

CNN Networking Panel: Navigating Networking in A Virtual World

NICK WILSON: Welcome to the Carson Career Spring Series. I'm Nick Wilson. I'm an ambassador for the Carson College of business, and I'll be helping facilitate today's panel.

I'm really excited to start with today's event-- CNN Networking Panel-- Navigating Networking in a Virtual World. As our attendees log in, we'd like to remind our participants of some helpful ground rules. Please make sure your microphone is muted upon entry to prevent echos during the presentation.

Please consider turning your video on so that presenters can see attendees' faces. Q&A will be at the end. Please raise your hand or use the chat box to ask questions. WSU students, please make sure to complete the survey at the end of the session in your chat.

And we'd also like to note that this session is being recorded. Thank you to all of our participants for joining. And now we'd like to extend a warm welcome to our panelists. They've all taken the time out of their day to be here and we can't wait to hear their insights.

With that being said, we'd love to use this time to learn as much as possible. So we're going to go ahead and get started. Our first question is a bit of introductory one for all the panelists. First, tell us a little about you. Then tell us the story of how networking found you a job, internship, or an interesting business opportunity-- or vice versa, how a lack of networking led you to missing an opportunity.

We can go ahead and go left to right and start there with Ellie.

ELLIE HIRSH: Hello. Good afternoon, everyone. And go Cougs. I graduated from Washington State University in May of 2018 with a degree in business marketing. And I currently work for Cintas Corporation and I'm a uniform sales representative for Cintas.

I originally started out as a management trainee, which is a role we love to hire for especially from Washington State University. We love Cougs. And networking, I mean, basically got me this job. If I had not gone to career networking night and the career fair, I would have never known who Cintas was and what we did.

So I'm standing here today in the position that I'm in because of the career fair at Wazzu, and it just opened the door for me in all my career options through Cintas. So it's a great opportunity.

NICK WILSON: All right, thank you so much for sharing, Ellie. Rylee, would you like to go next?

RYLEE KAMPF: Yeah, thank you. So my name's Rylee Kampf. I am a recruiting specialist with Ferguson. So we can talk a little bit about that later.

But starting my career with Ferguson, in one of our entry level training programs, which is predominantly what we hire for-- the inside sales training program to be specific, which is our largest and most popular-- after doing that for a few years, then transitioned into my position now in recruiting.

So as far as networking goes, to piggyback off what Ellie said, I definitely agree. I think that I would have not found this job or been able to network with other companies or figure out what those other companies even consisted of if I didn't participate in things like this. So I think you are all on the right track by participating today and participating in things like this in the future

I know sometimes it can be a little bit nerve wracking, but it's important to just stick with it and figure out what else is out there. So happy to be here today and looking forward to the event.

NICK WILSON: Awesome, Rylee. All right. Lisa, would you like take it away?

LISA LATRONICA: Sure, so my name is Lisa Latronica and I'm an associate program manager at Schweitzer Engineering Laboratories in our university relations unit. So I get to work a lot with incoming students, intern recruiting, partnering with our hiring managers who want to attend career fairs, as well as our research and faculty partnerships.

Networking really is the reason I'm here at SEL. So I made a pretty big career change. About eight years ago, I started my career in student affairs in higher education. So I worked on four different college campuses doing a variety of things. Everything from working as a residence director, to campus activities, to being a training specialist.

And I knew I wanted to make a change. And I had to rely on the skills that I had built taking one-off projects and saying yes to those opportunities that were a little bit outside of my wheelhouse. And being able to put those on my resume is what got me this job, because I had such a wide range of experience that was transferable.

That it set me up for success when I knew I wanted to make that pivot. So don't underestimate the power of networking, even if you don't think you'll change careers. Statistics show that folks will make that change more often than not.

And so even if you feel like it's a little outside your wheelhouse, definitely take into account, you never know where you'll be in the future.

NICK WILSON: That is a very interesting point. You will never know what you will be in the future. So always got to be networking. All right, so Marnie, would you like to wrap it up with this first question here?

MARNIE PETEK: Yeah, for sure. Thanks for having me. So my name is Marnie Petek. It's great to meet everybody. I'm a Vandal alumni. Class of 2010, so Palouse pride, I'm not rooting for the Vandals, I'm definitely rooting for the Cougs, you can believe that.

But I graduated in 2010, and it started with Gallo. So I've actually spent my entire professional career with Gallo, which is quite unique, as Lisa was touching on. I was recruited for our sales leadership development program. I've worked my way up, just as our program is designed to do from sales representative, to manager, multiple other jobs.

I've held seven jobs in the last 10 and 1/2 years. And now I manage our sales recruiting strategies, and our current leadership development program candidates within, with their mentor families and retention rates. And I manage basically Idaho, New Mexico, west to the Pacific Ocean.

So really cool opportunity, and when it came down to networking, like some of the other panelists, I have this job because of networking. I knew someone who Gallo hired the semester before, and I said, Taylor, I want to learn more.

Can you facilitate introduction? So because he worked there as a sales representative, he facilitated the introduction with the recruiters at the career fair, and the rest is history. So because I said, hey, give me an introduction, been here for almost 11 years.

So really exciting, and networking truly can just open the door, whether it's starting your career or halfway through your career. So definitely networking is always going to be a key part of what we do professionally.

NICK WILSON: OK, thank you so much. It's great to hear from all of you for that first one. Always interesting to hear about how networking led you to your career and will continue to. We'll go ahead and get started with this next round of questions.

This one will be directed individually toward certain panelists. So we're going to go ahead and get started with Ellie from Cintas. What is the one main thing you wish you would have known, or that you did while you were still in college, when it comes to professional networking?

