

5 MYTHS ABOUT NETWORKING FOR TECHERS



WHEN BOBBY JOHNSON (BS '98) WAS THE DIRECTOR OF ENGINEERING AT FACEBOOK, HE WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR GROWING THE SOCIAL NETWORKING SITE FROM HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF USERS TO NEARLY ONE BILLION, AND IN THE PROCESS, HIRING A TEAM OF ENGINEERS TO DO IT. HIS FAVORITE PEOPLE TO RECRUIT? TECHERS.

When Bobby Johnson (BS '98) was the director of engineering at Facebook, he was responsible for growing the social networking site from hundreds of thousands of users to nearly one billion. And he needed to hire a team of engineers to do that.

His favorite people to recruit? Techers.

"I loved hiring fellow graduates from Caltech, regardless of their specific majors," says Johnson, who branched off in 2013 to start his own company, Interana. "I knew how they were trained to think."

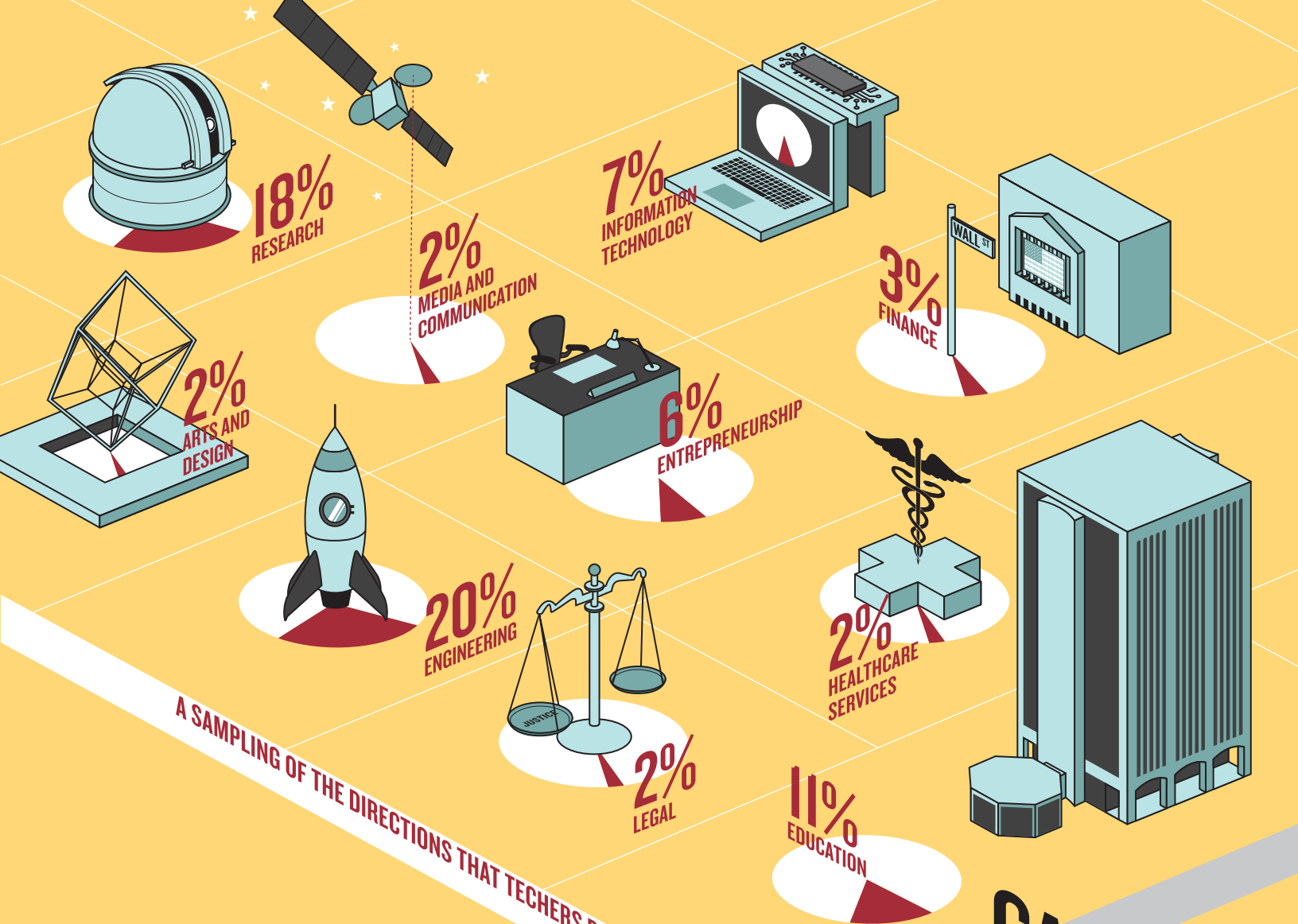
The problem was that he had trouble finding enough graduates to fill the ranks of his team. When Johnson organized networking socials—which overflowed with engineers in Palo Alto eager to hobnob with Facebook insiders—few Techers turned out. Johnson knew that when he could make contact with Caltech graduates, it was often a great fit. Why, then, did it seem difficult to make that first connection?

