

3 STEPS TO EFFECTIVE NETWORKING

Network • 1 [*noun*] A group or system of interconnected people or things
2 [*verb*] To cultivate people who can be helpful to one professionally

STEP 1: IDENTIFY YOUR NETWORK

- **Start with the obvious**
 - High School coaches
 - Travel ball coaches
 - Personal instructors
- **Expand your list**
 - Opposing high school coaches
 - Umpires
 - Parents of kids that have gone on to play collegiately
 - Current college players you know (or know someone that does)
 - Local alumni of college that may have influence or strong tie
- **Cultivate from the unexpected**
 - If you are truly excited about playing in college, then it is likely a central topic of conversation with all sorts of people. If it isn't already, it either should be, or perhaps you really aren't that excited
 - Expand your normal network by engaging not-so-obvious people in conversation
 - Neighbors
 - Mail man
 - Grocery store owner
 - Parent's coworker
 - Barber, etc.
 - **Directly ask some probing questions**
 - Do they follow the sport?
 - Do they have any friends or family involved in the sport?

You'd be surprised how often a random connection can be made. A friend of a friend of a friend can still be helpful in networking!

STEP 2: EDUCATE YOUR NETWORK

- **The better information that you can provide your network, the better they will be able to help you**
 - This can be done in person, over phone or by e-mail
 - I recommend including e-mail so that they have something concrete to refer to when they are talking to college coaches
- **Share your goals**
 - Type of academics you want to pursue
 - Geographic region
 - Level of baseball at which you think you can compete
 - As stated by someone that knows baseball, I recommend an unbiased 3rd party that you might pay for an evaluation, but is not earning a living based on weekly lessons from you. If someone is paying their bills by keeping you around for weekly lessons, they suddenly become "biased"
- **Provide them with personal information**
 - Current grades & SATs
 - Current recruiting video
- **Encourage conversations to **show** the physical and **talk** about intangibles**
 - Providing an updated quality recruiting video that is on an easily accessible website AND showing them where and how to use it will help them incorporate film into their conversations
- **Why provide this information?**
 - The better the information you can give your network, the better they will be able to help you
 - Imagine asking someone to help you "buy a car" versus telling someone you want a "used crossover SUV with less than 40,000 miles, under \$25,000, automatic transmission and color black or grey." The better info you can provide will help them focus their efforts
 - No need to "call in favor" to look at a guy if you aren't interested or not a fit for that program.
 - Providing them with your background will help them respond to questions without needing to waste time

STEP 3: FOLLOW UP & EDUCATE

- Remember that you are asking your network to do you a favor. Besides “good karma” and being nice, there really isn’t much for your network to gain
- With That In Mind, You Should Remember a Few Things...
 - Always be thankful for any help they provide
 - Don’t have too high of expectations
- Plan on following up often by providing updates
 - Politely reminding your network should be important to you
 - This can easily be done with a simple question. For example, “Did you ever get a hold of the coach from XYZ U?”
 - Update the network as your situation changes
 - As relationships deepen or schools begin to show more interest, inform your network. This gives you an easy way to remind them to reach out to coaches, and it gives your network a good reason to contact or not contact a coach
- Keep lines of communications open both ways
 - Your network may have contacts at unexpected schools
 - Be open minded. Don’t close doors. Do your research.
 - Just because you’ve never heard of the school or considered it doesn’t mean it’s a bad fit
 - Just because someone in your network has a coach interested in you, doesn’t mean it is a good fit

STEP 4: THANK YOU

- Eventually you will make a decision
- That decision may or may not have been directly or indirectly impacted by someone in your network
- Thank everyone in your network regardless if you think they had a direct impact
- Think “butterfly effect.” You never know if a conversation that someone in your network had with one coach led to another coach coming into the picture. Remember that coaches are competitive. If one begins to like you, it will be natural that another will too.

The Final Word

- If your recruiting process can teach you anything, I hope it is the value of networking. I cannot overstate the importance of a strong and diverse network.
- If you question the power of networking, I’d challenge you to interview a few adults in your life: your parents, parents of friends, teachers, neighbors...
 - Ask them who helped them make the most important decisions and/or investments/purchases in their life
 - I’d be willing to bet that you’ll hear a lot of the same answers...
- “My friend from high school is the realtor that sold me my house”
- “My dad’s friend is the doctor that delivered my babies”
- “My friend from grade school is the guy that handles my investments”
- “My brother’s classmate hired me at my current job”
- Remember that networking is a verb. Putting in a little work here has the potential to pay off in the long run