ELLIE HIRSH: Yeah, so it's so tough to think of one thing. But I would probably say that the number one thing that I wish I would have known and/or did while I was in college is like what everyone has already touched on. Network with everyone from any business, students to business professionals.

Go to all those events, talk to people, and just really broaden who you know and who you can get to know. Because for me, Cintas, I had never heard of Cintas. Half of you guys have probably had no idea what Cintas does.

And the only reason I went to the interview is because I had a family member say, "That's a great company, Ellie. You should go interview with them." And I would not be standing here today had I not just blindly gone and joined one of the best things to ever walk into my life.

And I'm very, very happy and have spent 3 and 1/2 years at Cintas, or coming up on three years. And so I would just say go to those networking things, even if you maybe don't want to or you think you know that it's not going to work out for you, because you really never know where you're going to end up.

Like Lisa touched on as well, is she had a career change, and that is something that is fairly common. And it really is about who know, not always about what you know-- so if you broaden it and make sure that you stay in touch with professors and just all kinds of people that you meet throughout your college career and time there.

I wish that I would have done more of that, because I think that it can just open the door for great friendships, great professional opportunities. And it's really just a great thing to be able to network. And one other thing that I'll touch on super fast is make sure that you guys have an elevator pitch down.

I know at least personally for Cintas that was something that I thankfully had prepared, but not necessarily a lot of students have that. And it's nothing to be worried about. It's just a little 10, 15 second spiel on who you are, your year, things like that.

So that's something that I wished I would have had before my senior year. I really only dialed it in my senior year. But that's something that is really, really important.

NICK WILSON: Thank you, Rylee. And good news for all of us students here in terms of networking, coming to college, and being and showing up at those events-- well, we're here right now. So we've got a step in the right direction with that one. So up next, we're going to have Rylee.

So how would you describe successful informational interview, and what tips do you have for students to set one up in today's climate?

RYLEE KAMPF: Yeah. So a little bit on this, informational interviews is something that I do quite a bit as a recruiter. So just some tips for you guys and some things to think about. So I know for Ferguson predominantly, a lot of you might not know exactly what we do, and that's the whole point is to get that more information to figure out what the company is all about.

So just to give you guys some high level examples of what I was thinking when I chose this question, but basically for some of our entry level training programs, we have two that predominantly have to do with sales. And I know for some of you out there that are marketing majors or interested in that path of sales, you might know that sales means quite a bit of different things.

So we have, for instance, an inside sales training program as well as an outside sales training program, which are two very different paths that have to do with sales. So when you're kind of looking through jobs-- maybe that's a career fair or just some online job postings, things like that-- you might come across a job title that might not look super appealing to you.

So maybe seeing a job that is labeled as inside sales might not seem very appealing to somebody who's not super interested in taking that sales path. But for us at Ferguson, our inside sales program is very much like an account manager. So it's not like a high stress sales environment.

I know sometimes people aren't really looking for that. So it's not like cold calling, or prospecting, or anything like that. So it's important to get that company on the phone, get that recruiter on the phone, and ask them what the job is all about.

You might find that it's something that you really didn't think just based off of the title. So just take that 10, 15, or 20 minutes to talk with the recruiter. And then also, when you have already chatted with them on the phone, when they see your application come through, it just helps you that much further in the interview process.

They already have you in their mind, and you've already had a brief conversation. So just as a large takeaway, I would say take the time just to feel the company out if you have the time prior to graduation and see what it's all about.

NICK WILSON: Awesome. Thank you, Rylee. Next we'll move on to Lisa. Lisa, people often talk about building professional brand. How does my personal brand fit into all of this? Is it more or less important in this virtual world? And what brands do employers look for?

LISA LATRONICA: Yeah. So when I think about a personal or professional brand, I think the most important thing for folks who are building that is to be true to yourself. Recruiters can see pretty quickly right through if you are not being authentic. We talk to a lot of people, and I'm sure the folks who are also on this call could tell you they know pretty quick if you are trying to paint a picture that isn't true to your professional experience or to your personality.

And you don't want to portray something that isn't true to you, because you're ultimately probably not going to be a great fit in that company and then not be happy with where you're at. So being true to yourself is definitely a big piece.

And then I would say, think about where you want to be in that three, five, 10 year span and portray that. I love talking to potential interns who are already thinking, in five years, I think this is the type of job I want to be in, because we can help set you up for success in those internships or entry level jobs. If we know your goal is leadership, if we know your goal is to stay in research and development, if we know eventually you want to be in sales and consulting, that helps shape and helps us imagine where you fit in our company long term.

So all of those things are super important to portray in your brand. And I think it's more important in this virtual world because unlike a traditional career fair where you're one out of maybe 500 students and there's a little bit of noise and chaos in the background, you're having a lot of these one-on-one conversations with recruiters or hiring managers. And their focus is solely on you, and they're more apt to take notes.

I know the hiring managers that I work with take really great notes. Everything from, oh, they said that their hobby was this and this sounded really interesting, to, this is how they answered this question on a technical problem. So I think that with this shift to virtual, it's allowed us to build a little bit of a deeper connection.

But that means it's so much more important for you to have figured out who you are and who you want to be in your career. And there is no right answer, I think, when you're building a brand. You have to be true to yourself. You have to be able to say, this is my brand and I'm proud of it, and then look for a company that aligns with those values you're portraying. If you find yourself completely needing to reinvent your brand, it may not be a good fit for a company, and they're probably going to realize that as well.

