lead! Here are some tips for making your outreach to alumni as smooth and effective as possible:

1) Do your homework!

Before reaching out to a contact, do a Google search and take a close look at his/her LinkedIn profile. Know any mutual connections and, importantly, have a basic understanding of the person's career history. Avoid "So...where do you work?" or "What does your company do?" Instead, ask meaningful questions, such as, "What advice do you have for a recent PR grad who hopes to be in your shoes – director of brand strategy for a high-end fashion company – five years from now?"

2) Make a strong impression.

First impressions stick. When you reach out to an alum, be professional in your communication; treat this relationship as a business one. Double-check your e-mails for proper spelling and grammar, as well as appropriate tone. As your relationship advances, take cues from the other person about the level of formality expected.

3) Show interest in the alum.

Though your reason for reaching out may be to advance your own career, you should show genuine interest in the alum's story. Everyone loves to talk about themselves! Listen – you might learn a lot.

4) Ask for advice, not jobs.

Once you've made a connection, start by asking for advice about the job market or insight into the alum's career field. As your conversations advance, the alum may point you toward a job opening or offer to pass along your resume. It's best to wait until rapport is established before making any requests of this sort.

5) Follow through!

Alumni want to help, but they can't help if you don't follow through on what you say you'll do. If you say that you'll follow up on your phone conversation by sending the alum a list of companies where you'd like to work, do it! If you tell an alum that you'll keep him/her updated on your interview at his/her company, do it! Prompt follow-up is a sign of respect and professionalism.

6) Say "Thank you."

When it comes to networking, you really can't say "thank you" enough. "Thank you for your e-mail," "Thanks for connecting me with Bob," "Thank you for being able to speak with me today," and the list goes on. Strategically, "thank you" is also a good way to re-start a conversation: "Thank you for your great advice last month. I've re-written my resume based on what you said, and I've already gotten three interviews!"