Networking...chances are you've heard the term thrown around before. Maybe you've even gone outside your comfort zone to build your own personal network, or maybe just the thought of networking makes you freeze with fear!

As we are getting ready to introduce your Capstone Project - a mandatory project that you will complete over the upcoming year - building confidence around networking will become more and more important as you establish and maintain relationships with your mentor(s) and those who can help you with your career life decisions.

But what is networking? Essentially, networking is getting to know people who can help you in your career and life goals. Networking has so many benefits in terms of mentorship and career advice, but also in terms of job seeking. Think about it - many jobs never make it to the pages of a recruitment website or newspaper. They get filled by word of mouth and referrals - it's all who you know! The good news, though, is that you don't need to be the most outgoing or social person in order to be an effective networker!

The best place to begin networking is to think about the people you know at school, at work, or in your social life. Think about the people your parents know. Listen to conversations around you about people who share similar interests or goals.

The job search site [www.monster.com (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site.](http://www.monster.com) gives some great hints for where and how to best find networking opportunities:

What is the best way to build your network?

Even if you're new and nervous about networking, it is likely that you already have a lot of contacts that you haven't yet thought about this purpose before:

- Old or current classmates
- Distant family members
- Your friends' family
- Your doctor, lawyer or hairdresser
- Former colleagues or bosses
- Club members or anyone else you meet socially

Think about who you meet and conversations you've had, and, more importantly, ask if you can stay in touch. Too often we all have good intent but feel awkward to reach out to build a connection. Aim to stay in regular touch even when you don't need anything specific; taking someone for a cup of coffee to stay connected can go a long way. You don't want to be known as the person who only ever gets in touch when you're after a favour.

What are some hints for effective networking?

Like any other form of socializing, there are certain rules to follow when networking:

- *First impressions count* - both face-to-face and via the phone or email. Always stay sharp.

- *Don't ask directly for a job* - networking is not a job fair; it's an opportunity to gather potentially useful information.

- *Give and take* - networking is a two-way exchange, there's no such thing as a free lunch. It won't be long before you become a mentor to others!

- *Do the groundwork* - research your contacts before meeting them and always follow up good leads or they pass on.

- *Think laterally* – try to expand your network outwards, beyond your comfort zone.

- *Patience is a virtue* – getting involved in networking is being in there for the long haul; don't expect have the perfect network on your first go. It's not always going to be perfect. Be consistent with reaching out and meeting new people.

When it comes down to it, though, effective networking all comes down to rich conversations...being an effective listener and asking good questions. In our technological age, this is sometimes a skill that we lack confidence. Watch the following TEDTalk discussing the art of conversations. Just choosing one or two things on Ms. Headlee's list could make the difference between a positive and negative networking experience!

Video Resource – How to Have a Good Conversation

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H6n3iNh4XLI