NICK WILSON: Thank you, Lisa. Yeah, I love that point. If you have to alter or fake your brain for a company, then it probably won't end up being the right fit anyway. So it's better to stay true to yourself. All right, now for the last of these individual questions, we're going to move to Marnie.

So what if I don't know what I want to do yet? How do I talk to recruiters if I'm still exploring my path and forming my career goals?

MARNIE PETEK: I resonate so much with this question, because I knew I wanted to talk to Gallo, like I said, and talk to Taylor and make that connection. But I have no idea what I wanted to do. And so it's true. To use the "why not" mentality, you know Gallo has a great work-life balance, but they're a sales company. And so you're like, I don't know if I want to do sales.

But by using that "why not" mentality, it keeps you totally open to truly amazing opportunities, especially when going to a networking night or a career fair or talking to people at the-- or your career advisors at the Career Center. So use that "why not" mentality to your advantage. And by talking to recruiters, you can be up front.

You can say, "Hey I'm really interested in learning more about Ferguson. Do you have 10 minutes to tell me what your company is all about?" Or do a little bit more research on Glassdoor, on LinkedIn, on Twitter or Instagram or Google.

Find out what that company is like so then when you do meet with Ferguson or Sweitzer or Gallo or Cintas, you can come with really great questions. OK, I'm not sure about sales. Can you tell me more about sales? But I see that you're really big into innovation. And that's really important to me.

I can see myself finding a passion for sales through innovation. So it's really easy to talk about what you already know. For example, I don't have experience in sales, but I am a very fast learner and I put everything into what I do. And I know in order to be a great sales person you've got to be competitive.

And boy, let me tell you, I'm super competitive. So you don't have to have experience to be able to talk about your experience, essentially. But use that "why not" mentality, ask a lot of questions, and please do your research and use your referrals.

Leanne and Amy are such wonderful contacts. They might know, hey, I really don't know what I want to do. They're like, oh, have you met with Gallo? I can really see your career goals align with what they do.

So talk to the people who you trust most. Do a lot of research. Ask a lot of questions. Say why not? And like me at Gallo, you might end up finding your forever career. 11 years later, what if I hadn't have said that? So use it and run with it. Use it to your advantage, for sure.

NICK WILSON: Sweet. Thank you, Marnie. Yeah, the "why not" quoted by Russell Wilson himself. So we got to love that. All right, now that we are done with the individual questions, we'd like to move on to the audience Q&A.

We'd like to give all of our audience members an opportunity to ask a question. You may use the raise hand function to get called on or post a question in chat if you feel more comfortable.

MARNIE PETEK: Come on, y'all. Don't be shy.

NICK WILSON: All right, looks like we got a hand here with Kaitlin Hall. Go ahead and--

AUDIENCE: I was wondering, I've used Google and Glassdoor before with prep to get ready for an interview and just researching companies. How accurate are they? How much should you take the words that people post with a grain of salt, or that's the actual experience of the company?

MARNIE PETEK: When it comes to Gallo, you can truly take it as, that's what it's like. Because people can review it who work for there, but then you can also get people who interviewed there that can give you good advice that maybe didn't get the role.

So I think every company might be a little bit different. That's a really great question. But I trust in the process in Glassdoor, and so I lean in and I say, yep, that should be how it is.

And then if you come up with a question, get the interview, you can also ask the recruiter or ask who you're meeting with. Say, "Hey, I saw this on Glassdoor. Can you please expand on that?" Not only does it show you did your research, but then you get more clarification as well.

AUDIENCE: Thank you.

NICK WILSON: OK, thank you. Looks like we have Jaden Johnson raising your hand as well, if you would like to ask that question?

AUDIENCE: Yeah, all right. This might be kind of a silly question. But I'm a freshman, so I'm not exactly sure how these networking events work. Do you just get set up with them through your college? Or do certain businesses have them? How do I find events?

LISA LATRONICA: I can tackle that one. I think it's awesome that you're already looking into this as a freshman. Yeah, that's a huge step. The earlier you get in the groove of networking, the better. I think you can find networking events a wide range of things.

So Handshake-- I know WSU uses that-- is a great place to look for it. I know at SEL we post internship panels or company hosted events on Handshake. So you can find other companies that are doing that as

well and attend those events, or connecting with your college or career services is going to be a great way to be plugged into that as well.

Actually read your emails. I know that that's hard for students. You get inundated with a ton of information. But even if you set up a flag or a folder for those career emails, either from Career Services or from your college specifically, and then go through once a week and see, are there job postings, are there event notifications, and put those on your calendar, those are all great ways.

And then ask your peers. If you're in a class with upperclassmen, ask them where they go to networking events, or where do they find that information. There's really no wrong answer. And it sounds like you're already navigating some of that by attending an event like this.

So just keep doing what you're doing. And like I said, you'll stumble upon these in the strangest places, but there's a lot of ways to get connected.

AUDIENCE: All right, that's super helpful. Thank you.

NICK WILSON: Yeah, and just to add on to that as well, Carson College offers a lot of resources, events such as this one in the spring, but we do have a running fall series as well, as well as some networking events throughout the year. I went ahead and I dropped a link just to the business school website, where it lists some networking events and some networking clubs and whatnot if you'd like to look at that.

All right. It looks like we got a lot more questions coming in. So we'll go ahead with Leanne. "What really makes someone stand out to you at a networking event?"

ELLIE HIRSH: I can go ahead and answer that one. For Cintas, I mean, it's a little bit different navigating the virtual recruiting world. I think everyone can probably agree with that. So I'll touch on in person, because hopefully in two or three years-- I don't know how long it'll last-- we will be able to interact with students in person again.