"For whatever reason, I think there's a kind of stigma amongst Techers against professional networking," Johnson says. "Maybe it's that we're introverted by nature, maybe we're focused on the work. We tend to think, 'Oh, networking is something business majors do. Not us.' But experience has taught me that no matter the industry or how qualified you are, you still need to leverage your contacts. You have to jump in."

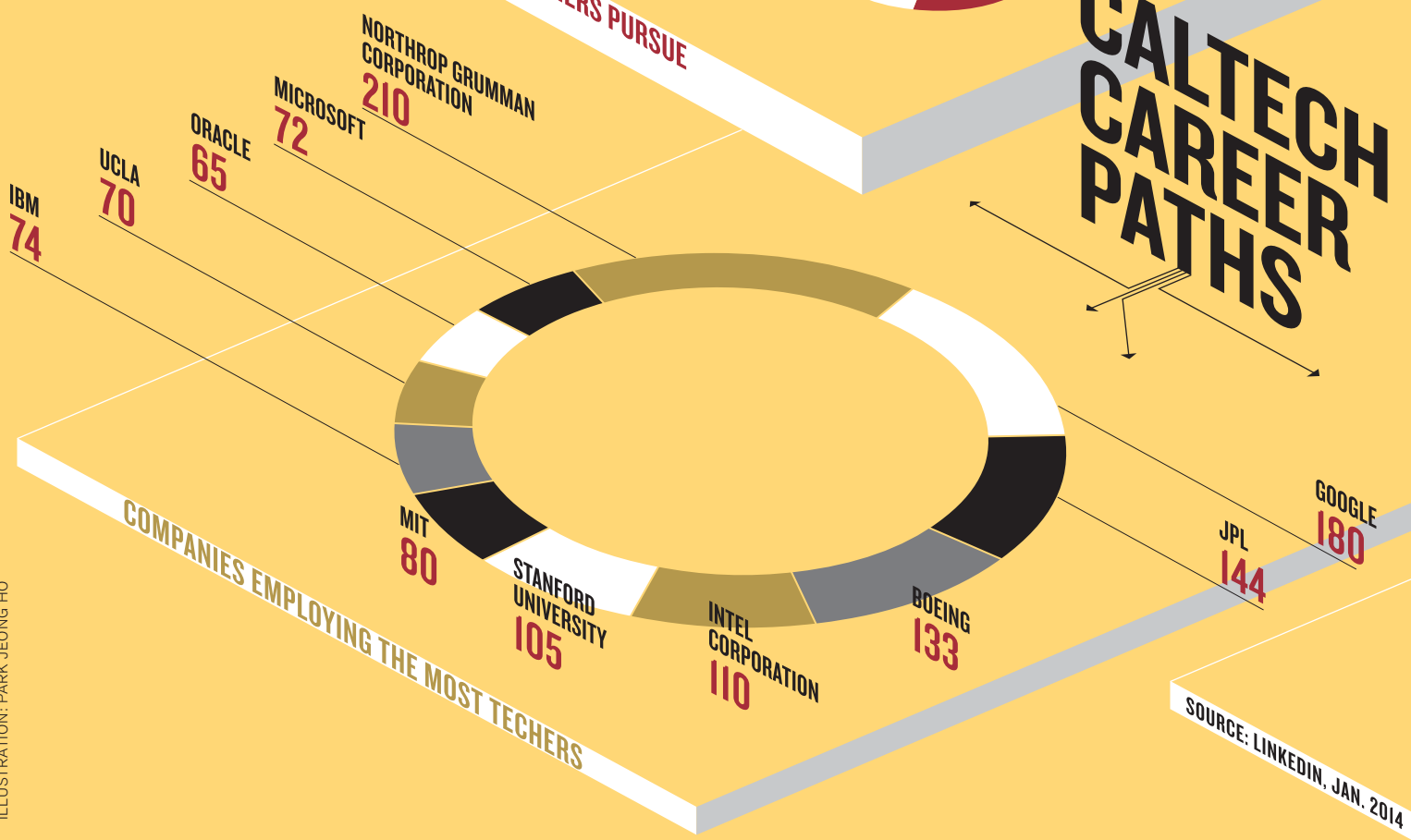
Does the old and clichéd adage, "it's not what you know, it's who you know," really apply to the sciences, where the bar for required knowledge and competence is set so high?

Techers boldly tackle problems that change the world. Solving the challenge of your own career requires another set of skills that may feel foreign, but with a little effort, can be acquired.

