

NETWORKING 101

“Stalking for business and pleasure”

Hello! My name is Parker Lemal-Brown and I want to be a TV writer. I went to a tiny college in Maine and often felt frustrated, lonely, and confused when it came to learning about the career I wanted. It was hard finding advice about the entertainment industry through conventional resources like the Career Center.

So I turned to the Internet. After two years of networking, I have connected with over 65 media professionals who work at CNN, Full Frontal, SNL, The Bold Type, Orphan Black, One Day At A Time, Faking It, and more. Networking is a messy, frustrating process, but it is also exciting and rewarding. Since you’re reading this, you must be intrigued. Welcome aboard!

Here is everything I have learned, through a lot of trial and error. I’m no expert. I was an unemployed college grad with a dream and a laptop, so I’m probably not too different from you.

This guide is geared towards the entertainment industry, but the general process can be used for anyone interested in technology, medicine, event planning, and many other careers.

Please send questions and feedback to parker.lemalbrown@gmail.com. Enjoy!

Part I. Expand Your Network



Odds are, you know someone who does what you want to do. Whether it is a relative, a teacher, a friend, or a friend of a friend of a friend, think of someone who you have met personally. Reach out to them through social media. Find their emails. Take them out for coffee. This is the best first step, and sometimes you will get an offer right away. If not, don't worry. The Internet allows for unprecedented access to people outside of your social circles. Social media can help you make those circles bigger.

LinkedIn:

Aka grown-up Facebook. You should always keep this up to date, because it is how employers stalk you when you apply or interview. Entertainment folks do not use this often, but it can be a great way to connect with college peers and alumni.

Tips:

1. Upload your resume / put the items in your resume into your profile. You can elaborate a lot more about coursework, volunteering, etc. because it does not need to fit onto one page!
2. Get to 500+ connections, so you look like a boss. Quickest way to do this is friend everyone you know at your college. These connections can come in handy at surprising times.
3. Download the mobile app. This lets you invite people way faster (literally just tapping buttons, you can watch TV at the same time). Also, if you are at a function, add people to LinkedIn on the spot. It is more informational than a business card. Also you probably don't even have business cards. And that is ok. You are saving trees.

Websites:

For journalists, authors, playwrights, podcast hosts, and entrepreneurs, it might be easiest to connect with them through their websites. Go under the Contact page and look for an email address. Depending on their stature, the contact may be their agent. I have never contacted an agent to get to someone, and would not suggest it. However, a generic email for the site (e.g. info@website.com) will likely reach the person you want.

Twitter:

This is a long shot, but sometimes people can be reached through other forms of social media. Again, it depends on how popular they are. You can DM people or tweet at them, asking for advice and/or a phone call. Other platforms like Snapchat or Instagram can work too, especially if you follow an influencer on the rise.

Facebook:

**** WARNING: USE LINKEDIN FIRST.** Facebook is more for personal lives, which makes it very risky as a networking tool. It is inappropriate to go here if industry professionals network through LinkedIn or any other platform. **

First, check your own profile. Is there anything on there you don't want a future employer or colleague to see? You should be completely honest about who you are, but it is smart to keep your profile somewhat private. Here are some tips:

1. Go to Settings, to Timelines and Tagging. You can choose to review all posts you're tagged in before they appear on your timeline. I like this because you can filter out any posts that might be unflattering or inappropriate, like that pic your mom found of you potty-training.
2. Play around with privacy settings. Keep most information available only to Friends or Friends of Friends, rather than Public.

Now let's find new friends! Here are some tips to start:

1. Think of anyone who you know in real life who works in your preferred industry. Friend them on Facebook if you are not friends already.
2. Check out their list of friends. Most friend lists are accessible to anyone. Do a little snooping – what do their profiles say? What do they do? And who are their friends?
3. Selectively send requests to people who are in your industry. Don't send to everyone, but send a lot of them – it will increase your chances of being accepted by someone.
4. Keep track of the networks. Social media is a great way of mapping out “who knows who”. Use your common sense, IMDb, theater websites, etc. to establish communities.
 - a. In TV, it's easy to pick out who might have worked with each other. Look for actors who cameo on multiple shows or trained at Improv centers (Second City, UCB, etc.). For writers, they often work on multiple shows with the same showrunner.
 - i. E.g. Writers on Brooklyn Nine-Nine or The Good Place probably started on The Office or Parks and Rec.
5. The longer you do this, the more mutual friends you will have in common. This means you will likely have more people accept your requests in the future.
6. If someone accepts your friend request – yay! Act cool. Don't go liking all of their photos from 2012. If their friend lists were restricted before, you may be able to access it now.
7. Do some research on your new friends: Where have they worked? What type of experience do they have? Advice they might be able to give?
8. Once you've worked up the courage and written down some questions, send them a message.

THE ART OF THE MESSAGE:

Here's a template for a basic introduction:

"Hi ___! I'm [a student] interested in working in ____. I'd love to hear about your own career and what you've learned. Do you have any advice for someone starting out? Thank you!"