But in person for us, we were really big and are really big on just how you hold yourself. And when you come up to the booths or even in the virtual setting, if you're attentive, if you are asking questions-- you can instantly tell when you have a student come up to you and they're not really paying attention and not really there. And you can see what you're saying is going in one ear and out the other.

So I'd say for Cintas, just being present and aware and asking questions and having done your research, like a lot of the panelists have already said, really, really makes you stand out. And then for us, the main role that we hire for straight out of college, which is what I was hired for, is a management trainee role.

And it's a two year program where you get to see all aspects of our business. And then you go into a role that was best suited for yourself. So right now, I am in outside sales, and eventually, we want to create future general managers and executives of our company.

So leadership and having leadership skills is a really big one for us. So talk about that and make sure you touch on that even if you are just the group leader for group projects, the president of a sorority or fraternity. Things like that are really big, at least for Cintas.

MARNIE PETEK: Ellie-- sorry, can I-- I'll add onto that. Ellie, I think you said earlier about your elevator pitch. Have your elevator pitch down, and have multiple iterations of it. Maybe like using the "why not"-- I'm going to go back to that question.

Have an elevator pitch for sales. Have an elevator pitch for leadership. Have an elevator pitch for finance. If you're wondering what you want to do, they can be very, very similar, with just a couple of sentences changed.

So have your elevator pitch practiced, red-penned, and you can even run it by your Career Center. So use your elevator pitch, because the more you can talk about yourself with eloquence, the more the recruiter is like, yeah.

NICK WILSON: Thank you so much. And it looks like Audrey has had her hand raised for a while now. So we don't want to forget about her. Audrey, if you'd like to ask your question.

AUDIENCE: Hi. Thank you. I was just wondering. A couple of professors I've had have mentioned before how having a blog or something like that where you can write about things you've done as a student, things you've done, like you said, in leadership positions, stuff like that, and having it on your LinkedIn, having it on any kind of-- or Handshake or anything you have like that, to where you can show employers what you can do-- writing capabilities, everything like that.

I'm heavily considering having one of those. When you see that on a LinkedIn profile or you see that on a resume or anything like that, how does that-- not necessarily affect your decision, but what do you think when you see that?

Would you say that considerably helps somebody who is trying to get a position at your company or anything like that, basically? How beneficial would you say it is for somebody to have something like that?

RYLEE KAMPF: I can jump in here. So I think it's definitely beneficial to have that, whether that's in your About Me on LinkedIn or-- you mentioned Handshake, something like that. Definitely beneficial. However, you really want to make sure that what you're putting in there is relevant.

So I would say, maybe you have time management skills or good communication skills, a couple of things that recruiters really look for, tailored to those positions. But not only mention those skills, but be able to have a quick little blurb about why you are able to have those skills or what you have done to demonstrate those skills within past experience.

And past experience doesn't have to be a job. It doesn't have to-- I mean yes, of course, that's great to have, but it could be, like somebody mentioned earlier, maybe participating in a fraternity or sorority-- that's great-- or volunteering and doing something on campus or even outside of campus.

I know there's a lot of group projects in classes. That's all great things and great experience to highlight. It's just important to be able to talk as to why you can portray those skills. So one of the questions that we like to ask, to give you guys a little bit of insight on that, is tell me about a time about a customer relationship.

And I can tell you, when a person tells me, I've never had any experience in that, it is kind of misleading, because I think that there's ways where you can really get creative. So yes, maybe you've never had a job at a restaurant or in retail. But there's ways where you have had some sort of a customer, whether it's somebody standing in front of you at a cash register, or maybe it's a professor or a coach or somebody that you've dealt with in your fraternity or your sorority.

So just going back to being able to portray those skills and showcase that, I think that's beneficial. So really just work on what you're putting out there is good content, is what I would say.

LISA LATRONICA: I do want to tag onto this a little bit. I think the idea of a blog, it's going to be industry and maybe company specific on how they view that. I know at SEL, where we deal with a lot of confidential information and really value keeping our business prospects private and within the company, seeing somebody who is openly blogging about another job may not be something that we're looking at as a plus.

Because then the question becomes, are they going to be blogging about the projects that they're working on that maybe they shouldn't be? So I think it's all in how you're-- again, what you're writing about and what kind of jobs you're looking at, because the flip-side to that is if you're looking in communications or corporate communications, things like that, a blog is definitely a great way to showcase those skills.

I would say talk to folks who are at your networking events. How do you showcase the skills? For some folks, it may be an online portfolio, a blog, something of that sort. For other folks, it's going to be volunteering and making sure to work that into a resume. It could be side projects that they do just for fun.

There's a wide variety of ways to show that you're really interested in devoting time outside of class and jobs to things. It just may take a little bit of drilling down what you want to portray and what the career field you're looking into is going to be looking for.

NICK WILSON: OK, thank you. And it seems like Taylor Phillips is raising her hand as well. Taylor, if you'd like to ask your question?

AUDIENCE: Yeah, thank you very much. I was just referring back to when they talked about how in interviews you sometimes run into sticky questions about customer service interactions or why-- showcasing the time management skills and that. I work in the food industry, and I would like to get an idea of how you guys would go about that question about customer service because I know sometimes it can come off in the wrong way.

Or I don't know. I just wanted to see if you guys had an example that you could represent for us.

RYLEE KAMPF: Yeah, so happy to jump in. I'm sure some other people want to weigh in on this as well. But yeah, so obviously as a recruiter, we don't want to hear any kind of bad, negative kind of remarks against a customer. That's obviously not something that we do in customer service.

