Alumni Mentoring – Giving Students And New Grads The Benefit Of Your Years Of Experience And Connections

By: Joe Tait, Epsilon Phi Class of 1982, Graduate Chapter President

Not a week goes by that I don't hear another story in my professional or personal life about someone who is running into an issue related to their employment situation. The rocky economic times have created a mess out there and people are struggling to make business connections at all levels. This is especially true for our undergraduate and new grad brothers who have not yet had a chance to build up their professional networks. How can we help – why networking of course!

Whoever said "it is not what you know but who you know" was prescient regarding the state of the job market in these tough economic times. Networking has always been a key ingredient in a long-term career plan and it is even more important today.

Consider reaching out to your undergraduate chapter and making a connection to the brothers offering to help them with their job prospecting. Services like resume critiques, interview practice, or simply sharing contacts will provide an invaluable service to them. The career services office at many schools have limited resources available so the more we can help them the better they will be able to navigate the rough waters ahead.

Networking 101 – A Refresher Course:

What is networking? It means getting out of your shell and participating in activities related to your career. Not the technical training that we all need to do (that is a given) but more social things that will help to develop your career. It requires a time commitment on your part but is well worth the trouble.

Consider joining professional organizations - they are a great way to network and they come in all shapes and sizes including the ones that I belong to as an IT professional. The Student Professional Organizations at your school have chapters of Association of

Information Technology Professionals or AITP, Association for Computing Machinery or ACM and many other societies that can help you now and more so down the line.

There are groups for every major discipline from Medical, Finance, Life Sciences, Pharma, Marketing, HR, Real Estate etc. A quick web search will help you to find the right one for you. Invest the time and it will pay off in the long run.

As your career progresses you will want to stay involved and start to participate in the groups for more senior folks. TPNG (Technology Professionals Networking Group) is for IT people with 8 or more years experience and TENG (Technology Executives Networking Group) is for VP/CIO types like me. I personally belong to a few other groups like SIM (Society For Information Management), IERG (International), Chem-Pharma (just what it sounds like) and The Greater Philadelphia Senior Executive Group or GPSEG (all disciplines working in the Philly area). All of them are networking groups for senior executives that help to build your business contacts.

Make sure that you join and stay involved in the Alumni Association from your school that is yet another great way to network. A very high % of Temple alums still live and work in the greater Philly area and I have come across them many times during my career. Check with your school alumni office to find the one that is a fit for you.

The National Office is working on a new strategy to help the undergraduates get connected to alums for mentoring, networking, finding summer jobs and internships and other valuable career planning programs. This is in the very early stages of development and will be presented at the January 2010 conclave and start growing from there. Look for more to come on this topic.

Join groups like Linkedin and Plaxo (think Facebook for business) - it is a great way to stay connected in the business world. Your 6-degrees of separation link to virtually anyone on the planet comes into play here so use your parents, aunts, uncles and friends too. People all work somewhere and you will be amazed at where the connections come

from and how valuable they can be. I tell people that you already know the person who is going to help you to get that next job you just have not figured out who it is yet.

And finally think about volunteering for local organizations that need help. At a technology steering committee for the Free Library of Philadelphia a few years ago I got to know a number of high profile CIO types who I am still in touch with. These connections have led me to get invited to a number of advisory boards at Philly area colleges and some day may lead me to a Board of Directors position at a company.

The value of your school connections can make a great impact on your career if you manage it properly. Network, Network, and Network some more…

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