



Successful Networking: What is it and how do I do it?

Did you know that only 20% of jobs are ever advertised? The remaining 80% of jobs represent the “hidden job market.” Networking generally fills these positions. Usually, companies will look to people within the organization (a “known entity”) or to individuals who come recommended to them from people within the organization which, in turn, helps to decrease recruiting costs.

What is networking?

Networking is the process of establishing, building, and maintaining relationships (contacts) as a source of gathering information. Networking is not merely handing out resumes or business cards, asking for jobs or leads, being pushy or overbearing. In contrast, *to be effective at networking you must:*

- Show a genuine interest in the other individual.
- Build a strong rapport by being friendly and enthusiastic.
- Recognize the importance of the two-way nature of networking and thus mutually sharing information and advice with the other individuals to assist them in achieving their goals.

Advantages to becoming proficient at networking

- Have earlier chances at opportunities for employment (less competition).
- Experience greater satisfaction in job as you may influence job description or roles.
- Avoid the advertised market where positions are sometimes close to being filled from within an organization.

Network to

- Explore career fields.
- Identify job search leads.
- Build & manage your career over time.

Developing a network list

Your initial networking list can come from a variety of sources:

- Personal Contacts: family, friends, neighbors, classmates, acquaintances, organizations, church groups
- Work Contacts: co-workers, supervisors, colleagues
- Educational Contacts: teachers & professors, academic advisors, athletic coaches, alumni networks
- Professional Group Contacts: Chamber of Commerce, professional trade associations, career centers
- Professional Contacts: doctor, dentist, optometrist, lawyer, accountant, banker, insurance agent, realtor

Brainstorm as many potential contacts as possible. It is also important not to overlook or underestimate the magnitude of “chance encounters,” such as waiting in line at the supermarket, sitting next to someone on the bus, or the individual standing alone at a party.

Ways in which you can naturally build or increase your network of contacts

- Volunteering
- Job shadowing
- Joining a club, organization, or professional association
- Informational interviewing

The preferred method to network is face-to-face on the individuals’ own turf. The contacts will be more apt to be relaxed in a familiar environment and generate better ideas for you. Also, when you are at their offices, the contacts may have business sources readily available, or may introduce you to other key people.

Prioritizing Contacts

The next step after generating a list of contacts is to prioritize them into 3 groups:

Group A: This group has the ability to make referrals to put you in contact with professionals working in your field or people working in organizations of interest to you. This group may also advise you on your resume, critique your presentation style, and help identify skill areas.

Group B: This group may or may not know of specific job opportunities, but can provide information on knowledge of the industry, ideas on how to approach people, current needs in the industry, and necessary skills required.

Group C: This group has authority to hire you for the work you want with their company if a job/need exists. Do not be worried if you do not have many C's. Keep in mind that your A's and B's will refer you to the C's.

Networking: The Process

Networking for some can be an intimidating or daunting process. You may want to practice on your "A" group before moving on to your "B" group. The following are some tips on how to network.

- **Create a sound bite or personal pitch.** This may include information on your education, skills or developed areas of expertise, along with characteristics of the job or workplace in which you'd like to work.
- **Explain the nature of your call.** Ask to meet with him/her (preferably at the office) for an interview lasting 20 minutes. If you were referred by another person, it is a good idea to mention this fact as it helps to establish a frame of reference for the individual.
- When meeting with the contact, **establish rapport with the individual.** When you establish a relationship with a contact, he/she will be more willing to refer you to others or pass your resume along.
- **Don't be afraid to ask for names of other professionals** whom you might want to interview to help you in your job search. These contacts may either be inside or outside of the organization. Also, ask for advice about breaking into the profession.
- If you are given another individual's name as a potential contact, **follow up with him/her in a timely fashion.** Make sure to check back with your original contact from time to time to advise them person of your status or progress. Be professional and send a thank-you note to express your appreciation for the help.

Networking over the Phone

Face-to-face contact when networking is generally the best method. If you find yourself using the telephone to network consider the following:

- Practice what you are going to say ahead of time.
- Try not to speak too quickly or too slowly and enunciate clearly.
- Do not use a lot of fillers (ums or ahs) when speaking.
- Use the inflection of your voice to indicate enthusiasm that cannot be seen on your face.
- Keep a notepad and pen or pencil handy to jot down any notes.
- **Remember: The way in which your message is communicated may be more important than the actual message.**

Final Thoughts on Networking

- Be specific about what you need.
- Set realistic and attainable goals.
- Be organized and keep good records.
- Don't pass up a time to network—it can happen anywhere!
- Maintain a positive frame of mind.
- Follow up with others in a timely fashion.
- Thank those who have helped you along the way.
- Continue to network after you have found a job.
- Return the favor and be helpful to others.