

## Network to Work Meeting

January 2023

### RESOURCE DOCUMENT – *NETWORKING & THE JOB SEARCH*

## All About Networking

### What is Networking?

Networking is the ongoing process of talking with people and growing the circle of people you know, all as part of your job search. It's a way to learn about opportunities and possibilities by connecting with others – people you know well, your 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 new relationships where each party can help and support the other. It is bringing new life to current relationships so you can gain helpful information, while at the same time you are helping them with information and assistance to the extent possible. Networking is about helping others as well as helping yourself.

### The Benefits of Networking

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

When you network, you should share 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. When you network as part of your career search, you can be looking for all kinds 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 or in a field of interest to you. 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. 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'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**

When networking, it is helpful to have prepared a brief “elevator speech” that concisely tells a bit about you, your skills and what you're looking for. You should tailor it for 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 about what you are looking for. 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 a small company 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?

## Characteristics of Effective Networkers

There are certain characteristics of individuals who are good networkers. They know how to come across in way that doesn't seem pushy or self-serving. Here are key characteristics of 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.** Someone who refers you to another is putting their reputation on the line when they do so, 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.

## Networking Post Pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic separated people and restricted the making of new connections and relationships. As the world now opens back up, it's time to put renewed focus on professional growth and networking.

But how to start reprioritizing networking?

One way is to **reenergize dormant ties**. Make a list of people you know but haven't seen or interacted with much during the past few years. What relationships would you like to refresh? Reach out to your old trusty network connections.

It is also helpful to **get back to the basics of practicing small talk** as a way to connect with strangers. Try to identify things you have in common with the other person. The pandemic instilled in many a fear of strangers, and finding these commonalities can help to build trust in people.

Don't hesitate to take advantage of the once-unconventional networking methods that have now become the norm, such as **using social media sites like LinkedIn to make new contacts**. There you can create a profile and content that presents you in a professional and authentic manner. On social media it is acceptable to reach out to a stranger for the purpose of professional networking. When doing so, it is important to be courteous and clear about your intentions. Do you want to set up a brief meeting to discuss their career path? Are you seeking information about job openings at their company? Be brief and respectful of the recipient's time.

Finally, **take advantage of virtual meeting platforms such as Zoom to meet with others**. It is now possible to build relationships, while at home, with people across the world. Networking in the pandemic meant fewer barriers to meeting people and in fact expanded opportunities. As there is no longer the expectation to meet in person, people often find it easier to fit a virtual meeting into their schedule. Take care, however, to be sure that you and your surroundings are "camera ready".

Remember, **once you have made a connection, make an effort to maintain that relationship**. A quick note every few months is often sufficient. Seek to establish a two-sided relationship. It is also important to "pay it forward"; whenever possible, make genuine recommendations or help to connect other professionals. Think of networking as providing value to someone else, so even if you are helping two other individuals to connect, you are being an excellent networker.

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