Networking might seem like a dirty word when you are just starting the process. However, it can be the lifeblood of any career. Let us start with what you want to do after you complete your education. You have your college degree, and you are ready to start the job-seeking process.

While it is nice that you have a degree, and that will certainly help you down the road, you need to create a foundation. That means people. Let us start with a few questions you should be able to answer. If you can’t you have some work to do. My students complete this assignment at the start of their sophomore year. Each week, they find four contacts in the five areas where they think they want to work. At the end of 15 weeks, they have 20 contacts.

Although you may not be sure of the value of this at this point, the goal is to deep dive into what you are thinking. It is better to invest time now and find out if a job meets your core values: The average person will work for 50 years.

To be successful, there are a few things you need to do before you speak to your contact. First, Google them and learn about their background so you do not waste time asking questions about information that you should already know. If they are on LinkedIn, read their profile. It might include the groups they belong to in their industry. After you speak with them, then you can request them as a contact.

Word of warning—do not use the generic request to add a contact to your LinkedIn. It is unprofessional and lazy. You need to send a tailored note requesting they become your contact because you enjoyed learning about them and want to keep them apprised of your progress in your career.

DREAM INDUSTRY (1-4 CONTACTS)

For example, say you always wanted to work in college athletics and see yourself as a basketball coach. Find your first four contacts from the dream industry. Ask yourself, that if you were a college basketball coach, whose phone number would you need to help understand the job better when you are in that position?

- A basketball coach would need these people to be successful at their job:
  - College athletic directors. They hire the coaches.
  - Sports information directors. They work with coaches on dealing with the media.
  - Sports equipment personnel (from Nike, Under Armor, etc.). They conduct basketball camps and sell supplies like shoes, uniforms, and basketballs.
• Academic advisers. They work with student athletes through scheduling, tutoring, and proctoring exams.

This is not a comprehensive list but a starting point. As you get information from these people, you may question if this is the job for you. Maybe one of your new contacts has shared information with you that turned you onto their job. It is OK if your job is different than these; just pick four people that your dream job might interact with on a regular basis.

DREAM JOB (5-8 CONTACTS)

You want to be Division I NCAA Men’s Basketball Coach—great goal. Find out what their job is really like and how they arrived at that position. All jobs come with good and bad, and you need to understand that if you want to work yourself into that position.

It is important to understand the types of jobs these people performed prior to their dream job. (You will not start as head coach.) They had many steps before they got the job they wanted. Examples include basketball manager, graduate assistant, and assistant basketball coach. This is not a complete list, but it does give an idea what steps you might have to take.

You cannot ask how much money they make. However, it is important to get an idea. Ask that important question by asking about the salary range for that type of job.

DREAM CITY (9-12 CONTACTS)

If you could live anywhere, where would it be? There is no wrong answer. I tell my students that the only place that they cannot pick is their own hometown. At this point, my students pick places all over the country or the world.

It is likely that you do not know anyone who lives in that town or maybe just one person who does not work in the field that you want. The goal is to get some place on purpose. Now is the time to work on those skills of being uncomfortable.

It is time to explain the purpose of this exercise. Let us say, you have a significant other who got their dream job, and it is in North Dakota. The bright side is they are going to making $150,000 a year. They love you and you love them. You need skills to learn how to get a job even if it is not in a place that you would pick (no offense to North Dakota, I am sure it is a great state).

People lose jobs for many reasons. Personal health of a loved one and a change in the economy are only two, but the ability to deal with change is a great skill that we need to cultivate. It is great that your school has a great alumni network with contacts everywhere. However, that is only a starting point. Entry Level (13-16 Contacts)
Of all the contacts my students are required to speak to, the most eye opening is the entry-level employee. The purpose is to talk to people who are at the first level of their career. That can be a graduate assistant or entry-level job.

The reason for this is, it is important to interview these people as they tend to think they put in too many hours for too little money. Many even think this job is not for them. While it can be hard to hear this information, it is imperative to go into any industry with your eyes open.

We tend to look at the positive, but with any position, there are things that you will not like. All positions come with unpleasant tasks that will be your responsibility.

The goal is to be proactive and know what you are getting yourself into before you start your career.

**PROFESSIONAL MINIMUM OF FIVE-YEARS OF EXPERIENCE (17-20 CONTACTS)**

The last four contacts will be very different from the entry-level people. These seasoned professionals have more than likely held two to three jobs already. They feel positive about their career prospects and their future.

Life has a way of providing experience and perspective. We all might make different decisions if we had all the information at the time. The reason I came up with this assignment was because I wanted my students to make the most informed decisions based on real information.

While they were gathering this information, they were making contacts along the way at many levels. If this is the right career path, they have a plan of action. If they found out this was not quite right for them, this is also a positive as they learned before making a mistake.

This assignment may be done more than once. We change and may want to do different things. It is important to understand that the average person has many job changes and many may work in different industries over their working career.

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