



Network to Work Meeting

Resource Materials – May 2015

Networking for Jobs

Introduction

Finding a job in today's economy can be tough, but there are opportunities if you know where to look. The vast majority of job openings are never advertised; they're filled by word of mouth. The best way to find these opportunities is not through online job boards, the classifieds, or employment agencies—it's by talking to people around you. Your network of friends, relatives, colleagues, and acquaintances is a valuable job search resource. Networking may sound intimidating, but it can be rewarding and fun, even if you're shy or feel like you don't know many people.

A willingness to **network** and **build connections** will be the single most useful tool in your job search. Unfortunately, many job seekers are hesitant to take advantage of networking because they're afraid of being seen as pushy, annoying, or self-serving.

What is Networking?

Networking doesn't mean asking everyone you run into for a job or even if he or she knows where the job openings are. It also isn't about using other people or aggressively promoting yourself. It is nothing more than getting to know people.

Networking is about building relationships so that you can enlist support and comfortably ask for ideas, advice, and referrals to those with hiring power. It is making contacts and sharing information for professional and personal gain, in a give and take manner. The goal of meeting someone in networking is to create rapport and build a relationship so that they like you, want to help you, and if they become aware of potential opportunities they will refer you.

While some people have an easier time making new connections than others, it's important to remember that everyone is capable of networking.

You probably already have networking experience, even if you don't think of it in those terms. Any time you meet someone or make a new friend, you're engaged in a form of networking. You are networking when you strike up a conversation with the person next to you in line, introduce yourself to other parents at your child's or grandchild's school, meet a friend of a friend, catch up with a former co-worker, or stop to chat with your neighbor. Everyone you meet can help you move your job search forward. Making good use of these connections can make finding a job that much easier.

Why network?

Networking is considered to be the single most effective way to find a job. A majority of job seekers found their most recent position by networking, either through **referrals** or **direct contact** with a hiring manager. The majority of job vacancies are hidden from the average job seeker; they are never advertised and are part of the "hidden" or "closed" job market. While career experts have for years used figures ranging from 75 to 95 percent to quantify the hidden job market, no one really knows how large it is.

Why aren't most jobs advertised? Employers' reluctance to advertise is partly tied to the economy; they are disinclined to spend money on advertising. There's also a psychological reason. Employers wonder why a job hunter is looking for a job. The answer that pops into the employer's head, whether fairly or not, is probably not a positive one. People look for jobs, many employers believe, because they are unhappy losers, job-hoppers, or unproductive malcontents who blame poor performance on their employers and believe switching jobs will solve their problems. Employers would rather go after people -- called "passive candidates" -- who aren't necessarily looking for work. In the employer's mind, those people will be successful, productive contributors to the company's bottom line.

According to Ohio State University career counselor B. J. O'Bruba, "The last place I want to pull applicants from is [an advertisement]. ... Ad applicants are unREFERRED, untested, and unknown. The first place I look for applicants is within my current or previous organizations or applicants who were referred to me by professional colleagues and acquaintances. These applicants are better referenced, tested, and known."

Further, busy employers simply don't have the time to go through the mountains of resumes a job posting is likely to produce; it can draw thousands of responses because of the relative ease of responding online. Employers often find it far more efficient to ask their employees and other members of their personal networks to refer high-quality candidates to them. Networking makes you a recommended member of a much smaller pool.

Finally, the process of defining job vacancies can take a long time. In some companies, a year or more can elapse between initial conceptualization of a job and actually filling the position. Thus, at any given time, a theoretical position may exist within an organization, but the formal mechanisms of funding, structuring, and writing a job description for the position mean that the job cannot yet be advertised. That's another reason networking is so valuable. If you can tap into a job in its developing stages, you will have a huge advantage over those who wait to answer ads.

Let's imagine you are responsible for hiring a person to work at your company. Would you rather hire someone you've never met or someone you already know and trust? **People do business primarily with people they know and like.** Resumes and cover letters alone are often too impersonal to convince employers to hire you.

