

Job Networking Tips

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How to Find a Job by Building Relationships!

Finding a job in today's economy can be tough, but there are opportunities if you know where to look. The best way to find these opportunities is not through online job boards, the classifieds, or employment agencies—it's by talking to people around you. Your network of friends, relatives, colleagues, and acquaintances is a valuable job search resource. Networking may sound intimidating, but it can be rewarding and fun, even if you're shy or feel like you don't know many people.

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 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 that 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 very good chance that at least a few 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, co-workers, colleagues, and even casual acquaintances. Start writing down names, and you'll be surprised at how quickly the list grows.

Think about people you know from former jobs, high school and college, church, your child's school, the gym, social media, or your neighborhood. Also think about people you've met through your close connections: your sister's co-worker; your best friend's boss; your college roommate's spouse; friends of your parents; your uncle's business partner. Don't forget to include people like your doctor, landlord, accountant, dry cleaner, or yoga instructor.

Are you 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.
- 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.

Job networking tip 2: Reach out to your network

Once you've drawn up your list, start making contact with 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. Asking for specific information, leads, or an interview is much more focused and easier for the networking source.

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.

Job networking tip 3: Improve your communication skills

Effective communication is a cornerstone of job networking. It is a set of learned skills that include: attentive listening, recognizing and using nonverbal cues, managing stress in the moment, and understanding the emotions of yourself and the person you're communicating with.

Communication tips:

Attentive listening

Effective listening means not just understanding the words or the information being communicated, but also understanding how the speaker feels about what they're communicating. To listen well, remember to:

- **Focus fully on the speaker** and his or her body language.. If you find it hard to concentrate on the person, try repeating the speaker's words over in your head.
- **Avoid interrupting** or trying to redirect the conversation to your concerns. Listening is not the same as waiting for your turn to talk. You can't concentrate on what someone's saying if you're forming what you're going to say next.
- **Show your interest** in what's being said. Nod occasionally, smile at the person, and make sure your posture is open and inviting.

Nonverbal communication

Wordless communication, or body language, includes facial expressions, body movement and gestures, eye contact, posture, and the tone of your voice.

- You can enhance communication by using open body language—arms uncrossed, standing with an open stance or sitting on the edge of your seat, and keeping eye contact with the person you're talking to.
- Body language can emphasize or enhance your verbal message—patting a friend on the back while complimenting him on his success, for example, or pounding your fists to underline your message.

Managing stress

To quickly deal with stress while communicating:

- **Recognize when you're becoming stressed.** Are your muscles tight? Are your hands clenched? Is your breath shallow?
- **Take a moment to calm down.** Take a few deep breaths, clench and relax your muscles, or take a break. Stroll outside or spend a few minutes in a quiet place to regain your balance.
- **Bring your senses to the rescue.** The best way to rapidly and reliably relieve stress is through your senses: sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell. Wearing a favorite perfume or cologne, or keeping a photo of your family at hand may help to calm you.
- **Find the humor.** When used appropriately, humor is a great way to diffuse stress. Lighten the mood by sharing a joke or amusing story.

Job networking tip 4: Focus on building relationships

Networking is a give-and-take process that 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. All you have to do is reach out.

- **Be authentic.** In any job search or networking situation, being you—the real you—should be your goal. Pursuing what you want and not what you think others will like, will always be more fulfilling and ultimately more successful.
- **Be considerate.** If you're reconnecting with an old friend or colleague, take the time to get caught-up before you blurt out your need. On the other hand, if this is a professional you don't know well, be respectful of his or her time and be direct with your request.
- **Ask for advice, not a job.** A request comes with a lot of pressure. 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.** Before you go reconnect, do a little homework. Be prepared 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 be ready with an update on your qualifications and recent professional experience.

Job networking tip 5: 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 irrational impulse to meet as many new people as possible. The key is quality, rather than quantity. Focus on cultivating and maintaining your existing network. You're sure to discover an incredible array of information, knowledge, expertise, and opportunities.

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. Invariably, there will be some you have lost touch with. Reconnect and then 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.

Take notes on the people in your network

Collecting cards and filing them is a start but maintaining your contacts, new and old, requires updating. Add notes about their families, their jobs, their interests, and their needs. Unless you have a photographic memory, you won't remember all of this information unless you write it down. Put these updates and notes on the back of their business cards or input them into your contact database.

Find ways to reciprocate

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.