So yes, I think all of us in customer service know that sometimes customers can be very difficult. That is just reality, and that's just kind of what we face. So really what I look for specifically-- and like I said, others probably will want to weigh in on this as well. But what I look at specifically is, yes, the customer is difficult. Tell me about what happened.

Tell me about the time. And then also tell me how you specifically where we were able to resolve it. So not necessarily looking for, like, "oh, I went and called my manager," because that's not really showing what you've done to resolve the problem. So we get it.

We understand. We've probably all done these roles that we are interviewing and hiring for. So we understand where it kind of comes from, especially in that customer service role. So take that positive approach on it, and really be able to tell us what steps you've taken and how the customer's maybe difficult situation was resolved. And hopefully it's something that you were able to fix for them, and let them be happy and essentially come back. So I'll let some others, I'm sure, weigh in on that one as well.

MARNIE PETEK: Yeah, absolutely agree. I was going to say it's a great time to showcase your conflict management skills. There's always going to be conflict. So use the STAR method in answering-- Situation, Task, Action, and then the Result is really important.

So how you, I-- a lot of I statements, not I call my manager-- exactly, Rylee. But I was able to take a step back, listen, assess the situation, and then approach it using X, Y and Z. So it's a really, really awesome way, especially if you're looking for a job in customer, how to talk about your conflict management, whether it's with a teammate or a group project or customers or group project.

So like we said, you don't have to necessarily have food service, but always look on the positive. If you do want to say this was bad, pro/con/pro it. Put it into that positive answer and just use it to your advantage. And make sure you're giving that I statement with results at the end.

AUDIENCE: Awesome. Thank you, guys. That was actually really helpful.

NICK WILSON: Just I'd like to remind people, if you use the Raise Hand function, please click it again to take your hand down after you're done answering your questions so we can keep that list updated with new people and fresh questions.

Looks like we have some more in the chat, though. So what are some specific differences between in-person and virtual interview, or networking, rather than an interview, that students should be aware of in order to make the best impression possible?

MARNIE PETEK: Sorry, Ellie, go ahead.

ELLIE HIRSH: I was just going to say that-- I mean, these might seem kind of obvious, but you would be surprised at what I have personally experienced and seen. But as far as virtual interviews or virtual networking versus in person, just make sure that you limit the distractions. And I mean, we all understand you may have dogs, you may have roommates. You can't always control those situations.

But if you can and you have an interview and you can prep for it, just try and make sure you limit-- close the door so a dog doesn't come in. Let your roommates know, that kind of stuff. It can be very disruptive for you as well, and you could be in the middle of answering a question and lose your train of thought.

So I'd say that's probably one of the biggest ones is just make sure that you are aware of your surroundings. And then just-- we like to call it owning your square or your rectangle, and make sure that you're dressed professionally, you don't have a lot of distractions, as I mentioned before, and that you have preferably internet. But we all understand that sometimes it can crash and things can happen.

But other than that, I would say for us, it's pretty much the same. Just bring your personality, and be ready to talk about yourself.

MARNIE PETEK: Absolutely agree with what Ellie said. And I'm going to yes/and. If those distractions do happen, do not let them take you out of that interview. If the dog barks, if the doorbell rings, don't be like, "Oh, my gosh, I'm so sorry," and then totally fall apart at the seams.

You can turn it into a human moment and say, "Work from home life. I'm so sorry. Let me remove the distraction and I'd like to get back to the interview." So turn it into that moment.

You can make a joke about it. Don't let it totally ruin your space. You can take it and acknowledge it and then move on from it. That's the important part is moving on.

So limit it as much as possible, but if it happens, because it's bound to happen, take it in stride and turn into a human moment. Additionally, I think eye contact is really important. We all have crazy setups.

Maybe you have your phone and you're taking notes. Maybe you're looking at another monitor over here. Or maybe the box is over in the bottom corner. But when you're listening, you can look down at who's talking, but as you're answering, as you're speaking, look at the camera.

It's really tough to do virtually, I think we're all getting a little bit better at it. Or if you're over here, and you're taking notes on your phone, just say, "Hey, I'm going to take notes on my phone. I'm clued into your interview. I'm clued into this networking night. I just prefer my notes digitally."

So say it up front. But try to focus on that camera versus another monitor or looking elsewhere. So that takes that eye contact and makes it a little bit more personal virtually.

NICK WILSON: That's great. If no one else would like to add on to that question, it looks like Kaitlin Hall is raising her hand as well. Kaitlin?

AUDIENCE: I just wanted to add on just with distractions or if something happens with a pet. Should you address it when you're talking with someone one-on-one or an interview? Should you address it or just take care of it? My cat likes to jump up on the table and meow, and I'll usually just tap her on the head and then she's-- be quiet.

Should I say, "Oh, I'm sorry for that happening," or should I just get her to be quiet and then keep on going with the interview?

LISA LATRONICA: I think it's whatever is most natural to you. I've definitely had interviews where folks are ignoring chaos behind them, and I'm super impressed with that. But I've also had folks be like, "I'm so sorry. Let me just take care of this and move it." Whatever is going to feel most comfortable and genuine to you.

I will say as a recruiter, I personally-- as long as it totally doesn't derail you, I just roll with it. At this point, we've been doing this for a year. We've probably seen some very interesting things in the background happen. So stuff like that, especially when it comes to pets or kids, it doesn't faze a lot of us anymore.

We've all been there. So again, whatever is going to be most comfortable to you and makes you feel like you tied up that loose end and can get back to focusing.

AUDIENCE: Thank you.

NICK WILSON: You've got to be careful about those pets, the dogs. They go wandering around a little bit too much sometimes during the interview. But that sounds good. All right.