The Networking Process

Making the decision to start networking can feel a little overwhelming, but it's important to remember that no one builds a network **from scratch**. Your family and friends already make up a powerful network of different **connections**.

Reaching out to your existing network is a great way start practicing your **networking skills**. Over time, you'll feel more comfortable expanding your network and building new connections. Take some time to organize your **existing connections** and identify **networking opportunities** you can pursue.

1. Make the biggest, broadest list of everybody you know:

You may think that you don't know anyone who can help you with your job search. But you know more people than you think, and there's a very good chance that at least a few of these people know someone who can give you career advice or point you to a job opening. You'll never know if you don't ask!

Your list should include parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, old friends, new friends, current neighbors, past neighbors, former classmates, former teachers or professors, maybe a community or church group you belong to, the guys you play basketball (or softball or flag football) with, the girls in your book club, the people you chat with at the health club... And on and on. Think about people you know from former jobs, your child's school, social media, the grocery store, or your neighborhood. Also think about people you've met through your close connections: your sister's co-worker; your best friend's boss; your college roommate's spouse; friends of your parents; your uncle's business partner. Don't forget to include people like your doctor, landlord, accountant, dry cleaner, or yoga instructor.

Ultimately, your only two criteria for adding anyone to this list are:

- The person is breathing.
- The person will recognize either your name or the name of the person who connected you to them. (“We both lived on Green St.,” or “I’m a friend of your sister Mary.”)

Sometimes people say, “Those people don’t know anyone in my industry. They can’t help me find a job.” **The truth is, you have no idea who the people you know also know.** Or who *they* know who may also know someone else who could help you.

In networking, the whole point is to cast your net broadly to see what leads, contacts and ideas you can reel in. Even if a person in your network can’t find you a job, what they *can* do is connect you to people who know other people. And *those* people may know just that person who has a job you’d be perfect for.

Your network is more powerful than you think:

- Each network connects you to another network (e.g., your child’s teacher can connect you with other parents, schools, and school suppliers).
- Each member of a network may know of an available job or a connection to someone who will know of one.

Strengthen your networking by thinking about where you want to go. Your network should also reflect where you’re going, not just where you’ve been. Adding people to your network who reflect areas of interest is essential. If you are a career changer, join the professional associations that represent your desired career path. Attending trade shows, reading magazines, and keeping up with the lingo of your desired field can prepare you for where you want to go.

2. Prioritize your list as follows:

- Extroverts who know a lot of people. (They’ll be “above-average” on the number of people they can connect you to.)
- People who “owe you one” because you’ve done them a favor or lent them assistance in the past. Now’s the time to collect on your debt.
- People who seem like they probably like helping people (or at least, would like to help you).

Let them know that you’re looking for a job. Be specific about what kind of work you’re looking for and ask them if they have any information or know anyone in a relevant field.

3. Consider ventures for networking:

Some of the best venues for networking include during volunteer experiences, at charity events and fundraisers, and at meetings of professional organizations.

4. Figure out what you want before you start networking:

Be prepared to articulate what you're looking for. Is it a reference? An insider's take on the industry? A referral? An introduction to someone in the field? Networking is most effective when you have specific employer targets and career goals. You want to help get them to invest in your goal of finding a job or new career. And you do this by helping them see your determination and the positive thought and effort you've already put into your search.

It's hard to get leads with a generic "Let me know if you hear of anything" request. You may think that you'll have better job luck if you leave yourself open to all the possibilities, but the reality is this "openness" creates a black hole that sucks all of the networking potential out of the connection. A generic networking request for a job is worse than no request at all, because you can lose that networking contact and opportunity.

Asking for specific information, leads, or an interview is much more focused and easier for the networking source. If you're having trouble focusing your job search, you can turn to close friends and family members for help, but avoid contacting more distant people in your network until you've set clear goals.

