

Grad Student Advice Series: How To Network and Add Value To Yourself and Others¹

Part 1: The Dire Need to Network While In Grad School or Academia

It's Not What You Know It's Who You Know That Matters

Why is networking so important? Well, the short answer is that it all depends on what your objectives are. For example, some people network to expand one's resources, learn about potential opportunities and collaborations, answer questions, discuss current research topics, build relationships, learn from other people's failures or experiences, establish yourself as an expert in your field, **add value to others** (I'll explain this later), and/or other personal reasons such as business or entrepreneurial ventures.



Those who are in academia and choose to network with those in industry, may even help [bridge the gap](#) between academia and industry which has many added benefits. The bottom line is that networking is extremely valuable and you never know what opportunities might arise.

A common misconception is that networking only serves one purpose: finding employment. This will be covered more in detail in my [Ebook](#) or Part 2 of this series. However, a survey conducted by the Science Advisory Board (www.scienceboard.net) revealed that networking is by far the most successful means of finding employment. Networking is responsible for 90% or more of finding employment, whereas cold resume submission has been reported as low as only 4-10%. If that 90% isn't a good incentive for you to **step out of your comfort zone**, then this is your wake up call.

Some working professionals who already have an established career stop networking because they no longer see the need. No matter what situation you are in, you should NEVER stop networking. You never know when it will pay off.

Graduate School “Tunnel Vision”

For graduate students in particular, the need to network becomes even more obvious. As a graduate student, not only did you make the decision to go get an advanced degree, but you made a decision to increase your chances of landing a better job. Without networking this chance is dramatically diminished.

¹ <http://thegradstudentway.com>
October 29, 2012 by [Ryan The Graduate](#)

For example, a lot of PhDs in the sciences will spend five to six years on average working in a research lab. During that time, **the majority typically network very little**. Many are afraid to step out of their comfort zone or they lack confidence. Some find themselves caught up in fear or making the excuse that it takes too much time.

Another excuse is that one's particular field doesn't require networking or good communication skills. One major downside of graduate school is that a graduate student may get "tunnel vision." **Tunnel vision is when a graduate student gets so overly-focused on his or her thesis topic** that he or she doesn't devote any time to other things other than finishing the degree.

Although the end-goal is to graduate in the fastest possible time, it is **meaningless if you are unemployed and with a degree that you aren't even putting into good use**. You finally got your degree yet you don't even know how you're going to use it. Next comes the traditional post-doc. Or does it?

The Problem With Taking On A Post-Doc and Not Networking

A post-doc is a good option for those who want to stay in academia or broaden their skills as a scientist and want to continue their love for science. If you want to stay in academia, the need to network might not seem as prevalent or important. However, for those who want to go into industry, **there is a cross-over you will have to make**: Academia into industry. The need to network is greater than if you were just switching into a different lab and remaining in academia.

I will point out that just because you are a fifth year post-doc for example, this doesn't entitle you to a job and it certainly doesn't exclude you from having to network. But the real question is: Is a post-doc even necessary? Depending on what you ultimately want to do as a career, the [answer is ultimately up to you](#).

But I will also point out that **50% of Graduating PhDs end up doing a "traditional" post-doc upon graduation**. Some even enter [Industrial Post-Docs](#) (although this is a road less traveled). Of that 50% how many are landing tenure positions? Not surprisingly, only 14 percent of those with a PhD in biology and the life sciences now land a coveted academic position within five years (according to a 2009 [NSF survey](#)). Do you see a problem here? Most will look the other way or ignore the problem.

It is no wonder we have a so-called "[post-doc crisis](#)," which is when a newly minted PhD ends up taking a traditional post-doc, then ends up spending an average of four or more years at one post-doc. What happens after the first post-doc? They end up doing a second post-doc and never end up with a "real" job until much later. Or worse. They remain a post-doc, come to their senses about the poor job prospects, and enter industry, government, or [sadly leave the field altogether](#). Can the "post-doc crisis" be prevented through the benefits of networking? The answer is YES.

Another important question here is: [Where do the other 50% go?](#) Careers in discovery research, preclinical research, bio/pharmaceutical product development, and clinical development may require post-doc experience. However, other careers in industry such as project management, medical or regulatory affairs, quality and operations, business and corporate development, sales, marketing, technical applications and support, corporate

communications, law, executive leadership, consulting, or finance may require a totally different kind of experience and you most likely do not need a post-doc as a stepping stone.

No matter what your career goals are, the need to network is imminent.

Some companies may require post-doc experience, but networking will give you an edge either way. Networking serves two important purposes. First, it can educate you (see [informational interviews](#)) by allowing you to talk to others in the field and learn about potential career opportunities and options. From this, you may realize that you don't want to be stuck at the lab bench anymore based on information that was shared and learned. You may even realize that you want to take your career in a totally different direction.

