

Networking: How to Make it Work for You

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When conducting a job search, inevitably, someone will suggest networking as a method to expand your career options. Most people will associate networking with meeting new people at events in an attempt to make small talk and exchange business cards. This can be a daunting situation for anyone, especially if you have not had much experience networking. However, networking is a critical aspect of any successful job search, and it can quite enjoyable if you know how to prepare and navigate through this process.

What is Networking?

Networking is making connections with people, then building and maintaining good relationships. It's an effective way to get information that could lead to work and to develop your career. When you're looking for work, you need to draw on the people in your network in a conscious and systematic way. You might find that some people in your existing network have useful advice or information for you while you're looking for a job. Or they might lead you to someone in their network who can help you.

Creating a Network.

Everybody has contacts. Life would be impossible without them. Your existing contact network may not contain decision-makers in your career field, but a few selected people from the following list may be useful as initial contact in which to build your own career contact network:

- Former Employers
- Current Employers
- Fellow Workers
- Past Colleagues
- Professional Associations
- Friends/Relatives/Neighbors
- Business Owners
- Consultants
- Club Member
- Civic Leaders/Politicians
- Clergy

As you start to make use of your network, it will develop and expand to include more people.

Networking is Information Gathering.

Networking involves requesting and gathering information, it is not a straight-out request for employment. Asking straight-out for a job or job opportunity seldom works for two basic reasons:

- In any given situation, the chances are very small that a job is immediately available.
- People instinctively shy away from job requests, even people who know you and want to help but can't.

Networking as asking for small favors, some information and some advice.

Almost everyone is willing to comply with that request.

Steps in Networking.

Before starting to network, that is attending a networking event, calling or emailing a contact, or getting together with a contact, you should keep the following goals in mind:

- **Build Rapport.** You need to first build rapport with your networking contact. You will do this by setting a positive climate, taking a genuine interest in the other person. Referring to your past relationship, if any, or mentioning the mutual contact that referred you.
- **Reassure Them.** Make it clear that you are not expecting them to know of a current opportunity, and by telling them what you expect from the meeting, call, or email.
- **Present a Clear Pitch.** Present a clear and concise picture of your chosen career objective, and a brief description of the options or industry sectors you are currently exploring. This will help them decide what type of information will be useful to you.

Keep Track of Your Information. If you've established meetings and discussions with all your existing contacts, it might prove difficult to keep all your information organized. The first thing you should do following such a meeting or discussion is to gather the person's contact information, such as their business card, and write comments by their contact information regarding the information you shared. There are quite a few software programs available to help you manage contacts and keep your information organized. This will allow to use the information gathered effectively and efficiently, and will also

allow to you follow-up with your contacts in a more organized and focused manner.

Staying In Contact. Keeping in touch with your contacts is an important a part of networking as it is to network in the first place. You should set monthly goals to follow-up with your contact on a regular basis. It may be as easy as sending emails, inviting them for coffee or lunch, or just making a phone call to touch base. You should also make sure to provide information, help, or insight to your contact in return for his/her time. Networking should be mutually beneficial whenever possible. This process of nurturing contacts will ultimately serve to sustain and enhance your career.