Have a clear and specific "ask". Don't ask for a job; ask for information that will help you with your job search. Don't be shy in telling the person how they can help. Be specific enough so the person knows how to help you. Here are some examples of questions and asks:

- "I'm looking for an entry level position as (type of job) at small companies such as (name of companies).
 - Do you know anything about that industry or this type of position?
 - Do you know anyone who works in it or a related one?
 - Can you think of anyone you know who I should talk to? Would you connect me with them?
- "I'm looking for an introduction to a person at these companies."
 - Can you think of anyone you know who I should talk to? Would you connect me with them?
- What kinds of prior experience are absolutely essential for the kind of job I'm seeking?
- What personal qualities or abilities are important to being successful in this kind of job?
- What is your opinion of my background and resume? Do you see any problem areas or weaknesses?
- Who else do you know that might be willing to speak with me as well? May I use your name when contacting him/her?

That's it. Keep it simple. Remember, you're not asking them to help you find a job. Honestly, that tends to make most people uncomfortable. You're just trying to find out if they know anyone (or know someone who might know someone) who can give you some info or advice.

5. Reach out to your network:

All the connections in the world won't help you find a job if no one knows about your situation. Once you've drawn up your list, start making contact with the people in your network. Don't assume that certain people won't be able to help. You may be surprised by who they know.

Start with your references. When you are looking for a job, start with your references. Your best references—the people who like you and can endorse your abilities, track record, and character—are major networking hubs. Contact each one of your references to network about your possibilities and affirm their agreement to be your reference. Prepare them for any calls from potential employers. Keep them posted and thank them for their help.

6. Be clear of your purpose when asking for a meeting:

Don't simply ask to meet to "pick someone's brain". Describe your goals and seek their assistance. If you are reaching out to a referral, introduce yourself, say something that shows your knowledge of the person and their work, and explain why you'd like to talk. Propose potential times to meet. When you plan your meeting ahead of time, you show your professionalism.

7. Networking Courtesies:

- **Don't Be Late – ever!** Leave early; allot time for traffic; know where you are going.
- **Offer to pay.** Ask the other person what they'd like to drink before placing your order, and pay for both.
- **Respect the time of the person you are meeting with.** If you agreed in advance to meet for 15 or 30 minutes, keep track of the time and offer to end on time.

8. Focus on Effective Communication:

Effective communication is a cornerstone of job networking. As simple as communication may seem, much of what we try to communicate—and others try to communicate to us—gets misunderstood.

Focus fully on the other person and his or her body language, rather than daydreaming, texting, or doodling. If you find it hard to concentrate, try repeating the speaker's words over in your head. **Also, be sure to give him or her a chance to speak.** Don't do all the talking. If you have asked another person for advice, make sure he or she has the opportunity to offer it.

Avoid interrupting or trying to redirect the conversation to your concerns. Listening is not the same as waiting for your turn to talk. You can't concentrate on what someone's saying if you're forming what you're going to say next.

Show your interest in what's being said. Nod occasionally, smile at the person, and make sure your posture is open and inviting.

Ask questions. Asking a series of purposeful questions can help you engage someone you're meeting for the first time. Most people generally like talking about themselves, so don't shy away from asking about someone's career and interests. At this point, you should be focused on getting to know your new contact and how this person might fit in to your network. You're **not asking for a job, just more information.**

Consider asking some of the following questions when you're meeting someone for the first time:

- How did you get started in your current career?
- What do you like most about your job? What are the biggest challenges you face?
- Would you choose the same career path if you had to do it all over again?

Be mindful of your own body language, including facial expressions, gestures, eye contact, posture, and tone of your voice. The way you look, listen, move, and react to another person tells them more about how you are feeling than your words alone ever can. Enhance effective communication by using open body language—arms uncrossed, standing with an open stance or sitting on the edge of your seat, and maintaining eye contact.

9. Have a positive attitude:

How you present yourself can have a significant impact on the kind of impression you make. While it's easy to become discouraged in the middle of a long job search, it's important to remain **positive** and **optimistic** when introducing yourself to others. Broadcasting your frustrations will only make it more difficult to gain new connections. Even if you're coming out of a tough situation, be sure to project **confidence**.