Maybe you can't see two steps or even five years ahead in your career, but networking may just help you and add immense value. Maybe you want to do one post-doc as you see the benefits and it fits with your goals and career objectives, but then leverage your network to land a good job. However, the second benefit of networking is that it allows you to skip the post-doc altogether. Either way, networking allows you to transition away from a post-doc.

To get around Graduate School or even Post-Doc "Tunnel Vision" **you have to make an effort to dedicate your time to networking.** Even once a month is better than nothing. Many graduate students (and post-docs) who work in research labs won't even leave their lab building for lunch. Just think if you met a network contact once a month. How about once a week? Your network isn't going to grow by staying in lab in seclusion.

I Understand That Networking Is Important But I'll Worry About It Later.

If you have said or thought this in the past you need to change your way of thinking. Now. Graduate school and the poor job prospects in academia can throw you curve balls. You can have personal issues, your lab can lose funding, or you may find out that it's not for you. If you network early on and keep networking throughout graduate school or beyond it, you have strategically created opportunities and built personal relationships. This may play a huge role and have unmeasured benefits upon completion of your degree or in your future career.

Effective Networking Is A Learned Art



Don't expect to become an expert on networking right away. In fact, it is a skill that needs to be developed over time. So what can you do to build your network? Again, don't get used to just sitting at your desk all day and in front of a computer. Nothing beats face-to-face interaction and making personal connections. This is exactly why an online marketer is at a disadvantage (especially using social media). Keep in mind, half of networking is just showing up.

10 Ways To Effectively Network

1. **Talk to your professors.** Chances are they know people (or have past lab members) within and outside of academia. Preferably talk to the professors (ie the ones who run their own company) who are well connected and can introduce you to those people in industry that have transitioned away from academia. Get the names of those individuals. Email or call them and set up a time to meet. Then, do an **informational interview** (#4) with that key contact. From there, ask to be introduced to other people that they might know and it will spiderweb and create an endless network.
2. [Attend live networking events or “happy hours”](#).
3. Go to scientific conferences.
4. Start doing more [informational interviews](#) via introductions through LinkedIn or branching out from your existing network (the higher you aim position-wise, the better your chances will be for establishing a network that branches out).
5. Attend career fairs, product shows, recruitment events, seminars, etc.
6. Connect with someone who is established or is much better at networking than you and who can connect you with working professionals. Or better yet, connect with someone who [can teach you effective ways to network](#).
7. Audit classes on campus. If you are a science person, then take a business class and start networking with business professors and MBA students. If not business, find a secondary interest and step out of your comfort zone.
8. [Talk to those interested in entrepreneurship and possibly starting their own company](#). Chances are you will learn about what drives you, others, and you may just come up with the right idea that could lead to a successful business.
9. If you can't do face-to-face interviews, connect with that distant (interesting) person over the phone. Chances are they may be in your area on business sometime in the near future and they will contact you to meet face-to-face. This also expands your network beyond your own local area.
10. Give presentations, be a guest speaker, and put yourself out there. The more you step out of your comfort zone the more you will find new networking opportunities! And this can lead to yet even more opportunities!

Some Key Things To Remember

Understanding what networking is NOT is just as important as knowing why you should be networking.

- Networking is **NOT about selling your products or services**. Your objective is to build a relationship or connection with that person. Ease up about having to sell yourself, and make sure you keep an open mind. You never know who might be a potential business partner, referral, or your future employer.
- Networking is **NOT about selling you**. This doesn't mean that you shouldn't prepare for a quick introduction for the common question "So.. What do you do?", but it shouldn't be rehearsed or over-practiced. Do not dominate the conversation and bore the person with only talking about yourself. Show sincerity and focus on adding value.
- Networking is **NOT about just finding employment**. Remember it's all about **adding VALUE to others**. If it just so happens you do end up finding employment, then great. But this should not be your main objective. This means you have started networking for the wrong reasons: To only add value to yourself and no one else.

So what SHOULD you do?

1. Get comfortable talking about what you do (you should be able to sum this up in no more than 30 seconds) and with speaking to a total stranger. That means practice your elevator pitch.
2. Have a casual conversation that adds value to that person.
3. Make a definitive plan with at least 3 people to have a follow-up meeting. That means having lunch, coffee, or seeing them at the next meeting or event (you can even invite them ahead of time if you're going).
4. Get to know the organizers and those who plan events.
5. Ask to be a presenter or speaker at a future meeting (such as [Biotech Happy Hour](#)) or on-campus event.
6. Position yourself as an expert in your niche.
7. Seek out potential business or academic partnerships.
8. Expand your network! Ask to be introduced to other key contacts this particular person might know (LinkedIn works great for introductions). The network is endless and you can go as far as you like.



Plan Before And After Each Event

Make sure you have a plan for what your objectives are before attending a particular event. Obviously, do your research ahead of time. What do you want to get out of attending this event? If you aren't defining your objectives ahead of time, you may just waste time or money of that particular groups' objectives because they are not in-line with your own business or personal goals. Avoid this pitfall and mismatch.

