Whether you’re fresh out of college or you’re looking for a change in career, networking is an essential tool for being successful in the workplace. Not only in networking valuable when it comes to finding a new job, but it also allows you to meet people with similar interests and form lifelong friendships. Below, I have compiled a list of tips and tricks to help you network like a pro and hopefully get established in the career of your dreams.

1. **Make a commitment to networking.**This is the one piece of the puzzle that no one can help you with. Much like exercising, networking needs to become part of your everyday life for you to get the most out of it.
2. **Put together a list of contacts.** Contacts may include (but are not limited to) friends, family, co-workers, direct reports, supervisors, vendors, former colleagues, college alumni, people you would like to meet, etc.  No one is exempt from this list; even if you never get around to reconnecting with your best friend from the fourth grade who you haven’t spoken with in 20 years, include them for now.
3. **Prioritize the list.** Naturally, those who are closest to you and are most likely to return your calls should be placed at the top of the list. Friends and family go first, then co-workers, former colleagues and so on.
4. **Set goals and execute them.** For example, your goal could be to shoot for X amount of calls and emails per day, meetings per week, networking events per month, et cetera. Your goals don’t necessarily have to focus on finding a new job. They should focus on staying active and keeping up with networking. Make sure that your goals are aggressive yet attainable. Measure your successes regularly and try to understand your failures so that you can make the necessary adjustments in the future.
5. **Prepare for meetings in advance.** Though securing a meeting isn’t terribly difficult, it’s important to have a game plan. Treat meetings the same way you would treat an interview. Make sure to focus on the person or people you are meeting with rather than on yourself. This, more than anything, will help separate you from everyone else and leave them with a good feeling about you as well as a desire to help you succeed. After all, time is money. Make it worth their while.
6. **Meet outside of their office**. The office has a high potential for stress as well as added distractions that will take away from the meeting. Instead, you could try arranging to meet them at a nearby café of coffee shop. If you want bonus points, you could even offer to buy them a cup of joe.
7. **Make a connection.** Ask questions and make an honest effort to learn something about them that you didn’t know before the meeting. Even if you’ve known this person for years, they’ll appreciate your continued interest and be more likely to help you. Keep records of your meetings either in a journal or digitally. Refer to your records often so that you have a better reason to follow up with them than “just to check in.”
8. **Use LinkedIn.** It’s a great way to keep up with the career endeavors of former classmates and colleagues. LinkedIn can also be used to find people within your field who can help you get where you want to go. Make sure to keep your profile up to date. If you decide to include a picture, know that photos of friends and family members are not appropriate. I suggest having a professional take some head shots. It may cost a bit of money, but it will be well worth it in the long run.
9. **Join local networking groups.** Examples of groups include the Association for Corporate Growth, Financial Executives International, Technology Council, et cetera.
10. **Picture your dream job**. Establish a list of criteria that your ideal job would meet. As more and more opportunities are made available to you because of networking, this list will prove to be a valuable tool when evaluating all potential jobs. If a career opportunity doesn’t meet your criteria, try to refer it to another friend, family member or coworker who would be a good fit. Even if it’s not the job for you, referring another potential employee to the position is a great way to demonstrate your value. Both the company and the person you referred will appreciate the gesture and be likely to help you in the future.

Though following these 10 tips and tricks may prove to be tricky at first, they will soon become first nature. With a little practice, a quality resume and some sharp clothes, the career of your dreams may be closer than you think.

**\*\*\*414 words to start, 803 words total, 389 words added ($23.34)\*\*\***