10. Focus on Building Relationships:

Networking is a give-and-take process that involves making connections, sharing information, and asking questions. It's a way of relating to others, not a technique for getting a job or a favor. You don't have to hand out your business cards on street corners, cold call everyone on your contact list, or work a room of strangers. **All you have to do is reach out with a spirit of generosity and mindfulness of reciprocating.** Here are some pointers:

Be authentic. In any job search or networking situation, being you—the real you—should be your goal. Hiding who you are or suppressing your true interests and goals will only hurt you in

the long run. Pursuing what you want and not what you think others will like, will always be more fulfilling and ultimately more successful.

Be considerate. If you're reconnecting with an old friend or colleague, take the time to get through the catching-up phase before you blurt out your need. On the other hand, if this person is a busy professional you don't know well, be respectful of his or her time and come straight out with your request.

Ask for advice, not a job. Don't ask for a job; that request comes with a lot of pressure. You want your contacts to become allies in your job search, not make them feel ambushed, so ask for information or insight instead. If they're able to hire you or refer you to someone who can, they will. If not, you haven't put them in the uncomfortable position of turning you down or telling you they can't help.

Offer to add value and hold a spirit of generosity. Always remember that successful networking is a two-way street. Building a network is about creating a genuine relationship. That means giving as well as receiving. During the conversation keep your ears open for any way you can be of assistance. Don't think of "debt and obligation" but rather a "spirit of generosity". Thank your contact for the information they have supplied and see if you can help them in some way. Maybe, for example, he or she is interested in living in an area that you are familiar with. Share your knowledge and experience there as a way to help the other person.

Reciprocate by sharing your gifts. Networking doesn't have to drain your soul. ***When job seekers identify what they have to offer***, they open up a less draining, more personal way to network: through giving. When job seekers stop treating networking as "putting a dollar in the relationship bank to withdraw someday" and focus more on what they can do for their network, they establish credibility and trust, create opportunities to turn chance encounters into long-term one-on-one relationships, put themselves on equal footing with potential employers or referrers, and transform themselves to networking rock stars.

So how can you start networking through giving? **Figure out what you can offer by honing in on your special skills.** Identify a useful skill for your field and either learn it (e.g. through free online guides and webinars) or learn to articulate it if it's a skill you already have.

If you are struggling to identify yours, try asking yourself (or a friend or career counselor) these questions:

- **What problems do your friends ask you to solve?** Are you the go-to guy or gal when a computer freezes? When a cover letter needs to be edited? When they're bored on the weekend? The answer to these questions could lead you to discover a niche skill in tech, communications, or event planning, respectively.

- **How do current or former supervisors, colleagues, or professors describe you?** What strengths do they point out immediately? Are these the same or different attributes than the ones hiring managers in your prospective field are looking for? Ask professional contacts to list a few of your positive attributes to help you hone in on what will make you stand out.
- **What attracts you to the job positions you apply to?** Re-read the last 3-5 jobs you applied to that you really *wanted*. What are the specific skills that you have that matched the job requirements? What problems are these skills needed to solve? Think about how you can package these unique skills into an offer at a networking event or informational interview.

When your skill is well matched to a networking contact's needs, it gives you a natural way to transform a one-time encounter into a long-term relationship. Plus, skills-based networking *shows* instead of *tells* your value to an individual or company, which could lead to job opportunities or referrals.

Likewise, someone in your network could fulfill the needs of a professional contact you are trying to make or strengthen. For example, the friend you play basketball with on weekends may also have the aesthetic flair a networking contact needs to design a flyer. Take a critical look at your address book, email contacts, and Facebook friends and think about the niche skills they have.

Facilitating a mutually-beneficial connection between two members of your existing network will help you strengthen your relationship with both parties, by establishing credibility (you know talented people, so you must also be talented) and likeability. If your basketball friend does a bang-up job on your networking contact's flyer, hidden job opportunities and referrals will open up to you.

Taking the time to assess their needs and then directly fill them in whatever way you can will put you leaps and bounds ahead of the job seekers who never even asked. You will be fulfilling a need, strengthening a connection, and giving them a reason to picture you at their company permanently.