After the event, make sure you **FOLLOW UP**. Especially with the people you said you would follow up with. You exchanged business cards remember? Don't let more than a week go by without making contact, otherwise it will show you were not engaged. Show them that you serious and you value their time by further establishing a sincere personal connection.

Schedule time to follow up. Do phone calls or emails. You need to set aside a specific amount of time to do this each week. Why? You need to get the most out of your networking efforts! Not just waste them. The whole point to a follow-up is to maintain that connection and add value to each other.

Conclusions

By building your network, you are increasing your net worth. People will begin to see you as an authority in your particular niche. It will gain you credibility and respect. Most importantly, they will see the value that you have to offer. You're not just another face in the crowd.

Keep networking consistently and do this in order to build yourself or your particular brand. The beauty of networking is that the more you do it, the more comfortable you'll be talking about WHO YOU ARE and WHAT VALUE YOU HAVE TO OFFER.

Increase your net worth and you may just find that future start up company or [job in industry](#) not too far off. You never know WHAT can happen. The possibilities are endless. So what are you waiting for? Get out there and start Networking!!

Ultimate PhD Networking Guide: How To Create Opportunities Out Of Thin Air (Part 2)

March 28, 2013 by [Ryan The Graduate](#)

I stared at the computer screen. I knew no one outside of academia. I thought about setting up a LinkedIn Profile but didn't see the point. A feeling of hopelessness set in. I heard about the importance of networking before but didn't know what to do or how to take those first steps.

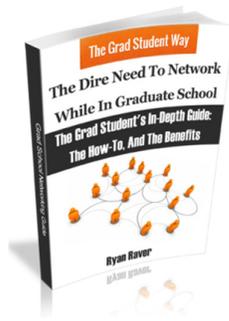
I signed up on LinkedIn despite my complacency and skepticism. I said to myself, "Like this will change anything." This is supposed to do what for me exactly?

I stared at the screen. **ZERO contacts.** I knew of a handful of people I could add, but very few who actually knew of my accomplishments and personally knew me outside of academia (or who I worked with closely in a different field). A few professors maybe and a few people I worked with during a summer internship a while back. Sure I had my thesis committee. But I thought "they will probably just want to write me a letter to do a post-doc (at least that is the respectable and 'expected' thing to do upon graduation)." Beyond that, the only people I knew were the ones I've met at conferences, seminars, joint lab meetings, presentations, or just networking on campus.

The number of contacts just sat there. I had maybe 25 or 30 tops after about a month or so. I didn't know where to go, until a friend told me about the importance of informational interviews.

What is an informational interview? I didn't have a clue. I said "Yeah right. People will actually take time out of their day to talk to me? About what?"

I'll tell you one thing: **The Ultimate Networking Tool Is An Informational Interview.** I don't care if you are a graduate student or a post-doc.



Networking is about information exchange right? **The real goal is to provide information about yourself and gather information about other professionals and potential opportunities.** So let's get into exactly how I used informational interviews to "create a network out of thin air" in a short amount of time.

A lot of PhDs don't know what they want to do past the PhD stage simply because they lack information. I was one of them.

I also didn't see the value in a PhD until I started networking. In all honesty, I wanted to drop out with a Master's degree. But **[informational interviews saved my PhD.](#)**

You can't get enough credible information by just sitting behind a computer screen and reading about what someone in industry is doing. Or by talking to people who are in academia and have never been OUTSIDE of academia or had any working experience/knowledge (a lot of professors will even have skewed perceptions about what industry is all about, career prospects, and [what matters beyond grad school](#)). The best way to find out is to TALK TO THAT PERSON. Plus, once you learn about one position you may become interested in another or learn about different paths/transitions to take.

- Most senior-level employees believe that there is intrinsic value in having connections and facilitating connections. It's a cheap, relatively easy way to make the world a better place, and they consider their actions "paying it forward." They know that new opportunities can be created—all by giving up a few minutes of their time.

- "Opportunity hires" occur even during a hiring freeze or in companies that have recently downsized. This happens when no specific opening exists and yet good people surface via informational interviews. So it makes good sense for both parties to reach out for informational interviews; for you, having a personal connection means you'll be in a better position for a job interview invitation; and for them, the possibility exists that you'll be a great "find."

Source: [Tooling Up: The Informational Interview](#)

Step 1: Set up your LinkedIn Profile



Some things that may seem "obvious" aren't obvious in reality, because I see people miss some of the most basic and important practices. **Have a catchy headline that tells who you are.** This shouldn't be some boring title like "Graduate Student at UW-Madison"

or "Manager at Company X." That doesn't tell me anything about who you are and the value that you bring to the table. Don't be afraid to make it a sales-pitch here.

