6 Steps to Connect

Professional Etiquette for Approaching a New Contact

1. “Cyber-stalk” your contact. Learn as much as you can about them online.

2. Email them, asking to connect, and asking about specific information you would like from them. Use a subject line like this: “Query from a college student.” Mention any referrals or connections right from the first line (“I am a student at your alma mater,” “I was referred to you by Dr. Wilson, who mentioned that you would be a good information contact for me,” etc.). Assure them you want information, but “I am not applying for a position with your organization; I am most interested in your advice, ideas, leads, and referrals” (and mean this when you write it). Ask to meet briefly at their office, to Skype, or to talk by phone. If you are simply way too shy, then ask if they could answer a few questions for you via email. (Face-to-face is best.) Be overly enthusiastic. “I am truly grateful for any advice you can share with me!”

3. If they do not respond in three days, send the same email again.

4. If they do not respond in four days after that, send the email a third time, with a new top on it: “Ms. Johnson, I am not sure I have an accurate email address for you. Following is what I’ve been trying to find out this week and last. I would be truly grateful if you would have even a moment to respond.” Then under that paste the same email you sent twice before.

5. If they ignore that, wait four days, and reformat your email into a business letter. Google “format business letter” for sample instructions for formatting. The first line of the letter could be, “Ms. Johnson, I don’t seem to have an accurate email address for you.” Ask at the post office when the letter will arrive.

6. The morning after the post office said the letter will have for sure arrived, you call and leave a polite message like this: “Ms. Johnson, this is Able Student. I’ve been trying to contact you via email, and I sent you a letter which you should have received yesterday. I would love to connect. My phone is 504-555-8397. I would love to ask you a few questions and I promise to only take a few moments of your time. Thank you so much for your consideration.”

This is the minimum effort for one professional to reach out to another professional whom they do not know.

Provided by Donald Asher, author of Cracking the Hidden Job Market