

Network to Work Meeting

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RESOURCE DOCUMENT – *NETWORKING & THE JOB SEARCH*

All About Networking

What is Networking?

Networking is the ongoing process of talking with people and expanding your circle of connections in service of your employment goals. It is a strategy for learning about new opportunities and possibilities through connecting with others –people you know well, acquaintances, and new people you’ve never met before.

Networking isn’t one sided, however. It isn’t about asking for a job, shameless self promotion, or using other people. Rather, it is about building mutually beneficial new relationships and re-invigorating existing ones in order to gain information to help your job search, while at the same time learning about others and giving back to them as well, sharing information and providing assistance to each new connection to the extent possible. It’s about helping others as well as helping yourself.

The Benefits of Networking

Why should you network? Most jobs aren’t advertised, and successful networking allows you to access the hidden job market and increase your chances of obtaining a job that hasn’t been advertised. Furthermore, networking can result in you being personally referred to a hiring manager, which will give you an advantage over the others in a large pile of applicants.

When you network, you should be sharing with another information about yourself, your job goals and your career interests. At the same time, you should be trying to learn about and connect with the other person. Ultimately, you will be seeking information or assistance from that person. When you network as part of your career search, you could be looking for all manner of information or assistance. Job leads. The opportunity for an informational interview to learn more about a company or career field. Introductions to individuals who work for a particular organization. A request for

someone to review your resume and cover letter, or assist with a practice interview. A connection who might be able to check on the status of your job application or put in a good word about you.

You are Already Networking - and May Not Realize It

Many people see networking as something that only very assertive and outgoing people do well. The truth is that everyone networks. You probably network without even knowing it. Every time you have a discussion with someone about your life - whether it be that you are looking for a job, a plumber or a good yoga class - you are networking. In short, you are sharing information about yourself and the workings of your life while also seeking information from another person. You are reaching out to people you know and trust for assistance; they, in turn, may refer you to people they know and trust.

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. 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.

The Networking Conversation

As you go into a networking conversation, it is important to have prepared a brief “elevator speech” that concisely tells a bit about you, your skills and what you're looking for. It should be tailored to each particular meeting, as it will be different when you're seeking a referral than when you are trying to gather information about a particular job. It is very important to be clear in your goal. Is it a referral to someone else, information on a company or industry, a personal introduction? Don't be shy in telling the person how they can help. People feel good when they can help another, so the more specific you can be about how they can help, the better.

Here are some examples of requests that you might make in the course of networking.

- “I'm looking for an entry level position as (type of job) at small companies such as (name of companies). Do you know anyone at those places?”
- “I'm looking for an introduction to a person at (a certain employer).”
- What kinds of prior experience/training are needed for this kind of job?
- 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? Which of my skills should I showcase?
- Who else do you know that might be willing to speak with me as well? May I use your name when contacting him/her?

Networking Don'ts

Your networking strategy should include job fairs and other gatherings of professionals. To make the most of these events and have the best outcomes, avoid these Networking Don'ts:

1. Being unprepared.

You never know when the opportunity to network may arise so you want to be prepared to make a good first impression. Keep your resume up to date and ensure your appearance is neat and clean.

2. Using the event to peddle your resume.

Pushing your resume on anyone with a pulse (or using the guerilla-marketing tactic of leaving your resume on every table) can make you look like you are only there to advance your own cause. Most people will discard an out-of-context resume that's been forced on them and forget they've ever met you. Those that do remember will recall you as pushy and self-promoting. Do bring your resume — but keep it to yourself, unless your new contact asks for it.

3. Going on a business-card collecting spree.

A networking event is not a hunt, and there is no reward for collecting the most business cards. Your goal should be to create meaningful connections, not to capture that business card and move on to the next target. If people sense you are looking over their shoulder looking for the next opportunity to “work the room”, they likely will not be interested in helping you. It is better to slow down and focus your attention on the person you are in conversation with. An hour spent with one good contact with whom you seem attuned is a networking success.

4. Treating anyone as unimportant / not taking time to make a real connection.

Treat everyone you meet like they could make a real difference in your life. Be respectful and present, even if the connection is brief.

5. Failing to ask for help.

Some feel that asking for introductions or advice makes them look weak, but in fact, making a request for an introduction is at the core of the networking process. Networking only works when people make new connections. By being respectful, polite, and humble, you can reinforce the relationships you have and build new ones.