We asked alumni for their opinions and experiences. Here, in no particular order, are five common Techer preconceptions about networking.



CALTECH CAREER PATHS



SOURCE: LINKEDIN, JAN. 2014

1

Good work speaks for itself.

"We're trained to focus on our work" says Debbie Bakin (BS '86). "If we're rigorous about our work, then the thinking is it will help you to land the next job."

There can be no denying that the quality of one's work product is essential to unlocking future career opportunities. But how will the right people find out about your work?

"Good work is certainly important," says Elayne Chou, a career consultant in the Bay Area who advises a number of academic clients, including graduates from Caltech. "But to have the most effect, that work needs to be presented at the right moment." Managers hire because they are looking for a certain skill set to address a need, Chou explains, and no matter how good the portfolio—it must still reach the right person at the right time.

Search for people in your area of expertise and learn about their priorities, then find appropriate ways to make them aware of your own work and how it addresses their needs. Rather than assume they will make the connection, count it as your job to do it for them.



2

A Caltech degree can work as well as networking.

There can be no doubt that a Caltech degree is a mark of significant accomplishment.

"One of the things that makes Caltech special is that it is, in many ways, a meritocracy. We had to do so much to earn our degree. It's evidence not just of our training but also our determination," says Johnson. "For those who know—it speaks for itself."

But it can be difficult to know exactly how well a hiring manager understands the specifics of an institution, or to what degree they value education versus other factors like work experience.

The advantage of a Caltech degree is the ability to solve difficult problems. Discover the problems that hiring managers are trying to solve, and then educate them on how you—using the methods learned at Caltech—can best help them find the solution. And your degree offers another benefit—access to a broad network of fellow alumni who are placed in positions to help.

Like Johnson, there are people looking specifically for Caltech graduates. Rather than waiting and hoping for them to find you, make it your role to find them.



3

People don't want to hear me talk about myself.

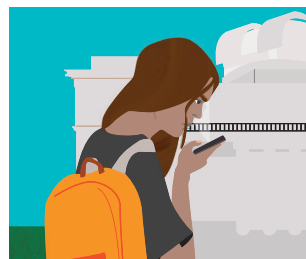
"I think that, as Techers, one of the things we prize is authenticity," says Dave Tytell (BS '99). "Which may be why many of us tend to shy away from 'selling' ourselves."

Here's a fact: networking is uncomfortable for most people. Some worry that by communicating their accomplishments, they may sound boastful or arrogant.

"There is an art to speaking up such that others recognize your valuable contributions," says Chou, who recommends focusing on how your work benefits others. "That's a way of taking the focus off you and relating it to your work."

Practice helps you gain comfort. It may help to think of career networking like research. If a couple of experiments don't yield the results hoped for, it's not time to declare the entire theory invalid. Rather, take the opportunity to learn what didn't work and refine your methods.

"You won't develop your ability to appropriately self-promote unless you do it regularly," says Chou. Small, regular interactions can make a big difference. Share information on your projects, ask advice from colleagues, or drop a note just to catch up. Chou advises setting a goal to meet at least one new person per quarter to broaden your base.



4

I don't know enough people.

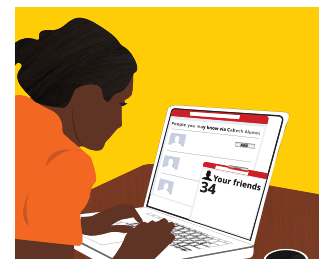
One of Caltech's distinguishing features is its incredibly selective student body. Once in the marketplace, however, many Techers observe that larger schools have very broad professional networks. It's easy to feel eclipsed sometimes.

But the same advantages that make Caltech a superb place to study also amplify the power of its alumni network.

First, there are fewer degrees of separation. "Caltech's alumni community, which numbers more than 23,000, has an outsized impact on science, academia, industry, and society relative to its size," says Heather Dean (BS '00, MS '00), president of the Caltech Alumni Association. The smaller population means that there are often just one or two degrees of separation between a new graduate and an alumnus/a who is a recognized leader within his or her chosen field.

Second, the strength of ties between contacts is often tighter. "There's a real sense that we were in the foxhole together," says Tytell. "And even if I didn't know you personally, I know your experience." As a result, Techers often express a willingness to be of assistance to fellow graduates.

"It's not just about having a high volume of contacts," says Dean. "It's about having the right ones. Most Techers will find that they are uniquely positioned to make meaningful—and actionable—connections very quickly."



5

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My contacts will be annoyed if I ask for help.

One of the larger challenges many Techers express with networking is the fear of imposing. "Rather than asking for a job, it can be more comfortable—and more successful—to ask for information or advice," Chou advises.

Not sure where to start?