1. Keep it short and polite.
2. It's ok to say you like their work – if they respond, elaborate on it!
3. If you connected on social media, ask if they are available for a phone call or would prefer to email.

*** SOMETIMES PEOPLE NEVER RESPOND. THIS IS OK. ***

The beauty of social media is that it helps you build a thick skin while the stakes are still low. Sometimes, it will feel like 50 people ghosted you at the same time. Remind yourself that these are virtual interactions. People are busy. You are a random stranger, so any response at all is a miracle. Either way, you will live.

Additional tips:

1. LinkedIn and Facebook messages automatically use read receipts. This can put pressure on people to respond, but usually you can just see when you've been ignored. Brush it off and find other people.
2. If you don't get a message, wait before reminding them. Be persistent, not a pest.
3. Sometimes, people will respond literally MONTHS after you message them. Be grateful for every response and thank the person.
4. Most of the time, you won't get to have in-depth discussions. Figure out what you really want to know and thank them once you get a response. Again, try to get on the phone for a longer conversation.
5. DON'T ASK FOR A JOB. JUST ADVICE. Students have an advantage because they are not in the "real world" yet. Just asking for advice shows your interest in being hired someday. They will get the message.

Part II: Connect

THE PHONE CALL:

Congratulations! You have connected with a professional, and he/she/they agreed to talk over the phone. Schedule a time to talk and share your phone number. Conversations usually last between 15-60 minutes. Be mindful of the person's time, especially if it is during the workday.

Getting ready:

Here are some questions YOU might be asked by the professional. These types of phone calls are sometimes known as **informational interviews** – you are interviewing them to learn more about a job or industry, but they are also interviewing you. It is pretty straightforward:

1. “Tell me a little about yourself”
 - a. This is the first question for any job interview. Develop your **Elevator Pitch**: Who are you? More specifically, what do you do now, what do you want to do, and why?
2. “What do you want to know?”
 - a. What DO you want to know? This is when you start asking your questions.

Coming up with questions:

Do your research on the person. On LinkedIn or IMDb, you can usually figure out where the person went to college, their previous jobs, and their current positions. Get a sense of WHAT they’ve done, so you can focus on learning HOW they did it. Think of questions you cannot Google.

A common question in job interviews is “if you could bring any famous figure to a dinner party, who would you invite?” Think of what you would ask your ultimate role model if you actually sat down to dinner. What do you want to **know**? This can help get the ball rolling.

Here are some questions I ask people:

1. What was your first job? How did you get it?
2. What is your favorite piece of advice?
3. What advice would you give to your college self?
4. What are the most useful skills/traits to have in your field?
5. What was it like to work on ___?

Usually, conversations unfold by themselves. Try to get people to tell you stories - it makes it more fun for both of you. Your questions will change, depending on what you are trying to do. Be flexible and react in real time, in case a new topic comes up that you didn’t think of before.

If you are just exploring an industry, here are some other questions:

1. Why did you choose to be ___? When did you decide to pursue that path?
2. What is the most rewarding aspect of your job? The most difficult?
3. If you could do it over again, would you choose the same industry?

Another tip: These conversations are for you to learn about the **PROCESS**. Sometimes, you might not love whatever show they work on or even hate their latest piece. You might not agree with their company’s politics or think you will never sell out and go corporate. Etc.

For example: if you are pre-med, you might end up meeting a doctor or shadowing a surgeon outside of your dream specialty. Listen to them and appreciate the opportunity, no matter

what. The knowledge you soak up now will be helpful down the road, for whatever you end up doing. This goes for any type of career. **Any exposure is good exposure.**

PART III: Stay in Touch

Notes and Organization:

Of course, you want to hold on to every piece of advice you get. I take bullet point notes on my laptop during every call. If it is an in-person conversation, you may be able to record the conversation and listen to it later (if they give you permission!) Jot down names that they mention, because you might be able to make more connections later.

Once you start connecting with people over the phone, it is a good idea to keep track of your contacts. Back in the old days (before smartphones), people used paper Rolodexes for names and numbers. I use a spreadsheet on Excel as my Rolodex. It looks like this:

Name
Position
Show/Company
City
Phone Call Y/N
Date of Call
Connection (i.e. Mutual Contact)
Follow-up / Notes

Follow-Ups:

ALWAYS WRITE A THANK YOU CARD. This can be a short email or FB message after you call. Letters are even better. Keep a tab on what people are doing. Send a congratulatory note if someone gets a promotion or produces something new. If there is an event you heard about or an episode they directed, reach out and ask them what the process was like. People often appreciate these little notes and it keeps you on their radar.

Follow up. Reach out for another call to catch up every few months, if they are available. Whenever possible, meet in person. Buy them a cup of coffee if you are in the same city. If you can visit the place you hope to move to, make sure to reach out to your contacts in advance and let them know you will be in town. Nothing beats real-life interactions. It can lead to deeper trust and valuable opportunities.

Part IV: Go Forth and Conquer