6. Being glued to your cell phone.

Networking events can be uncomfortable and cell phones can provide an easy escape. However, checking messages or scrolling through emails doesn't make you look smart, busy, or important; rather, it makes you look unapproachable, or worse, disrespectful. If you are expecting an

important call, feel free to keep that phone nearby — but turn off the ringer and resist the urge to check for texts and emails.

7. Failing to follow up or respond to others' challenges.

Post-event follow up is an opportunity to reinforce your professional image. If you promised someone you would send an article, make an introduction, or schedule a meeting, get it done within 24 hours. If someone expressed a challenge they were facing that you can help with, respond no later than the next morning with something of value in their situation. Positioning yourself as a resource to others will make you more valuable to them and their contacts over time.

8. Forgetting to be grateful.

Remember that no one owes you anything — not a meeting, introduction or a recommendation. Be reasonable in your expectations and don't ask for favors you would normally only ask of trusted friends or long-time colleagues. If you have just met someone, don't insist that they introduce you to the head of their company. Be grateful for any help or advice that you do receive and follow up with a hand-written thank-you note, a personal email, or a quick phone call to acknowledge the other person's effort. This will go a long way towards reinforcing the relationship. Courtesy counts!

Characteristics of Effective Networkers

There are certain characteristics of individuals who are truly effective at networking. They know how to come across in manner that doesn't appear pushy or self-serving. The following are key characteristics that will make you a great networker.

1. Good listener. Being a good listener tops the list. Networking success depends on how well you can listen and learn. Listen to people's needs and concerns and find opportunities to help them. You can't help others if you don't know what they need, and you find out what they need by listening

2. Positive attitude. The first thing that people see from you is your attitude, how you handle yourself day in and day out. A consistently negative attitude makes people dislike you and drives away referrals; a positive attitude makes people want to associate with you.

3. Helps others. People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. Helping people shows that you care. It can be done in a variety of ways, from emailing a helpful article to

someone to putting them in touch with a person who can help with a specific challenge. A willingness to collaborate and help others is essential for building trust and establishing a strong relationship.

4. Sincere/authentic. Those who are successful networkers show their sincerity at every turn. If you're not being authentic and sincere in your interest in the other person, they'll know it.

5. Follows up. If you are offered opportunities, whether it's a simple piece of information, a special contact or a qualified business referral, but consistently fail to follow up, people will stop trying to help you.

6. Trustworthy. A referral partner is putting their reputation on the line when they make a referral, and a successful networker can be trusted to handle that referral well.

7. Approachable. People don't forget how you make them feel, and when you are approachable, people feel comfortable. It is from this place that relationships are born. Effective networking always starts with approachability.

8. Ask interesting questions. You should be aware of the present situation and ask the right questions in an appropriate manner. Here are some great networking questions:

1. *"What brings you here?"*

Asking this question demonstrates an interest in the other person as opposed to an interest in how that person can help you. Their response will give you a sense of what they are working on and help you to figure out how you can be of service to them.

2. *"How did you get involved in the industry / company?"*

Once you know a little bit more about somebody's professional background, ask them how they got their start. It can provide valuable takeaways for you, as well as make you seem more likable. Showing interest and enthusiasm makes a memorable and lasting impression.

3. *"Since you work in the industry, how do you feel about X?"*

Asking about a specific, timely event in an industry or company is a great way to show that you are knowledgeable and thoughtful. First impressions matter, and in addition to being nice and approachable, the best thing you can do is to demonstrate how you think and what you know.

4. *"How would someone get their foot in the door in your company / industry?"*

While the ultimate objective of networking is often to get a job, coming out and asking somebody you just met to help you get one can be pretty off-putting. However, that doesn't mean you can't approach the topic at all — you just have to do so delicately. This question is

a subtle way to ask about opportunities, and if you are lucky, they will ask you if you are interested and then provide you with a business card to follow-up with them after the event.

5. *“Based on your journey, what do you wish someone would have told you earlier in your career?”*

This is a great question to ask if you're speaking with somebody who is more senior than you are. It allows them to impart the knowledge they've acquired over the years with you, as well as appeals to their ego. Generally speaking, people are much more comfortable sharing their wisdom than they are sharing their contacts, and that wisdom is valuable as well.

6. *“How do you spend your time outside of work?”*

Since networking is all about forming connections with others, it's okay to engage in casual chitchat. Questions like this one help people open up and discuss their passions and make it clear that you don't expect the interaction to be purely transactional.

7. *“What's the best way for me to get in touch / follow up with you?”*

Asking this question this way is much better than saying ‘may I have your card?’. It shows you view the individual as a person, not merely a contact, and that your interaction is not simply transactional but rather about relationship building.

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