Your summary should have important points without lengthy paragraphs. Tell people the highlights of what you have done. Make it stand out. Talk about what you are interested in doing (your informational interviews and corresponding positions will match up with the field(s) of interest you list here). If you want to talk about any special skills, specialties or interests, now is your chance!

Your LinkedIn Profile is basically your **online resume**. If you have a polished resume, it is as simple as copying and pasting. If you don't have a resume, well you better get to work. Because networking without having a resume (if asked for or if you want to offer it for feedback -I'll mention this in Step 4) will only leave you empty-handed for potential future opportunities.

You don't have to do everything at once like get recommendations or endorsements. People worry about needing to have a complete LinkedIn Profile right off the bat. The important thing right now is to focus on your informational interview strategy, not on having an A+ LinkedIn profile with 500+ connections. After all, **quality beats quantity**. You must have the basics to make contact (and start doing informational interviews), but you will build as you go. You don't have to join 50 groups all in one day.

Join LinkedIn Discussion Groups and be an active participant. You will establish an online reputation and it will get you noticed. If you have a professional blog, even better (see below- only 18% of those surveyed actually have a professional website and only 2% have a professional blog).

Going further, you can even have people contact/message you for possible collaborations or value opportunities via LinkedIn Discussion Groups. Either way, you are getting your name out there. One group I actively participate is "PhD Careers Outside of Academia." Also, keep in mind that some LinkedIn Discussion Groups will even have internal job postings that aren't available elsewhere (you'll have to find the ones specific to your field).

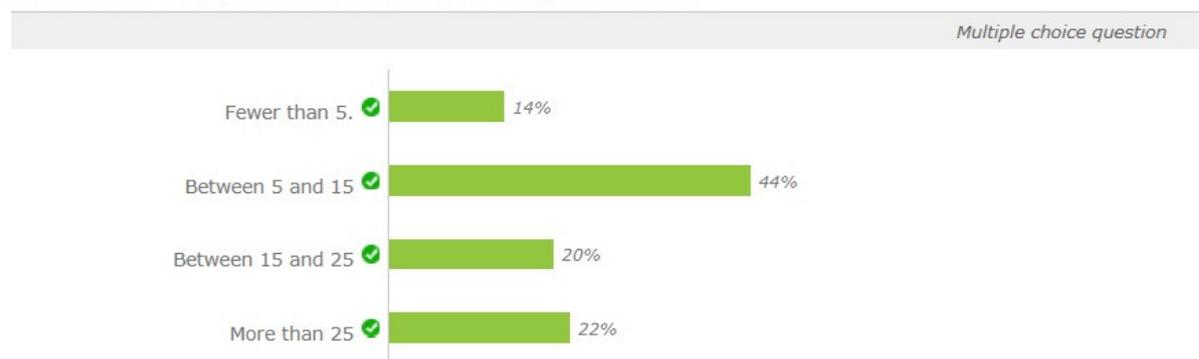
Statistics That Should Concern You

[Based on a survey by dousguides](#), the need to network and have a professional blog is imminent:

44% of people surveyed ONLY have a network between 5 and 15 people! That's almost half!

How big is your network? (Your network is the number of people you know who can help, advise, or support you in your job hunting activities. It includes people working in your chosen field, professors, and other students).

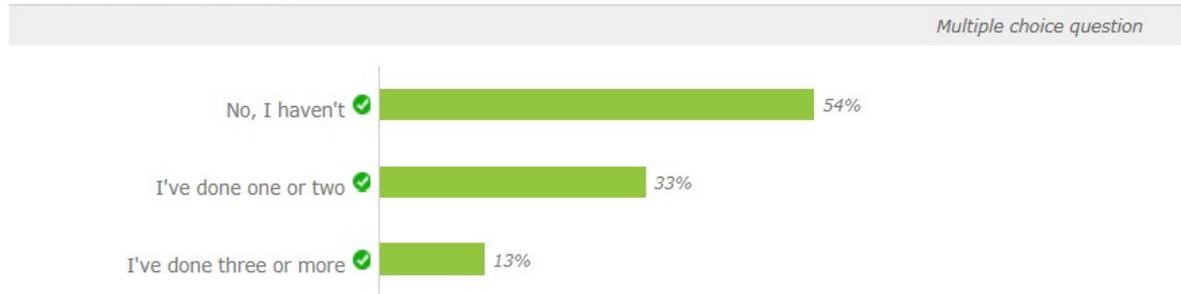
*Forty-two percent of the respondents have more than 15 people in their professional network! Another 44% have between 5 and 15. Having a strong network increases your chances of getting a job by 2-10x. If you are at the low end of the range, **follow this advice to build your network.***



Only 13% of those surveyed have done three or more informational interviews! More strikingly, a whopping 54% have never even done an informational interview!

Have you done any informational interviews? (An informational interview is an interview with someone working in your field of interest with the goal of getting information, not getting a job.)

