Most people love networking, and find it to be one of the most enjoyable parts of the job search process. Wait. That’s not true. Most people say networking is uncomfortable or “not for them”. But, whether you’re an introvert or an extrovert, a successful job search is often predicated on networking. So, if you’re looking for a job that you hope to enjoy, you’ll need to network.

At Yale’s Office of Career Strategy, we want to reframe your thinking on networking. It’s one of the most powerful tools you have when navigating the career decision-making process and the job search.

Companies are great at showcasing how awesome their work environments are, or how cutting edge their technology or approach is. But how do you know you’re making the right choice when presented with an offer? Or, even before that when you’re determining whether you should take the time to apply.

Through networking, you’ll learn about job functions that seem nebulous, if a company’s work environment is inclusive or flexible, and whether a job posted on a company’s website is the right fit for you. You’ll put yourself on other peoples’ radars, allowing them to possibly recommend other people for you to talk to at the company or in the industry.

But maybe you’re still hesitant to do this. You know conceptually that this method works, but these professionals are busy and you’re just a bother, right? Wrong. Most people love talking about themselves and what they do for a living, and they are usually excited to help others!

Think about the last time someone asked you for directions. Did they approach you without your permission? Did they ask you questions about how to get somewhere? What was your reaction? Were you hesitant to help because you felt they were overstepping? Probably not. You likely provided some instruction, some landmarks to look out for, and hoped they arrived to where they wanted to go. This is how we want you to think about networking.

During the career decision-making process, you’ll need direction to get from a place of uncertainty to one in which you are more knowledgeable about the jobs that make the most sense for you. To get these directions, you’ll need to find people who already do the type of work that interests you to learn from their experiences. They can be alums of your educational institution, neighbors, childhood friends, or your peers sitting next to you in class.

After you’ve identified who to talk to, craft an introductory email that tells them a bit about yourself and why you are reaching out. Remember, you are not reaching out because you think the contact can hire you into a position. You are reaching out to learn more about that person’s role within a company and their career path. This is called an informational interview. Be specific about finding a time to talk, offer to meet in-person or to talk over the phone or Skype, for about 30 minutes.

Approach your informational interviews with these goals: first, learn nuanced information about a company or work environment that you won’t get from websites; second, practice you own professional narrative – why you’re interested in an industry, what stuff you’ve been working on (this allows the contact to gain insight on
what specific elements they can help you with); and finally, cap off this conversation with a simple ask of “can you recommend other people for me to talk to?” This is how you’ll grow your network.

After these conversations, have an honest check-in with yourself to determine if the ideas you initially had about a company or job function align with what you heard from the people who have done the work. All of this will help you make a well-informed decision about how to proceed in your job search.

Get started now! Make a list of 3 to 5 people who you know already and would like to reach out to. They can be family members or friends, contacts from past jobs, internships, or professional organizations. Add to your list by using the Peer Networking Lists in Yale Career Link, use LinkedIn, and the Yale Career Network (image: yes, another video!) to gain access to thousands of Yale alumni.

Reach out to these familiar and new contacts, ask for directions, look out for those shared landmarks, and travel wisely as you navigate the roads of networking.