11. Take Notes and Follow Up:

How you conclude your first meeting with a new contact is vital to building an effective relationship. Even if your encounter is brief, make sure you leave it with a request **to keep in touch**, either by meeting again **in person** or connecting **online** through email or social media.

Ask the person if you may keep them informed of your search progress. If you read an article that pertains to a discussion you had in your meeting, cut it out and send it to him or her with a

brief note. Try to find at least two to three opportunities yearly to reconnect with members of your network.

Make yourself a calendar note to ensure you follow up in 2 – 3 weeks after your first meeting. Communicate any outcomes that occurred as a result of their suggestions. Keep notes on what you learn about your contacts so that future correspondence can have a personalized touch like "How was Jane's first year of school?" Check in periodically to see how they're doing. By nurturing the relationship through your job search and beyond, you'll establish a strong network of people you can count on for ideas, advice, feedback, and support.

Remember, networking is a long-term investment that requires **time** and **persistence**. Most of the connections you make will not have anything to offer you initially. By politely **following up** with your contacts, you'll be able to develop a relationship over time. The stronger your relationships, the more likely it is that your connections will think of you when **opportunities** arise.

Don't be a hit-and-run networker

Don't be a hit-and-run networker: connecting, getting what you want, and then disappearing, never to be heard from until the next time you need something. Invest in your network by following up and providing feedback to those who were kind of enough to offer their help. Thank them for their referral and assistance. Let them know whether you got the interview or the job. Or use the opportunity to report on the lack of success or the need for additional help.

12. Write a personalized thank you letter. Thank your contact in person and follow up with a letter. If your handwriting is legible, the personalized touch is always appreciated. The biggest mistake you can make with networking is failing to express gratitude. A simple thank-you for someone's help goes a long way.

It's Okay to Feel Nervous or Shy about Networking

Some people actually enjoy networking. To them, it's a chance to meet new friends or connect to someone interesting. But for the majority, who are shy or simply feel nervous about talking to someone they don't know, networking is hard. Even if you do know the person networking still can be hard, because you feel you are asking for something you need – help for yourself.

If you're nervous about making contact—either because you're uncomfortable asking for favors or embarrassed about your employment situation—try to keep the following things in mind:

- It feels good to help others. Most people will gladly assist you if they can.
- People like to give advice and be recognized for their expertise.

- Almost everyone knows what it's like to be out of work or looking for a job. They'll sympathize with your situation.
- You're not begging for help; rather, you're helping an employer find a great asset – you! You're asking your contacts to do an employer a favor by helping them find someone as good as you.
- Unemployment can be isolating and stressful. By connecting with others, you're sure to get some much needed encouragement, fellowship, and moral support.
- Reconnecting with the people in your network should be fun—even if you have an agenda. The more this feels like a chore the more tedious and anxiety-ridden the process will be.

Shy or not, you have to believe in yourself. Shyness is one thing, but low self-esteem can knock you out of the game. You can't sell a product you don't think much of, so why is it any different when you're asking someone to spend good money to hire you? An employee is one of the most valuable assets any company can have. So when they make the decision to hire, they at least want to see that you believe in you!

But sometimes **long job searches or bad experiences with prior employers can leave you feeling a bit low.** So if you're having trouble remembering how good you are, take a little trip through all the things you've ever done, and pick out at least three things you feel great about.

Maybe at work. Or helping a friend or family member. Or even something you did as a volunteer. Find some problem you solved or a time when you hung in to help someone or simply found a way to make someone feel better. Or think about something you're great at that maybe no one knows.

Think you've got enough? Nah. Keep thinking of things. Let the list go on as long as you can, even if it feels like little things to you. They all count as strengths. And you can build on any or all of these strengths from this point forward. See? You do have a great product to sell – you!

So how does a shy person network for jobs? Say you're at a networking event, or something that could lead to networking - a community organization, a party, a wedding reception - and you don't know anyone. Stand and watch for a while to get your bearings and see if anyone else standing alone looks friendly. Breathing in and out, slowly approach that person and say hi. Wait for them to say hi without rushing into any speech or elevator pitch. Most of the time they are grateful someone said hi first. And from that point, they may begin talking, letting you off the hook. Or they too may just say hi and wait.