Unfortunately, the majority of students (54%) haven't done any informational interviews and another 33% have only done one or two. Informational interviews are the best way to understand what skills are needed in a job, what kinds of jobs are available, and who's hiring. *(Here are some sample questions to ask during an informational interview.)*

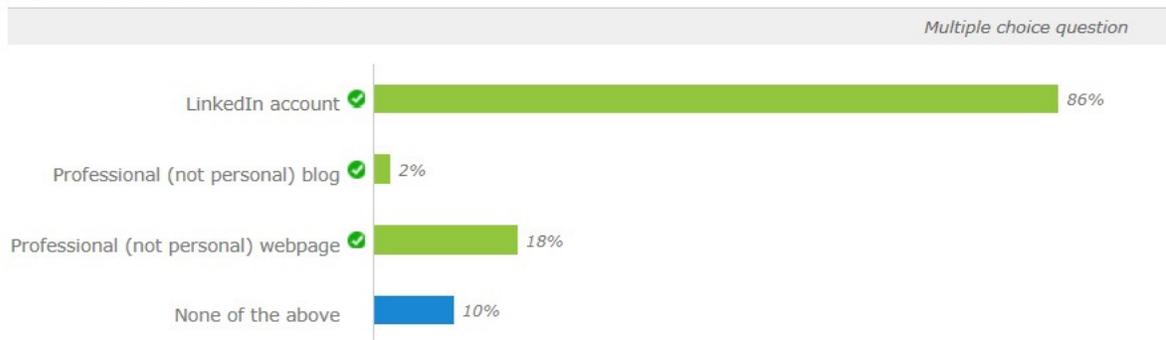


86% of those surveyed already have a LinkedIn Profile But Most Likely Don't Know How to Use It!

And, Only 18% have a Professional Website and Only 2% have a Professional Blog!!

Which of the following do you have? (Check all that apply)

Wow - 86% of the students are already on LinkedIn and 18% have a professional webpage! There's no doubt that LinkedIn is becoming a business necessity. *You can differentiate yourself if you start blogging*, since only 2% of the respondents have a one:



So what are you doing to stand out from the crowd? Do you have a professional blog? Do you have a LinkedIn Profile that you are actually using? Are you doing Informational Interviews? Are you building your network that a lot of graduate students and post-docs are lacking? Do you lack career direction or marketable skills that allow you to cross over to alternative PhD careers? Also, make sure you check out MyIDP on Science Careers to assess your interests and skill sets: <http://myidp.sciencecareers.org/>

Step 2: Start Making Contact (Getting the Ball Rolling with your Existing Network)

Hit up your Number #1 contact. What I mean by that is the **most well-connected person that you know**. This could be a professor on campus. The first thing to do is go through their network on LinkedIn and look at their connection list. Then pick your **top 5 contacts** that they have listed. Don't just go with all the same positions (or one company). For example, I picked Scientist, Field Application Scientist, Product Manager, CEO, Sales Rep, etc.

Set up an informational interview with your "key" contact. Ask to be introduced to the **top 5 contacts** that they know (if they don't know your top 5 "personally" then ask for them to make alternate suggestions or meet with more than one key contact). Aim for someone high-up position wise. Why? Because once you start following the emerging network that will spiderweb via introductions, chances are if you stick with people who are more experienced and high-up position wise, they are more likely to keep the ball rolling for you (based on more high-up introductions). If the person is new at their position or at the lower-end (less connected) of the company you may reach a dead-end sooner.

If you don't have time to set up an informational interview with your key contact (or they are in a different city), then you do it via email or LinkedIn. Your message should say something like:

Dear Dr. __,

I am a X year PhD Student (or post-doc) and I am starting to explore careers outside of academia. Therefore, I am conducting informational interviews to learn more about these potential opportunities. After doing some of my own research, I found fields 1, 2, and 3 of interest to me. I saw that Person X was in your professional network and was wondering if you wouldn't mind introducing me to that person so that I could conduct an informational interview? I would greatly appreciate it. Thanks for your time.

Regards,

Signed You

The hardest part is getting started. But once your key contact introduces you to those top 5 people (or however many you see fit), it will spiderweb to an endless network. A lot of times that person may be out of town or won't respond right away. You can follow up a second time. If you still get silence, then move on. Don't annoy the person.

Ideally, these top 5 contacts (which stem from your initial key contacts) should be in your area (nothing beats face-to-face contact), **but if you are looking to move or build your network elsewhere-do a phone interview instead.**

If you "run dry", lack initial key well-connected contacts (like I did), or want to expand further (as I would suggest/recommend anyways), proceed to step 3.

Step 3: Start Making Cold Contacts (Optional)



The first informational interview I ever did (officially) outside of academia was done and set up cold. Keep in mind that Step 2 is the most ideal step and best way to start since introductions get things done faster and are more credible (and you are more likely to get a response). **Do step 3 if you want to branch out to different contacts and different**

companies or expand on talking to people in certain positions that your current network is not acquainted with (maybe there are top 5 companies in your area that you are really interested in learning about or even working for).

