RED CAPE REVOLUTION
bring your superpowers to work

Planning Guide:
How to Network While You Work

Use this planning guide to start building relationships and knowledge that will take you towards your next career opportunity while you're already hard at work in your existing one.

Have questions, other ideas, or want to share a success story? Email us at info@ RedCapeRevolution.com, or post a comment at www.Facebook.com/RedCapeRevolution.

1. Who should I ask?

Who might be helpful to you as you explore your career decision? Who's "been there," knows people you'd like to know, or is doing something you're curious about? With whom do you already have great, safe, supportive relationships? Who's already in easy reach to get you started?

Ideas:

- Colleague you're working with on a project but don't know well
- Colleague working on a project you're not involved with
- Colleague who's recently left the company
- Peer in another department within the company
- Leader of project you don't work on
- Vendor or consultant to your company
- Member of the volunteer board of your profession's local chapter (for example, SHRM for HR, IABC for communication, AMA for marketing, etc.)
- Former manager or colleague you haven't seen for a while
- Someone who just connected with you on LinkedIn, or who has recently viewed your profile
- Neighbor, friend, or other personal connection who does work you're curious about or works at an organization that interests you

***Take action!* I'll ask ____.**

2. How should I ask?

Remember, you're not asking them for a job or even for advice. You're asking them for their unique perspective and point-of-view--something each of us have to offer (and are never invited to share it enough.) Also, don't call this an "informational interview." Anything with the word "interview" sounds intimidating and official. You're simply getting to know another human being better, building a relationship and gathering insights as you explore.

Ideas:

- Make it easy and safe to say yes.
    - Get specific to get a date/time booked (offer 2-3 choices vs. making an open-ended request.)
    - Time-bind the request ("a 15 minute call," "lunch this month" etc.)
- Make the request about your interest in them by sharing you've noticed what they care about or have done (everyone wants to be noticed).
- Remember, "no" is an acceptable answer. Thank them and move on.

Words (use specifics that apply to you):

- *"I've enjoyed working with you on project X, but we haven't had much time to get to know each other. I'd like to learn more about how you got to where you are—do you have 15 minutes for coffee after Wednesday's project meeting?"*

- *"I was thinking about you the other day, and it's been a while since we connected. I remember when you moved into marketing from finance, and I'm starting to think about what might be next for me. Would you be open to a 15-minute call so I can learn more about what change looked like for you?"*

- *"I heard about your work from [name of connection] and wanted to reach out and say hello. I'm looking at doing something similar and wondered if you'd be open to a conversation to compare stories?"*

Take action! What I'll say to ask:

3. Where and when should we connect?

The right answer is always “sooner than later,” and it can help to make sure your request is delivered in a way that makes it easy for the other person to respond. Put yourself in their shoes, and think about their schedule and commitments (both work and personal), as well as your own schedule and commitments. You don’t want to ask during a time when you won’t have time to take immediate action on any follow-up ideas that come out of the conversation.

If you live in the same geographic area, do all you can to meet in person—especially in our tech age, face-to-face communication is still the gold standard to build trust. And get over worrying about who might see you together—true professionals talk to new people all the time, and we never know today who knows who. Don’t get trapped into feeling you have to hide or explain why you’re meeting. (If you’re asked, try the simple answers below.)

Ideas:

- Take advantage of meetings/events you both are already attending (“You’re going to the Town Hall next week, right? Could we meet for coffee immediately afterwards?”)
- Planning for breakfast or for coffee/cocktails immediately after work can sometimes be easier on busy schedules than interrupting the workday by going out for lunch. Do they typically eat lunch at their desk? Offer to bring it and join them there.
- A phone call can work fine if in-person meetings aren’t practical. Just be sure to manage the time if you set a time limit and be clear who’s calling who. Or, use a free call-in line, available at freeconferencing.com and other sources.
- If someone you care about (a manager or influential leader) asks “Why were you talking to X,” say:
  - “We were overdue for a catch-up. Do you know him/her?”
  - We’re both involved in [project/profession/trade organization/extracurricular activity]. Why do you ask?”
  - I have a personal goal of staying in touch with as many of my professional contacts as possible. That reminds me, you and I haven’t had coffee lately—what’s your schedule look like next week?”

Take action! Here’s where and when we’ll connect:

4. What should I say/do during our talk?

When someone is giving you the gift of his or her time, the least you can do is to plan ahead so it will be as worthwhile as possible for you both. A good, well-planned conversation often has five parts: Appreciation, Purpose, Questions, Next Steps and More Appreciation.

Appreciation:
Start by thanking them for their willingness to talk. Reiterate whatever drew you to them in the first place, as in "Bob has spoken so highly of you and your work, and I'm grateful to have a chance to connect", or "I really admired the move you made from marketing to finance—that must have taken guts."

Purpose:
Again, you've already shared a little of this in your invitation, but remind them about the exploration you're doing: "I'm thinking about what's next for me, and wanted to learn more about moves others have made inside the company." (Hint: even if you know your purpose is to find a new job, stay exploring and learning for these early conversations. It makes it easier for the other person to feel like they can help.)

Questions:
Have an opening question ready ("Maybe a good place to start is to hear more about what made you decide to explore a move.") Then shut up and listen. Give them the space to talk and don't interrupt. You're not a reporter grilling a source; you're building a human-to-human relationship. Be more interested in their ideas and perspectives than worrying about whether or not they find you interesting—if you show that you're interested in their story, you automatically become more interesting. Follow your curiosity and ask real questions that come to your mind.

Next Steps:

Watch the time (if you committed to 15 minutes, keep a timer and start to wrap up at 10.) If the conversation is going well, you can always ask if they have a few more minutes than what's planned, but be prepared to end at the time you committed to ending. Know this doesn't have to be the last conversation—so don't rush it, and leave yourself time for two final questions:

- "Based on what you know about my situation so far, are there one or two other people you suggest I talk to?"
- "What can I do for you to support your work and success further?"

More Appreciation:

Go back to the first set of thanks: "Bob, again, thank you so much for your time and what you shared. I really value your ideas and insights." Show specific gratitude: "I really appreciate how open you've been about the skills it will take to be successful in our marketing department." Promise to keep in touch (or to do the things they asked when you asked them how you could support them)—and do it.

Take action! Here's what I'll ask/say during our talk:

5. What should I say/do after our talk?

Don't let a good talk go to waste—it's the beginning of a relationship, not the end. Write both an email and snail-mail thank you note (today, paper gets saved and remembered). Be sure you've connected with them on LinkedIn (and add a personal message referencing your conversation—do not use the default pre-populated message.). Finally, keep asking what you can do for them—and do it.

Ideas:

- Mark time in your calendar to:
  - Complete the follow-up items you may have discussed.
  - Re-read your notes and write down any other questions or ideas that may emerge for you
  - Check in on things they offered to do, and to ask how you can make it easy for them. (Just because they haven't jumped on making that introduction to the CFO doesn't mean they don't want to. Maybe it'd help if you drafted the email for them to send.)
  - Catch them up every month or so to tell them what you've done with their information/help, and to ask again what you can do for them.

Take action! Here's what I'll do after our talk:

Moving Forward

What have I learned that will work for me the next time?

What fears or assumptions did I have to let go to do this?

Who am I reaching out to next?