So for the next question here, "With the realization that any good relationship is a two-way street, how can a student be a good networking contact? What could a student offer to seasoned professionals?"

MARNIE PETEK: Honestly-- oh, sorry, Lisa.

LISA LATRONICA: Go ahead. Go ahead.

MARNIE PETEK: I was going to say, a lot of times, students have their thumb on what's happening, who they know, what campuses to be involved in, or what groups to be involved in. Hey, have you heard of Net Impact Club? I think it really aligns with what you're doing. So as an employer, I look for students to keep their thumb on what's going on campus and then inform me.

Or hey, Handshake is a great platform. Have you heard of this? Have you heard of that? I'm not a technology guru. I've not been on campus now for a year and a half. So what's going on?

Maybe there's something there that I could be of benefit or they could benefit us. Let's create a partnership. So you guys know what's going on. It's definitely a two-way street. And we always look to you for maybe opportunities where we can increase or where our recruiting practices can get better, too, at the end of the day.

LISA LATRONICA: Yeah, absolutely what Marnie said. And we see you-- even if you maybe are not a good fit or you're not in one of the positions that we have open, you probably know somebody, so those referrals are really important too.

But I know in the case for SEL, we greatly value our intern and entry level hires, as well as the folks that we get to meet through the interview process, because they bring such a creative and innovative perspective and often challenge some of our folks who've been in the roles for a while to think, OK, well the world outside is shifting. How do we keep up with it?

And so if you are looking at a company's page and say, "Hey, I see that you're addressing this problem or you're looking at this issue with solar energy. This is where my interests are, and these are the questions I have that I'd love to see you address or see if you have answers for."

It often triggers us to think, wow, we really need to think about this and how we're portraying it to future recruits, as well as on a company level. I know I have a meeting tomorrow where I'm going to go over some of the questions that have come up in networking and career events where I'm like, we need to address some of this and really think about what our answer is and what this impact is on our company.

Because every four years there's this whole new group of folks that have a different perspective. So I think that's a really important piece of it, and being able to have a conversation with a recruiter and being willing to have that conversation is incredibly valuable.

NICK WILSON: Thank you. Here's a fun one that us Cougs would like to hear about. So what makes Carson Cougs stand out specifically to you as recruiters? Are there any defining characteristics that you guys see across the board with us?

ELLIE HIRSH: I think as far as Cintas goes, it's not necessarily just the Carson Cougs. We will hire any major. I have some coworkers that were biology majors, and now they're working for Cintas and they're in sales. So for us, we just love to hire Cougs because Cougs are a really great culture fit for Cintas.

And we have had luck at other universities as well, but Washington State University is one of our main universities that we like to recruit from. And I think it's just because the culture at Wazzu is so unique as well. And I know all of what I'm talking about.

You go on the campus and it's just different. It's not a commuter college. It's not a super big campus. But it has just this pull to you to people. And so I think that for Cintas, at least, the type of people that Washington State University has for graduates is something that we love.

And like I mentioned before, just leadership, having experience, having the STAR process like Marnie mentioned is super big-- specific examples, not generalizations. And we just have had a lot of luck with Cougs.

RYLEE KAMPF: Yeah, I'd like to kind of go off of that a little bit as well. I think the culture is a really big thing for sure, and that's something that tends to fit in with Ferguson as well as Cintas and I'm sure the

rest of you. But I would say another big thing too is a lot of our training programs, because of the products that we sell, are very hands on.

And you guys are not afraid to get into the warehouse and get your hands dirty. That's definitely something that's a really big piece of our learning process in that five month training program that I talked about. So yeah, you guys are not afraid of that, which is awesome, and really just grabbing all that you can and gaining all that knowledge throughout the five months.

I know 5 months seems like a long time, but it really goes by quick. And you guys are not afraid of just jumping in there and taking whatever is thrown at you.

LISA LATRONICA: I do think since we are talking about networking, the WSU network is huge. And that is definitely something when we're thinking about recruiting or if we're thinking about, well, who do we have a connection with elsewhere in the country or in this realm, you can almost guarantee there is a Cougar somewhere.

I've been in the Chicago airports wearing a Cougs t-shirt and had folks, multiple people, coming up to me saying, Go Cougs. So that is another really huge benefit you all have behind you is you come with that network. You're going to know people in other places and in important roles that will be to your advantage and, therefore, help your employer when they're trying to make those connections as well.

So definitely, use that network, stay connected through the Alumni's Association or through alumni groups for the student organizations and colleges you're involved in, because they'll be invaluable to you throughout your career.

MARNIE PETEK: I was actually in a Vienna train station wearing a Cougar hat, again, rooting for the Cougars, even though I'm a Vandal. And I heard it from across the train station, "Go Cougs." And you're in a different country, and it's the network.

And I mean, leaning on what everybody said, good Cougs know good Cougs. And in the last two years, we've hired so many Cougs, not just out of Carson but just in general. And they know good people. So you're not afraid to get dirty. You have a good network, and good people know good people.

And Cougs are just good people. So everybody already said that, but from my perspective as well.

NICK WILSON: Great to hear. Another question we have is revolving around internships. So how important are internships? And do paid or unpaid look different to employers? And are certain internships referred?

LISA LATRONICA: I get this-- oh, sorry.

MARNIE PETEK: You up. You up, girlfriend.

LISA LATRONICA: OK. I get this question a lot. And I think especially in the last year, where internships may have gotten cancelled or virtual or those experiences have shifted, what I've been telling folks is as

long as you have experience somewhere. So maybe don't focus so much on like, oh my gosh, I don't have a year of internships or the only internship I could get was six week virtual.

