Resource Guide: Networking
Networking

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Networking

Networking is the personal process of linking with others to exchange information, advice, support, or ideas. By investing in relationships one can achieve goals and expand contacts to create long-term opportunities. All aspects of our life offer opportunities to network. There is a good chance you already have a strong network of contacts to get you started. Friends, former coworkers, or classmates often share similar background, interests, and possibly even career goals. Think about the people you already know who might be able to help in your job search. These people may have a wealth of information and resources for you.

Why Network?

Circling the want ads is no longer the best way to search for a job. Even searching for jobs on dedicated internet sites may not be the most effective use of your time. These resources are available to everyone, which means your résumé might be one among many, making it difficult to distinguish yourself. As easy as these internet job sites may seem to be, filtering through the results can be time consuming and difficult. Not all listings are legitimate and the information can sometimes be vague, misleading, or simply out of date. You could end up applying to jobs that have already been filled. One way to better your chances is look at sites that specialize in your field or even sites listing jobs in your immediate area rather than nationwide search engines. Another way would be to find companies that you want to work for and go directly to their sites.

There are many jobs, however, that go unadvertised. Companies often rely on their current employee networks or on concentrated pools of professionals to avoid being overwhelmed by candidates who may not even be qualified. You can break into these hidden markets by simply taking the time to develop a network.

How to Network

Networking is all about getting yourself out there and making social contacts. While it may be difficult when searching for a new job to look beyond those in your current circle, building new relationships and connections can lead you to new opportunities you may not have found on your own. There are a variety of ways for you to make new contacts and expand your network.

Online:

Social networks such as Facebook, LinkedIn, or Twitter are all popular networking sites. However, it is important if you intend on using these sites as part of your professional marketing effort, that you remember to keep them professional. Make sure the image of yourself you are putting out there is the image you wish potential employers to see. It is also important to maintain these networking sites with current information and regular activity, if you know you will not use a specific social site don’t sign up for that site. You can also increase your visibility and create contacts through message boards, online groups, websites, and blogs related to your field.
In Person:

Attend conferences related to your profession or desired profession. Seminars, classes, and conferences related to your field are a good way to get to know people with your shared interests and may allow you to demonstrate your talents and expertise. Even volunteering can help you connect with a variety of individuals from different walks of life; volunteering often entails teamwork and will show your ability to accomplish goals and work with others. These are all great ways to meet people with similar interests who may become professional contacts in the future.

Find a Mentor

Cultivating a relationship with someone more established, who has more experience and has achieved what you wish to one day achieve, may provide greater insight into your industry. You will learn a lot more from their experience and guidance then you would on your own. It can open up opportunities and help you advance more quickly. They can also introduce you to their own social network, helping you create contacts with other people in your.

Create a Personal Sound Bite

Create a 15 to 30 second promotion for yourself that sums up your brand in a way that catches your listener’s attention without wasting time. These are sometimes called elevator speeches; they are short, sweet and to the point. This is a good networking tool that will help prepare you for interview questions and brief networking encounters.

Your sound bite should say:

- Who you are
- What it is you do that provides value
- What you bring to an organization
- What makes you distinctive
- What others would say your greatest strengths are
- What accomplishments you can brag about
Becoming a Better Networker

1. **Identify your goals**

   Decide early on what you want to accomplish: a new position, increased visibility, greater expertise. Then write a 30 day to 12 month plan of action.

2. **Understand and prepare your conversations in advance**: Since networking is about reciprocity, focus on the value you bring to a relationship. Describe your experiences succinctly and the role you can play – so that people get an understanding of how you can contribute. Prepare different descriptions for different audiences: hiring managers, peers, and potential future managers. Then figure out what solutions or resources you can offer before requesting their support.

3. **Be genuine and generous**: Recognize that it can only help you to take an interest in people and what they are telling you. Being helpful, thoughtful and receptive will make your interaction (over email, on the phone, or face-to-face) more memorable and make them more willing to help you in the future.

4. **Aim for face-to-face contact**: Modern communications help us keep in touch more easily than ever before, and this boosts the size and strength of our networks. However, whenever possible, aim for face-to-face or even web conference meetings. These help cement relationships, enforce good first impressions, and enable a freer exchange of ideas and expertise.

5. **When meeting in person, ask the right questions and learn to exit conversations gracefully**: When participating in a networking event, asking the right, affirmative questions can help with all of the advice above. Ask open rather than closed questions (i.e., questions that require more than a “yes” or “no” answer). This will help the conversation flow and it will spark more ideas and follow-up questions. It will also show the person that you are interested in what they have to say and, in turn, make them more willing to ask questions of you. It will also help you get to know them quickly and work out whether the two of you will benefit from future contact.

   Face-to-face networking also requires people to learn how to finish a conversation in the right manner. Practice the content needed to finish a conversation, either by introducing the person you’re speaking with to someone else (or asking them to introduce you), or by simply thanking them for the conversation and promising to carry out any follow-up steps. As long as you do this politely and at the right time (i.e., after you’ve both had the opportunity to ask the right questions), nobody will mind.

6. **Communicate early and often**: Ensure that you follow-up promptly on anything you promised to do when first meeting a new contact (especially if you used that promise to gracefully exit the conversation). Also, make sure to stay in touch with your network. Sending articles of interest is a nice touch as well. They’ve carried on a relationship with you because you are useful to them, and so use what you learn to suggest things to others; you’ll be amazed how reciprocal these relationships can become.
Links

Business Insider: How to Network Like a Pro

How to Network Without Being Phony, Lame or Desperate

5 Steps to a Powerful LinkedIn Profile