

# Networking

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Nowadays, networking comes in many platforms. From networking on social media, like Instagram or Facebook, to more professional apps like LinkedIn, there are multiple ways to reach out to others rather than just face-to-face. With more and more offices working in virtual and remote formats, online networking has become more important than ever.

As a student, I had a hard time understanding what networking really meant for me. Sure, I knew it was important, but how important? How do I use it to my advantage? Where do I start? My best understanding was that it was about making connections, but networking is a lot more than that. Networking is putting yourself in situations where you will meet new people, introduce yourself, share your interests and commonalities, and work your way up to sharing connections with one another. After my first week working in the legislature, I knew I wanted to make the most of my time and come out with no regrets. So, I made a list of my goals.

This list included:

- Setting up as many informational interviews as I could
- Attending all networking events
- Signing up for extra activities and assignments

Now, you don't have to do all these things to succeed in the legislature. In fact, the Washington State Legislative Internship program is designed to set you up with fast connections and multiple networking opportunities. However, you do have to make sure you are taking advantage of those opportunities. For example, at the beginning of my internship, I attended a networking event held by the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL). The link was in an easy to miss email, with not much description. However, I knew that if there was any chance to meet others who could give me advice, it would be worth it. I showed up, and lo and behold, I was the only nonmember of the NCSL in attendance. Because of my outreach and personal drive to put myself out there, I had the opportunity to talk about myself and receive one-on-one attention from professionals in the field! They not only gave me career and life advice, sharing their own personal experiences they have learned from, but I also received contact information for the people I met and referrals for other resources.

Next, and this is the most *important* part of networking from my experience, *I followed up*. I sent emails to each member that I had met in the event, reminding them who I was, thanking them for their time, and sharing my resume with them to hold onto in case anything came up that they thought I may be a good fit for.

Following up is an important part of networking and maintaining strong connections. It shows that you're appreciative, enthusiastic, and serious. Employers and references want to know that you are committed to your work and that you pay attention to the little details. By sending a simple follow-up email, and a resume along with it, you're showing not only your interest, but your ambition and confidence.

In addition, our Mock Floor Debate was another amazing opportunity to make those critical connections. I volunteered to be committee staff. This was a job not many wanted to take on, as it involved a lot of extra work and learning a whole new system. Yet, I knew that if I took it, I would not only have the chance to learn something new, but to meet new people who would show me the ropes on their system in a training session. I took every opportunity presented to me, even when they did not seem quite as interesting at first.

I thought someone like me, a first-generation college student from a low-income family would never be able to excel in a skill like networking. I definitely did not have friends in high places, nor did I know friends of friends in high places. However, luckily for me and students like me, networking is not just about who you know and do not know already, but rather about your own personal character and what you are willing to do. As a determined student who has been where you are, I feel it's reassuring to know that you do not have to sit around waiting for things to happen, instead, *you* can make things happen! This internship is a huge steppingstone in helping you learn to take control of your own connections and communications.

Whether you are asking your legislator if you can sit in on their meetings, take meetings on their behalf, writing an email to someone you heard a lecture from, or reaching out to someone else completely out of the blue, do not be afraid to make your name known. The worst that can happen is someone says no. But the best that can happen? Who knows, maybe you'll end up with three different job interviews after the internship like I did!

If I took anything away from this experience, it was to network, network, network! It is an invaluable skill in the professional job world, and if this is something you want to expand on, I **HIGHLY** recommend this internship!