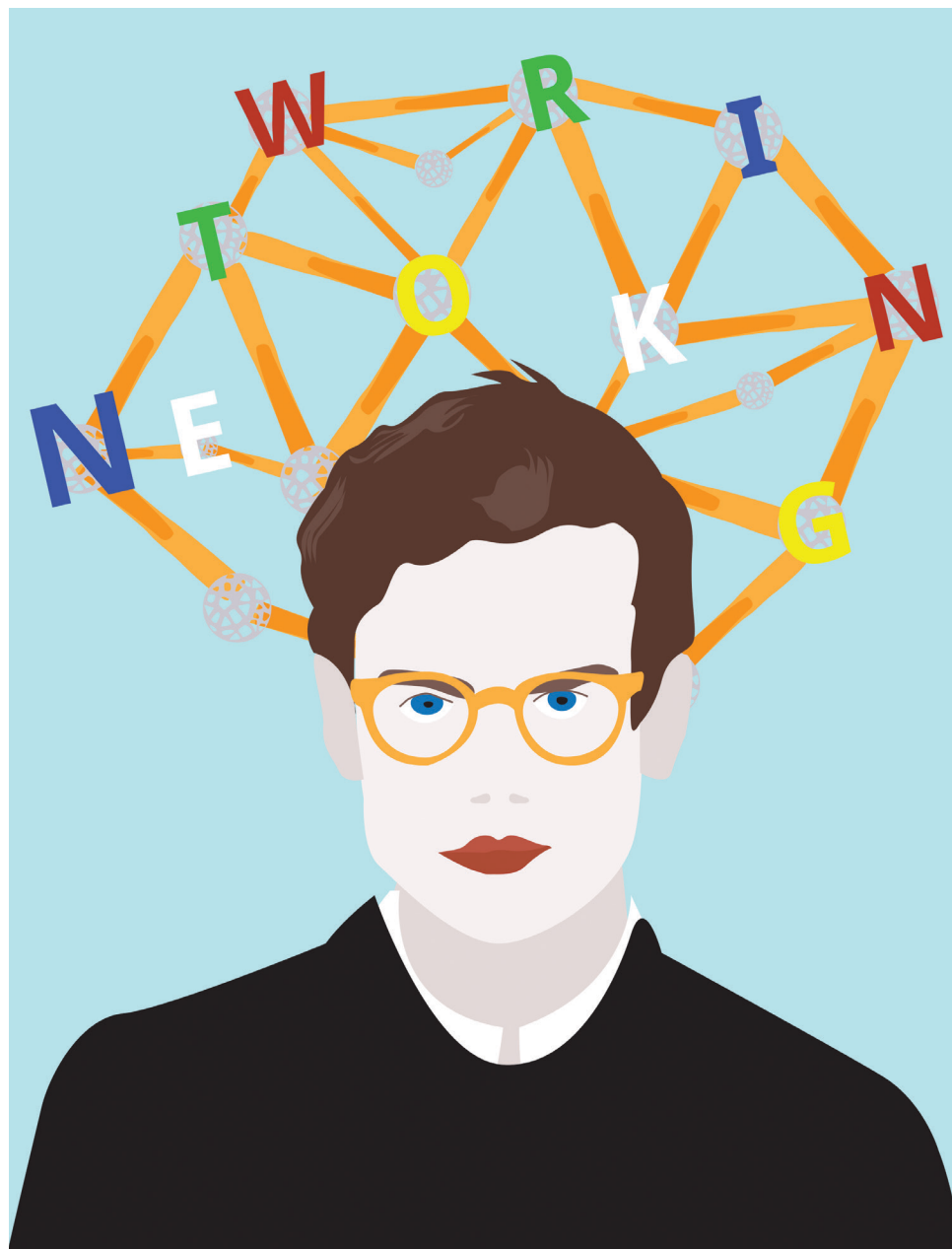
The Caltech Alumni Association, in partnership with the Career Development Center, launched a new online mentorship initiative on LinkedIn: the CHAT Network (Career Help: Ask a Techer).

"More than 16,000 Caltech alumni are registered on LinkedIn. But it can be hard to know whom to approach," says Alexx Tobeck, executive director of the Caltech Alumni Association. "The CAA is committed to helping Techers connect professionally. We created this dedicated group to make reaching out as easy as possible."

By joining the group, alumni agree to respond to requests for advice from fellow alumni and current students.

"It's not necessarily the place to ask for a job," says Lauren Stolper, director of fellowships advising, study abroad and Caltech's Career Development Center. "But it's a good opportunity for Techers to learn more about a field of work, get recommendations, and expand their field of contacts."

"The hardest part about networking is knowing where to begin," says Dean. "The CHAT group is a great place to start."



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NEED CAREER HELP? ASK A TECHER.

Whether you're looking for advice—or have guidance to give—join the Caltech Alumni Association's dedicated career advice network on LinkedIn. Look for alumni displaying this green badge, then go ahead and ask. You've got the green light.

alumni.caltech.edu/chat