Focus on what you learn from that. So even if it's not a formal opportunity-- so something that came up in an interview recently was this student built a robotic lawnmower for fun with a neighbor to solve this problem. And that was on their resume.

And it hit a lot of the skills and transferable things that we're looking for-- showing initiative, having that passion for what they're working on, being able to problem solve. And they were showing some technical skills there, too. That ended up being such a huge focus.

And hiring managers love talking about it because they're like, oh, that's really cool. And you're still showing off the fact that you've learned these things. An internship is great and absolutely can give you valuable experience in learning professional culture and all of that, but it's not the only option you have for gaining an experience.

So again, take advantage of what you do have in front of you. If you're having trouble getting an internship or maybe you're not able to because of COVID restrictions, or limited opportunities, we know that that's what's going on. Find other ways.

Attend a conference. Work on a side project, or volunteer with an organization. Do something that shows that you still care about your chosen field and putting in that work.

MARNIE PETEK: 100%. You don't have to have an internship for a lot of the roles that we hire for to get the job. However, if you do know that you want to go into sales or you want to go into engineering and you know the roles or the job responsibilities that you're hoping to have post-grad, any experience you can get, whether it's an internship or a job, to kind of showcase those responsibilities is great. If you can't, talk about your experiences.

But if you know you want to go into sales and you can get a sales internship, when I ask you the sales question, tell me about your most proud sale, you're like, yes. Here's my specific example. Here's what I've done. Here's my STAR method.

So if you know you want to do something, totally opposite of the "why not" mentality-- if you know you want to do something, try to gain experience, but it's not necessary. If you don't have sales experience and you want sales, you can talk about it in other ways, and creating an electric lawnmower.

By the way, can I get one of those? Because I could use it, just saying.

NICK WILSON: OK, thank you. And then we're going to come up on the last couple questions here. Another question we have-- "Looking forward into Career Networking Night tonight, all networking can be, but especially virtual, it can be a bit awkward. How do you guys suggest you best utilize maybe these 10 minute one-on-one times to break the ice with employers?"

RYLEE KAMPF: I can weigh in here. So we totally get it. We know that virtual can be a little bit tough sometimes. And 10 minutes is not a long time at all. So you have no time to waste whatsoever. We talked a lot about elevator pitch. I think that's a great way.

Odds are, yes, I'm going to talk to you about Ferguson, about who we are, what we do, what kind of positions we have. But ultimately, I'm looking at who you are and what you are interested in so I can tailor my speech, because Ferguson has tons of stuff going on. I'm sure that the rest of the companies do too.

So come in with that elevator pitch. This is who I am. This is what I've done. This is what I'm interested in, kind of thing. This is when I'm graduating. That's an important one as well.

Just try to be concise. Don't waste a lot of time, because that's what we're doing on our end too. But again, I understand that that can be a little bit tough. And take a look at the list of companies that are coming. Do a little bit of research. We're not expecting you to know anything and everything about each company, but just do some research so you're little bit more familiar and you can come prepared with a few of those burning questions that you might have in the 10 minutes.

MARNIE PETEK: Rylee, I love that you said that. You could spend 10 minutes scrolling TikTok, or if you sign up with three companies to meet at the career fair, you can spend 10 minutes learning about the opportunities so you can spend those 10 minutes talking about how you could be a fit or maybe burning questions you have. So it's not always possible.

Maybe you just pop on last minute. Like tonight, it's air meet and maybe you just see something. You're like, I'm going to pop in and grab a seat here. Professional network-- excellent, excellent. But if at all possible, do that research so we don't have to spend half of the time just telling you about the opportunity. We can spend that time getting to know you being more than a resume and creating that next level relationship.

NICK WILSON: Thank you so much. And then on that same thing, building off that initial time that you speak, what's the importance of follow-ups in networking and how do you do it effectively and appropriately?

LISA LATRONICA: I think with any of your follow-ups, be intentional. I'm sure the recruiters here will also acknowledge that we get a lot of emails and a lot of LinkedIn messages. Don't take it personally if we don't necessarily respond to you just saying, "Hey, thank you for meeting with us," because for every one of those, we probably have folks with multiple questions as well.

And sometimes our capacity is, I got to answer these questions and then move on to the next step. So be intentional. If you want to continue that connection and ask more questions, absolutely, 100% do that. Not telling you not to. Just be intentional with that reach out.

If you want to follow-up and say, hey, I really enjoyed our talk, could you point me to this open position we talked about, or something like that, that's a great intro. Think of an additional question to ask.

But if you reach out and you're just like, hey, just wanted to thank you for taking the time to chat with me, that's great. But I can't promise you're going to get a response because I do have those other messages with responses that I have to get out as well.

So again, keep that conversation going. That's going to rely on how you build that network. So maybe don't ask all your questions in that 10 minutes. Leave one to ask in that follow-up email. But make sure that you have a purpose for that reach out.

ELLIE HIRSH: Yeah, and just to kind of go off what Lisa said. I completely agree and she made awesome points. Something that I personally did that I got feedback once I got hired on at Cintas is I'm a really big note person, sending thank you cards. And so I sent thank you cards to everyone that I interviewed with and talked to.

I asked for their business cards in the interview. And then I hand wrote some thank you cards just saying, thank you so much for your time. And it can make someone smile too. They're working throughout their day and they get a thank you card from a college student that they interviewed with, and it'll make your name stand out as well.

So absolutely do it virtually. And I know it's a little bit different with everything going on right now. But ask for someone's business card, and then you can mail them a letter or something like that if they have the address on it. And then just adding people on LinkedIn, and exactly what Lisa said.

