

NETWORKING

The number one way to find a job is through networking. Some studies claim that networking is responsible for upward of 83 percent of new hires. Not the Internet, not resume blasts, not career fairs – networking. Are you using this skill? Do you know where to start? How to use it effectively?

SO WHAT EXACTLY IS NETWORKING?

Let's start with what it is not. Networking is not collecting a stack of business cards or seeing how many people you can meet at an event. It is not a numbers game.

Networking is creating opportunities to meet people and investing in mutually beneficial relationships that can support your long-term goals. It's about developing relationships and nurturing them. Networking is authentic; it is as much about the other person as it is about you.

Very rarely is it one dimensional. Remember the word "network." The relationships build upon each other, creating a web of influencers and supporters.

HOW TO GET STARTED

Take a moment to think of the people you know. Let's get started:

- Former bosses
- Colleagues from former jobs
- Friends
- Classmates
- Friends' parents
- Relatives
- People you met while volunteering
- Former and current teachers/professors

Who from this list would have good advice on professionalism, your long-term goals, your field of choice, job searching skills? How many of them might know someone they could introduce you to in your desired field, discipline, or organization to goals and aspirations?

EXPAND YOUR LIST

- Join organizations and professional associations—don't just join, participate
- Volunteer
- Introduce yourself to the guest speaker in class, get his/her business card and ask if you may call
- Attend conferences in your field; better yet, present at a conference (talk to a professor)
- Expand your contacts and groups on LinkedIn and introduce yourself to professionals
- Participate professionally on blogs, LinkedIn groups, Twitter, and other social media
- Research professionals in your field and ask for an informational interview
- Make eye contact, talk to people in elevators, and strike up conversations

IT'S EASIER THAN YOU THINK

You will find that many people enjoy talking, especially about themselves and their interests. Inquire about their hobbies, their travels—anything that is non-invasive. Listen carefully; you just might have something to add. Use their name several times in the conversation. This will not only help you remember it, but will also make the other person feel like you are really interested in them.

NURTURING YOUR NETWORK

There's an old marketing adage: To get someone to remember a message, they have to hear it three times; to get them to act on the message, they need to hear it six times. In these days of hyper-stimulation and information overload, these numbers are rising rapidly. Find ways to get through the clutter and create multiple opportunities to connect. You'll build deeper relationships quicker.

Always ask for a business card or get their contact information. Then add it to your contact management system, whether you use a Gmail address book, LinkedIn, Outlook, Plaxo, or another system. Staying organized will help a lot in networking. You may want to keep notes on people you've met to help trigger your memory down the road.

Find some way to follow-up with your new contact. Arrange to meet again over coffee, invite them to a lecture you think they would enjoy, or send them an interesting Internet link on a subject you discussed. Relationships are two-sided; make sure you are investing in the relationship, not just taking from it.

Lack of follow-through is a sure way to kill a good contact opportunity. If you promise to send something, make a call, or do any other action, do it. Confirm your interest in the relationship and the person, while demonstrating your professionalism.

USING YOUR NETWORK TO FIND A JOB

It's a daunting fact, but 75 to 80 percent of jobs are not posted. Instead they are found through referrals and direct company contact. The most successful way to get access to these non-posted positions is through networking. As much as possible, make personal contact (over coffee, e-mails, phone calls, etc.) with people in your network and be clear that you are looking to start your job search. Share with them the kinds of jobs or industries you are interested in, as well as a few skills and talents you bring to the positions. Ask if they would help make an introduction to other professionals in your field or if they've heard of any open positions or companies that are expanding. **This is very important.** Do not ask "Can you help me find a job?" Instead say "Do you know of someone in my field with whom I may talk to learn more about X,Y, Z?" When you use this approach, your contacts won't feel responsible for your success, but will feel more like an advisor or supporter.

Don't just contact your network once. Keep the people who are interested in your job search up to date on your activities. Drop them a quick e-mail stating something like: "Your advice that I contact hotels for a management training position was very helpful. Next week I have two interviews: one with the Windsor Court and one with the Hilton. Thank you so much! I'll let you know how they go." Or: "It's been a few weeks since we last spoke, so I want to let you know about the interesting job leads I've found. I just had a phone interview with the Children's Museum and I've had two interviews with the Audubon Institute. It is exciting to learn that I have some marketable skills in event planning. Thank you for helping me recognize that this is a growing industry in New Orleans. I'll write again as soon as some offers start coming in."

DEBUNKING A MYTH

You don't have to be funny, beautiful, or extraverted to be good at networking. The best networkers are people who are good listeners, warm, confident, look successful, and can speak on a variety of subjects. They nurture their relationships and become valuable resources to others. Networking has great payoffs. Not only can it provide leads for a job search or to build your business success, but it can be fun. Get out there and meet some people.