I went on LinkedIn and typed in “Field Application Scientist” (as an example). I found a huge list of people. So I narrowed it down to people JUST within my area (Madison, WI). I am fortunate enough to live in a city with over a 100+ biotech companies. So everyone’s situation may be different. But, from there I messaged my top 3 picks (you can do more if you wish: up to 5 or 10 which will depend on your schedule and how aggressive you want to be-if you aren’t getting responses you can increase the number to however you see fit).

I worded the message similar to Step 2:

Hi (Insert name of person),

I did a search for ‘__(Insert Position)___’. Your name came up in the search on LinkedIn. I was wondering if you would be willing to conduct an informational interview? The _____ track is a career I was interested in pursuing and I was hoping to learn more about it. If you would be willing to meet in person that would be much appreciated. I am currently a PhD graduate student at _____. There are numerous questions I had about whether this position was a good transition in order to be able to move away from the lab bench and go more into _____. Please get back to me at your earliest convenience. I look forward to hearing from you. Thanks for your time.

Regards,

Me

Does it actually work? Yes. It’s not 100% but guess what? **They were once graduate students too** (assuming you pick someone with a Master’s or PhD). They know of your situation! They know what you’re going through because most likely they went through the same thing. That is why 60% or more of the time they will respond and most will agree to take at least 30 minutes out of their day to speak with you. My success rate was 75% or more at first. But it led to almost 100% after the cold contacts introduced me to the people that they knew (it no longer become cold-the first initial contacts were cold then it was no longer viewed in this manner). **If the person isn’t available in-person, then do it over the phone.**

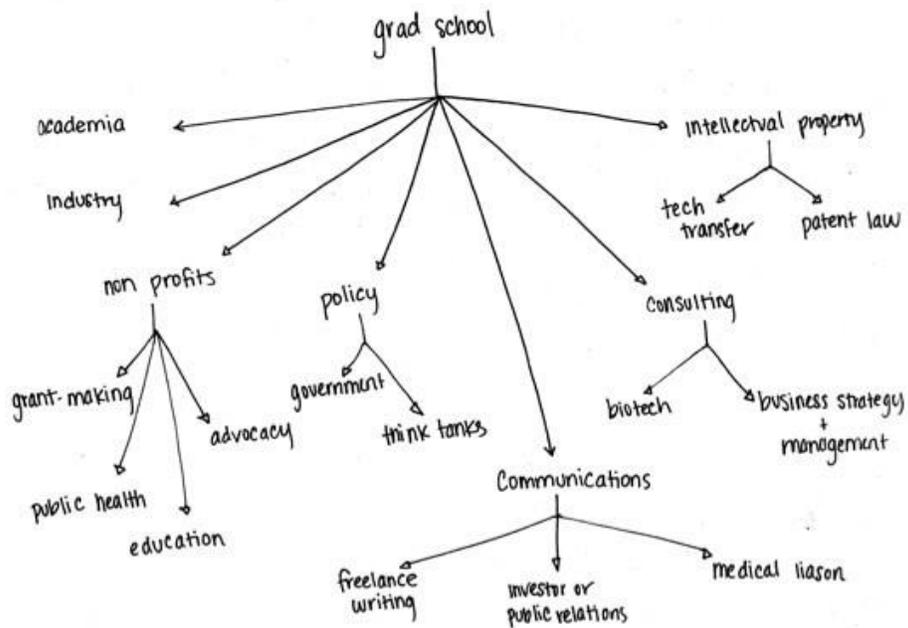
But I didn’t stop at Field Application Scientist. After I did the informational interviews with FAS’s, I noticed that they mentioned this type of position as being a stepping-stone. So I

learned more about the types of roles they transitioned into. So I followed the dots. One example of this was going into Marketing or Product Management. I've also spoken with people who were at the laboratory bench and moved away from it. **I asked them how they made the transition and if they were happy with their decision.** I'll get to the questions in Step 4.

The career path that you wish to learn about and/or pursue is uniquely up to you and your interests. Therefore, choose your interviews and network contacts accordingly.

Still stuck?

This should get you started:



Ultimate PhD Networking Guide: How To Create Opportunities Out Of Thin Air (Part 3)

April 1, 2013 by [Ryan The Graduate](#)

Step 4: Start Asking The Right Questions



I would recommend doing at least 10 informational interviews until you feel comfortable (and feel good about the questions and the feedback you're getting). Your goal is to become an expert informational interviewer. You will know the "right" and intelligent questions to ask. The deep ones.

On average, I started with 30 minute interviews. Most of mine lasted from 1-2 hours. Some went 2 hours and I had to cut them off. This will be dependent on your personality and the kind of conversation you carry, but it just goes to show that MOST people like to talk about their work. Who wouldn't? And a PhD student is taking notes? They are showing genuine interest (at least I hope you are), therefore they think "I will give this person my time because they value my time."