Then, ask about *them*. Let them talk about themselves. Who they know at the party. What brought them there. The music. Artwork on the wall. What they do, if that feels comfortable. A scarf or belt they might be wearing that you like. Anything to just get started.

Don't make it heavy and don't make it about you yet. If you connect, there's time to talk about your job search and anything else. If you don't connect, you can't force listening on someone; your words would be lost anyway. Just really listen (a major job search tool), and let the person relax into your discussion.

As that happens, you will most likely start to do the same. There's nothing to accomplish or make happen. Just you being interested in another human being and taking it from there, responding naturally. You may never ask the person for anything and that's ok; they aren't the only person there. Worst case, just think of it as practicing. Or simply meeting a nice person.

But then again, if the opening is there and you keep it a friendly discussion where you show real interest in the person (as opposed to blatantly asking each person you speak with for a job and dismissing them if they can't help you), you have now made it comfortable for both of you to discuss your quest for a job at whatever level the other person is open to – if not now maybe another time. And, you've made it more comfortable for yourself to go on to someone else, maybe made easier now that you "know" someone else there.

Craft your elevator pitch

In busy social settings, you may only have a few moments to capture someone's attention or make an impression. One of the most effective ways to get your message across – **when the time is** right - is to develop a personal **elevator pitch**. An elevator pitch is a **clear, succinct, and specific** statement that describes you and your strengths in less than 30 seconds. Preparing your speech in advance can also help you feel more comfortable introducing yourself to new people.

Your elevator pitch should explain **who you are, what you're seeking, and what you can offer**. Review some examples of different elevator pitches below.

Sample elevator pitches

For an entry-level food preparation position: *"I recently completed the SafeServ certification program and I'm currently seeking a position in food service. I love working with people, so I'm looking forward to a position where I can directly support my colleagues and customers."*

For an administrative support / customer service position: *"My name is Jane Doe. I have two years experience as an office assistant. I also took classes in project management at Whatever College. I have worked in customer service most of my life. I'm looking for an administrative support position. I'd really like to work for an insurance company. Do you know of any jobs in that area?"*

After you've composed your pitch, be sure to practice it by yourself and with friends until it sounds **natural**. Don't be afraid to **modify** your speech over time, or **adapt** it for certain situations. Remember, your elevator pitch should leave someone wanting to know more about you. An introduction has the potential to become a more lengthy conversation or even a screening interview, so **be prepared** to talk about your **experience** and what you could **contribute**.

Networking resources

Business cards. Believe or not, paper business cards are still a great way to share your contact information quickly and easily. Your business card should be simple, with your basic contact information and a concise personal statement, such as a shorter version of your **elevator pitch** (no more than a few sentences). If you feel comfortable using new technologies, you might consider using a mobile app like **CardMunch** instead, which allows you to share a digital version of your business card and take a picture of other people's cards for later reference.

Networking Log. You'll need to make sure you have an organized system for maintaining and tracking your connections so you can effectively **follow up** and **maintain contact**. You can create your own networking log or use a free online tool like **JibberJobber**, which allows you to save information about different **networking contacts** and stay organized as you build your network.

The above information is excerpted from a number of sources:

- *GCF LearnFree.org: "Job Search and Networking; Networking Basics";*
- *HelpGuide.org: "Job Networking Tips: How to Find the Right Job by Building Relationships"*
- *CareerNook.com: "Job Search: How Shy People Like Us Can Network for Jobs"; "Job Search Networking: What's the Best Way to Ask People for Help?"*
- *QuintCareers.com: "Quintessential Careers: Frequently Asked Questions about Career Networking"; "Seven Rules for Networking Success"*
- *99U.com: 10 Tips for an Awesome Coffee Meeting*
- *IdealistCareers.org: "Networking to find a job? Focus on being generous"*
- *BrazenCareerist.com: "How to Get Over Your Networking Shyness and Find that New Job"*