Don't think it's a bad thing if we don't respond, because we do all have a lot going on. And we still appreciate you taking the time. And maybe if there's a list of names and we know that you reached out but we didn't have a chance to reach back out, it will kind of do a little light bulb. And, oh, that person was proactive, and I was really impressed with them. So we should circle back and continue on with them, or things like that.

NICK WILSON: Great. Thank you so much. And it's all very important insight we can take into Career Networking Night and throughout the season in the job and internship search. We're running low on time here. So we're going to go ahead and move on to the last question, which will be directed at all panelists for about a minute each.

What is the top thing you hope students can take away from tonight?

MARNIE PETEK: I'll kick it off. Make it pretty general and pretty easy. Use your resources. Coming to events like this, going to the career fair, talking to the Career Center, your advisors, your professors-- there is not a single time in your life that you will have this many amazing resources at your fingertips.

Have them look at your resume. Check for spelling errors. Check for formatting opportunities. Use your resources, the amount of times you can practice. Practice makes perfect.

Talk about the STAR method. Sign up for panels. You're just going to be more prepared to enter the workforce, to network. This is networking. Use your resources. And I mean, Washington State has some of the best resource. You guys, I cover New Mexico, Idaho to Pacific Coast.

And Washington State has some of the best resources I've seen. So please, for me, use them because they are so so, so good. And they're here for you. So use your resources.

ELLIE HIRSH: Yeah, just to add on that, something that I think I didn't fully understand when I was a student, and that I hope all of you guys take away from all the events that you do, is employers need to hire people just as much as you need a job. So I know that it can be nerve wracking. And I know that it can be scary and maybe out of your comfort zone, but try to just go and have confidence and talk to everyone.

Because like Cintas and Ferguson and SEL, we all need new hires as well. We all want that new talent. So we are equally sometimes as nervous as you guys are, because we want to find good fits for the positions that we're trying to hire for. So if you take away anything, just know, take a breath, calm down.

Go talk to people, because we were all in your shoes at one point as well. And it's really a great resource and opportunity to, like everyone has said, just expand your network, and meet all sorts of people. Even if it doesn't work out, you get interview experience, you get experience talking to strangers.

There's so many things that you can take away. So just try not to be nervous, and make the most out of all the conversations that you have.

LISA LATRONICA: I would say along with having confidence, kind of what Ellie was saying, is that can be really nerve wracking because you have this pressure to find a job, find an internship, find your perfect fit. It's actually OK if you don't, too. Finding out where you don't fit or what jobs you don't want to be doing is just as important.

So my hope is that tonight you learn one thing, whether that's you learned, hey, I might be interested in sales. Or I didn't realize that this engineering company also had business positions open. Or it could be, I learned I don't want to be doing this. That sounded like my worst nightmare of a job.

So even if you thought-- you walk away and you're like, I didn't like any of the companies I talked to, they didn't seem like a good fit, none of those jobs seemed interesting, that's still a win. You're still narrowing that field down.

I know for me, my graduate degree is in art. I'm not doing anything with that. But as a student who attended career fairs, I was often like, I have no idea what I want to do. Nothing sounds appealing. But I kept going because I knew at some point I would find something that struck my interest.

So if you're in those shoes, that is totally OK. Still have confidence walking in there. Be confident in knowing that what you want to be doing is right for you. And it's OK to walk away and maybe not be as impressed as you wanted to be.

RYLEE KAMPF: I'd like to just jump in. I know you guys have mentioned a lot of good points and things that I was going to say, absolutely. And I know we're also almost out of time. But I would say the biggest thing is do your research. Go in. Figure out what companies are interested in, but also, to some of your guys' other points is talk to companies that you've maybe never heard of.

That is definitely what happened to me. I knew absolutely not a single thing about Ferguson until they came to my campus. Knew not a single thing about construction. And when they said a lot of what we sell is bathroom and plumbing type stuff, I was like, there is absolutely no way that's happening. But here I am. So that's a big takeaway.

Also, too, another thing is, yes, these are kind of like mini-interviews, or maybe later on down the road, you're getting an interview. But you're interviewing that company just as much as they're interviewing you.

You spend just as much time with your coworkers and with your company, if not more than you do at home with your family. So culture fit is a huge thing. Make sure that that culture is right for you and that's somewhere where you can definitely see yourself.

NICK WILSON: Awesome. Thank you so much again to all of our panelists today. It was very nice of you to take time out of your day to help us prepare for not just tonight but the search through the rest of the semester. Before we go, we'd just like to remind you, to our WSU students, please see the chat for our event survey.

We ask that all attendees please complete the survey before logging off. You can click on the link available at this time in the chat box. And then secondly, as we've discussed a lot tonight, the main event, 5 o'clock to 7:00, the Carson College of Business will be hosting Career Networking Night.

Career Networking Night will be a two-hour virtual event featuring over 30 top businesses who are looking for ambitious and motivated students to fill their internship opportunities and full-time job offers. It's not every day you have this many employers at one place.

And in this case, that place is at your desk. So don't miss out. Register now through the QR code or the link in the chat. And then also, if you're looking for assistance with job search strategies, interview preparation, or resume and cover letter review, the Carson Center for Student Success offers a variety of resources to prepare you to find and land that dream job or internship.

You can schedule an appointment with a career consultant through Handshake by following the steps below. Thanks again to our wonderful panelists. You guys were great today.

We appreciate everyone's participation in the Carson Career Spring Series. And we'll see you tonight at CNN. Go Cougs.