



Network to Work Meeting

Resource Materials – May 2016

Job Networking Tips – Finding a Job by Building Relationships

Networking is a strategy to reveal opportunities and possibilities. It's a way of connecting with others: people you know, but don't *really* know, and new people you've never met before. Networking starts with a mindset and an intention to discover, explore, and be open to what you may encounter. It's about helping others *and* helping yourself.

We are wired both to connect with *and* help others. Without these connections we can be isolated and experience loneliness and even depression. So, real networking is about re-invigorating your relationships and engaging new connections and new networks.

You already know how to network

Networking isn't about using other people or promoting yourself in an aggressive way—it's about building relationships. Done right, you won't seem pushy or self-serving. And while it may sound intimidating, it can be rewarding and fun, even if you're shy.

Networking is nothing more than getting to know people. You are already networking every day and everywhere you go. You're networking when you strike up a conversation with the person next to you in line, introduce yourself to others at your 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.***

Tapping the hidden job market may take more planning and nerve than searching online, but it's much more effective. ***Adopting a networking lifestyle—a lifestyle of connecting and helping others in good times and bad—will help you find the right job,*** make valuable connections in your chosen field, and stay focused and motivated during your job search.

Networking is the best way to find a job because:

- **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.
- **Job listings tend to draw piles of applicants,** which puts you in intense competition with many others. Networking makes you a recommended member of a much smaller pool.
- **The job you want may not be advertised at all.** Networking leads to information and job leads, often before a formal job description is created or a job announced.

Job networking tip 1: *You know more people than you think*

You may think 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 good chance some 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!

Make a list of the people in your network

Your network is bigger than you think it is. It includes all of your family members, friends, neighbors, current and former co-workers, colleagues, and even casual acquaintances. Start going through your address book (and social media accounts like LinkedIn and Facebook if you have any) and write down names. You'll be surprised at how quickly the list grows.

Think about people you know from former jobs, school, church, your child or grandchild's school, the gym, your neighborhood, or places where you shop. Also think about people you've met through your close connections: your sister's co-worker; your best friend's boss; a former roommate's spouse; friends of your family; your uncle's business partner. Don't forget to include people like your doctor, landlord, barber or beautician, dry cleaner, or exercise instructor.

Yes, you *do* have a job network, and it's more powerful than you think:

- You already belong to many networks (family, friends, colleagues, fellow community club members, etc.) and your job search network can grow naturally out of these primary contacts.
- Each network connects you to another network (e.g., your grandchild's teacher can connect you with other parents, schools, school suppliers, etc.).
- Each member of a network may know of an available job or a connection to someone who will know of one.

Job networking tip 2: *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 contact list, start reaching out to the people in your network. 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. Don't assume that certain people won't be able to help. You may be surprised by who they know.

Figure out what you want *before* you start networking

Networking is most effective when you ***have specific employer targets and career goals.*** ***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 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.

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.
- Describe your goals and seek their assistance.
- Keep them informed on your job search progress.
- Prepare them for any calls from potential employers.
- Let them know what happened and thank them for their help regardless of the outcome.

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. *Remember, too, that you are also looking for ways to be of assistance back.*
- 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.
- 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.

Job networking tip 3: *Focus on building relationships*

Networking is a give-and-take process. *It 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 cold call everyone on your contact list or work a room of strangers. All you have to do is reach out.

- **Be authentic.** In any job search or networking situation, being the real you should be your goal. Hiding who you are or your true interests and goals will only hurt you in the long run.
- **Be considerate.** If you're reconnecting with an old friend or colleague, take the time to catch up before blurting out your need. But if this person is a busy professional you don't know well, respect 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. 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.
- **Be specific in your request.** Prepare in advance. Be ready to state 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? Also make sure to provide any new skills or work experience you may have gained.

Slow down and enjoy the job networking process

Effective networking isn't rushed. This doesn't mean you shouldn't try to be efficient and focused, but ***hurried, emergency networking is not conducive to building relationships for mutual support and benefit.*** When you network, you should slow down, be present, and try to enjoy the process and the people you are meeting with.

Don't be a hit-and-run networker

Don't be a hit-and-run networker, that is, someone who connects, gets what they want and then disappears, never to be heard from until the next time you need something. Invest in your network by following up and providing updates 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.

Job networking tip 4: *Evaluate the quality of your network*

If your networking efforts don't seem to be working, you may need to evaluate the quality of your network. Take some time to think about your network's strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities. Are certain connections holding you back? Are you missing opportunities to branch out and forge new ties that will help you move forward? If you feel your network is out of date, then it's time to upgrade!

Rate your network

Give yourself 1 point for each question you answer yes.

- Do you trust your network contact to give you the truth about the real you?
- Does your network contact challenge you as much as it supports you?
- Does your network contact feel vibrant and dynamic?
- Does your network contact represent your future goals as much as your past goals?
- Does your network contact have strong connections to others?

5 pts – Your network is in great shape!

3-4 pts – You need to enhance your network.

0-2 pts – Your network needs a makeover.

Job networking tip 5: *Take advantage of both “strong” and “weak” ties*

Everyone has both “strong” and “weak” ties and connections. Strong ties are people in one’s inner circle. Weak ties, while less established relationships, can nonetheless give your network vitality and may introduce new ideas and options. New relationships can invigorate your network by giving you a connection to new people, viewpoints, and opportunities.

Tips for strengthening your job network

- **Tap into your strong ties.** Your strong ties will logically lead to new weak ties that you can trust and that will make your network stronger. Use your existing network to add members and reconnect with people.
- **Think about where you want to go.** Your network should reflect where you want to go, not just where you’ve been. **Add people to your network who reflect issues, jobs, industries, and areas of interest.** If you are a career changer, consider joining business groups connected to your desired career path.
- **Make the process of connecting a priority.** Make connecting a habit—part of your lifestyle. **Connecting is just as important as your exercise routine. It breathes life into you and gives you confidence.** Find out how your network is doing in this environment, what steps they are taking, and how you can help. As you connect, the world will feel smaller and a small world is much easier to manage.

Job networking tip 6: *Take the time to maintain your network*

Maintaining your job network is just as important as building it. **Accumulating new contacts can be beneficial, but only if you have the time to nurture the relationships.** Avoid the impulse to meet as many new people as possible. The key is quality, rather than quantity.

Schedule time with your key contacts

List the people who are crucial to your network—people you know who can and have been very important to you. There may be some you have lost touch with. Reconnect and schedule a regular meeting or phone call. You don't need a reason to get in touch. It will always make you feel good and provide you with an insight or two.

Prioritize the rest of your contacts

Keep a running list of people you need to reconnect with. People whose view of the world you value. People you'd like to get to know better or whose company you enjoy. Prioritize these contacts and then schedule time into your regular routine so you can make your way down the list.

Keep notes on the people in your network

To maintain your contacts, new and old, requires remembering aspects of their lives. Keep a notebook with information about their families, their jobs, their interests, and their needs and update it after each conversation. Unless you have a photographic memory, you won't remember all of this information unless you write it down.

Find ways to reciprocate

Always remember that successful networking is a two-way street. Your ultimate goal is to cultivate mutually beneficial relationships. That means giving as well as receiving. Send a thank-you note, ask them about their family, email an article you think they might be interested in, and 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.

Adapted from HelpGuide.org, <http://www.helpguide.org/articles/work-career/job-networking-tips.htm>