Pointers:

- 1) Don't dress like a graduate student or post-doc. I wear what I think I would wear if I was working for the place that I am visiting! Dress shirt, dress pants and shoes. Don't overdo it with a suit and a tie. This isn't a job interview.
- 2) Smile when you meet the person.. Give the person a firm handshake and tell them upfront that you appreciate their time (and that it means a lot to you). Before you start the conversation, first ask how much time that person has. Since you brought this up right off the bat, they will be more likely to give you more time. And I'll just say that because you may feel like a socially inept graduate student (or post-doc) doesn't mean you have to act like one. You may be nervous at first, but don't worry they get easier.
- 3) Meet for coffee or lunch. Suggest a place that is close to that person's work. Propose a day, time, and place that is CONVENIENT for your network contact. Make it easy on them.
- 4) Bring paper and something to write with. By doing this, when they tell you something you can write it down (you won't remember everything anyways) and this demonstrates that you are responsible and are serious about learning. Also, have your questions already written out (not memorized).
- 5) **Do NOT bring your resume with.** I wouldn't even bring it up until the very last minute.

Basic Questions to formulate (Tweak and add to the list the more you do)

There are NO right or wrong questions to ask! Make your own list as you see fit. Many questions are position specific. Honestly, I came up with my own list after I found which

questions got the best response or provided the most insight. You have to be the judge and become your own expert informational interviewer (don't just do one and walk away or lose faith in the value of informational interviews).

Each and every person will provide you with a unique INSIGHT and EXPERIENCE even if you ask the same questions over and over to different people! Why? Because no one is the same! They feel different about the thought of the questions. And I'll tell you what: You will have good interviews and you will have bad. But, you don't know what a good or a bad informational interview is like until you've done multiple. Some people may just be having a bad day. Some may even buy you lunch because they feel sorry that you are a poor graduate student. And I'm not even joking.

But don't let setbacks discourage you. Do enough informational interviews to the point where you feel it is sufficient (See Step 5).

Questions to ask:

- 1) I'd like to understand your current position. What are your responsibilities?
- 2) What are the responsibilities of a ____ (Fill in position title here)? What were your least favorite aspects of the position?
- 3) How did being a ____ prepare you for the rest of your career?
- 4) Where do you see yourself going from here (you can get a sense of whether or not they are happy with their current job, room for advancement, and how the company is doing) or in the next couple of years?
- 5) What helped you in preparing yourself to be a ____? (if they transitioned away from the lab bench asked them HOW they did it. Did they do an internship? How did they make themselves stand out from the crowd? Did they have a unique experience, develop a marketable skill set and how, or did they get their foot in the door through a network contact?)
- 6) Which of my skills would be important for me to highlight in order to be an attractive option to companies that are looking for ____?
- 7) What would it be like working for your company? How do you think your company culture would change if your company was bigger or smaller in size? (get a feel for the relative growth of the company)

THE BIGGEST TWO QUESTIONS:

- 1) Would it be alright if I sent you my resume so that you could provide feedback as to how I can improve it for companies looking for ____? Or help me better highlight my strengths for this particular position? (don't stutter on this one-ask it at the very end in a **very confident manner** as a means to get feedback/help)
- 2) Who else do you know that I could speak to about this? May I please have their contact information? Would you mind introducing them to me?

Here is how the scenario will play out: **99% of the time, they will say yes to your last two questions** (at least it worked for me). I also sent them my resume for feedback and they introduced me to at least 2 contacts (I would aim for 2- don't get too crazy here because they are busy working professionals-many of whom travel).

I had 5-10 different resumes for each position. If I interviewed a Field-Application Scientist, I sent them a resume (with unique objective statement) that highlighted that skill set the best I could. If I interviewed a Product Manager, I sent them a resume tailored to that type of position.

A lot of times, from what I had learned at informational interviews, **I was able to identify weaknesses and address some concerns about developing more marketable skills.** That is why I decided to launch two online businesses (and audit an Entrepreneurial Management business class on campus) to fill gaps in my resume. It gave me the marketing experiences and business acumen. **It made me look not just like a science person** but also a business person.

Whatever those skills are that you need to highlight (based on the job market needs) **MAKE SURE YOU FIND OUT!** And guess what? At the end of the day, **it got me an internship position my last 6 months of my PhD studies** (I have multiple offers from multiple companies-technical writing, sales, associate product manager, etc.). The same can happen for you! That way you will come out with both the education and real-world experience.

My Story Continued

I'd say only 10-25% of the people actually CORRECTED my resume or sent me comments back. The 75% didn't say anything. Does that mean they didn't look at it? No. Does that mean that they don't care? No. It means that they are busy. And just because they do or don't correct it (or provide feedback) doesn't mean that one network contact is better than the other (or you should place value of one person over the other). Everyone is of equal value, so keep this mindset and respect their time.

You have to send them a follow up email or message through LinkedIn to stay in contact with that individual at the conclusion of your informational interview. Don't get home right away and add them and send your resume. You will look too needy.

The next day or so, just send a follow up email thanking them for their time. Say "If you have the time (or get the chance) here is my resume if you wouldn't mind looking it over to provide feedback." Then you can say, as we discussed could you please get me in touch with person X and Y (at company 1 and 2)? (you have the names written down) Most the time these people will be from within their own company (that is why cold contact on LinkedIn is good if you want to get acquainted with multiple companies because you can branch out).

How you set up the next 2 contacts that they know is up to you (email, phone, LinkedIn). Most of the time they would just CC me on an email. Many needed to be reminded however, because they are busy. Or you can do a LinkedIn introduction if time goes by and you don't hear anything back.

Step 5: Follow Up, Offer Value, and Stay In Contact

Ok so you've already sent this person your resume for feedback. They may have not said anything back and that's fine. At least you will have met 1 or 2 contacts that they know to introduce you to (some are even their hiring managers).

The key here is NOT necessarily employment. A lot of times, when you send off your resume they may just shrug their shoulders and say "OK." But if you already have a polished resume and you've sent it off to the person at the company, the chances of them thinking of you (based on a need within the company or a job opening now or in the future) greatly increase. Therefore, even for feedback purposes you have **NOTHING** to lose.

The real question is HOW you can add value back to that person.

I'll tell you what I did and how I stayed in touch with my growing network.

The people that I really connected with (personality wise, science wise, etc.): I usually did 2 or even 3 informational interviews with. But the 2nd or 3rd time around, it's not really an informational interview anymore. **It's more of a personal "get together"**:

A lot of times it can be to discuss a scientific problem. A lot of times it can be to help out a friend or coworker of theirs. Or just talk about what they are doing currently at their job (and how you can be of help). They already know your skill set from the leading question you have asked at the previous interview and from the resume you have sent them. So if they see value in what you are doing (and you have a marketable skill set that you're developing) you should have no problem offering value back to your network contact.

Specifically, I noticed a lot of biotech companies lack social media presence. Therefore, after discussing the idea of a social media analytics platform (that I would help create), I was able to spark the interest of a network contact and he saw the value in what I was doing. But a lot of this came from my own experiences.

You have to keep in mind that a lot of what I did (informational interviews, my entrepreneurial ventures) were all self-taught. That is why I am sharing them with you. But a lot of it is grounded on my personality (I've done sales since I was 16). I am aggressive, outgoing, and high-energy. You may not feel that networking is a key strength of yours. But, **ANYONE can learn to network and it is a skill that CAN be learned!**

I was fortunate enough to have my professional blog running. Even though I was initially just offering professional advice just for graduate students and post-docs (and my incentive was to try and sell a book I wrote on how to generate a second income for graduate students via online marketing-which is now free), I started to add value back to my network contacts (in biotech industry), since I started to write about ways to bridge the gap between academia-industry. Even though the solutions I was proposing wouldn't and won't necessarily be adopted, the whole point is that I was sharing the value of my thoughts and ideas. It is the exchange of information. That's what networking and adding value is all about.

One person even said that they were going to feature my article in their company's blog or twitter feed since they were trying to do more social media. Many companies don't see the value in social media and question e-commerce and online marketing and its effectiveness in

driving sales and revenue. They couldn't be more wrong. Social media and technology are changing the world. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google +, Pinterest, Instagram... You name it. Throw in SEO, google analytics, and google adwords. You've got yourself an entire campaign.

But, this is my **UNIQUE value proposition** that I add back to my network. **That is how I stayed in touch with my contacts.**

Some have asked me how can I possibly be an expert in all of this and provide advice to grad students and post-docs? Well for one, I have done over 75 informational interviews. It took me that many to receive ONE PHONE call and land ONE JOB in this economy. I am currently an Associate Product Manager at Promega, and I couldn't have done it without networking and adding value back to my contacts.

There is no magic number (do whatever it takes). The questions I asked and the things that I did really can work. It is your own drive, curiosity, and persistence that will determine how effective your strategy will be. You will get what you put into it. I cannot guarantee that you will find a job or add value back to your newly created network.

What I can guarantee is that you still develop a skill you never thought possible. You will learn about careers you never thought possible. You will gain confidence. You will become excited about potential opportunities. You will learn from yourself as well as others. And at this stage you have nothing to lose.

I will end by saying that the majority of people start too late. They do their PhD defense or wait till their 4th, 5th, or 6th year post-doc then decide to do something. **WRONG idea. START NOW!** It is never too early to start networking. Networking is a lot of time and hard work. But you don't want to get to the end of your PhD with no idea of what you want to do and with nowhere to go. 90% of finding employment is networking!

Your network is your net worth. Start building it now.