

TOP NETWORKING TECHNIQUES FOR JOB-HUNTERS

Networking is the process of developing relationships with a group of relatives, friends, and acquaintances who can assist you with locating the information that you need to find a job. Ideally, a network will help you to identify where the available jobs are as well as give you the personal introductions and background information needed to pursue them. Many job-hunters admit that they are nervous and reluctant to start the process of networking - usually because they don't understand the process and have no idea where to begin. However, by not utilizing every networking opportunity, these people are greatly limiting their potential for success in the job hunt.

Networking is touted by many career counselors as one of the most effective marketing techniques available to job-hunters as well as the direct route to the hidden job market. Indeed, 70% of all new jobs are found not from answering the want ads or sending out hundreds of unsolicited resumes - these jobs are acquired as a direct result of networking.

Networking does require more effort on the part of the job-hunter. Combing the want ads each evening and preparing mailings to send to prospective employers are passive job-search techniques requiring little effort or investigation on your part. However, actually finding a job using these methods will require more than just a little bit of luck. Networking, on the other hand, is proactive. It is self-promotion and the process of establishing links with individuals in a position to connect you with your desired job.

Why You Should Network?

There are many reasons why you should network. Here are just a few:

1. It is your ticket to the hidden job-market that you would have no access to otherwise.
2. It gives you a chance to learn important information about various industries, companies, and jobs.
3. You gain insider information about the hiring practices of specific companies.
4. You get the opportunity to promote yourself and leave others with the impression that you are an intelligent and capable person.
5. You receive valuable advice about the job search process.
6. You will almost always obtain referrals to others who can offer you even more information.

How To Make Contact

Begin the networking process by making a list of everyone you have come into contact with in the last 10 years. Try to make your list as inclusive as possible. Don't leave anyone out, you never know where they may lead you. Include friends, family, distant relatives, friends of the family, co-workers, former employers, neighbors, professors, members of your religious organization, your banker, lawyer, dentist, hairdresser, members of professional organizations you belong to, and anyone else you can think of. Keep brainstorming until you have a list of 100-200 people.

Compose a letter to each person on the list. Briefly explain your career objective and that you are currently seeking employment. Stress that at this point of your job-search, you are mainly doing research. Ask them for advice, information, and referrals. Let them know that you will be contacting them by telephone and make sure you do. Promptly follow up any leads and send a thank-you note expressing your gratitude to each person you have made contact with.

Conduct Informational Interviews

Eventually, your networking will lead you directly to individuals with direct contacts in your chosen profession. When this occurs, you may wish to ask them for an appointment to conduct an informational interview. In an informational interview, the typical process will be reversed and instead of being interviewed yourself, *you* will have the opportunity to do the interviewing. Your goal in an interview of this type is only to receive advice, information, and referrals. Although it may happen, never go into an informational interview with the expectation that you will be offered a job. This puts the interviewee on the spot and will leave them with the feeling that they have been manipulated and deceived.

Before heading out the door, put some extra effort into preparing for the interview. Learn as much as you can about the individual, their profession, and their company. The time spent doing this will pay off by both flattering and impressing the interviewee, increasing the odds that they will remember you when they hear of a job opening. Prepare a list of questions that you can refer to if you get nervous. Plan on 45 minutes to one hour of dialogue. Use this time to ask questions about various aspects of your chosen profession, about how you should focus your job-search, and about how you can strengthen your resume (make sure you bring one to leave with them). Don't forget to bring along a pad of paper and pen so that you can jot down the advice you are given. At the end of the interview, be sure to thank the individual for their time and ask if they could refer you to two or three other people who may be able to help you on your job search. Always follow up within 48 hours with a thank-you letter reiterating your interests and asking them to remember you when they hear of a job opening.

Networking Opportunities On The Internet

The Internet offers job seekers the opportunity to network with others in their field both nationally and internationally. If you have access, be sure to subscribe to newsgroups and mailing lists devoted to your chosen profession. After reading the group for a week or two so that you have become familiar to the types of postings, become an active and contributing member. Make it clear in your posts that you are seeking employment, possibly even including a link to your hypertext resume. If done in a professional manner, you can quickly develop networking contacts in this way.

Five Important Things To Remember

1. Seek to expand your own network by tapping into other's networks. Always ask for referrals. In this way, your own network will expand rapidly, gaining you access to professionals in your field that you would have no link to otherwise.
2. Never directly ask individuals in your network for a job. Instead, ask for information, referrals, and advice. Although finding a job is your ultimate goal, the subtle approach will be much more successful.
3. Expect rejection but don't let it stop you. Some people will simply be too busy to offer you any time. However, if you are genuine and sincere in your request for information and advice, you place the person in the position of trusted advisor, a concept that is very flattering to many people. In this way you increase your odds of receiving more positive responses to your requests.
4. Always send a sincere thank-you letter within 48 hours of contact. If the individual does not already have a copy of your resume, this is the time to send it. Ask them to remember you if they hear of a job opening for someone with your qualifications.
5. Stay as organized as possible. A computer database or contact manager is ideal but if they are not available, a notebook will serve the purpose. Keep track of everyone you have contacted; their name, title, address, phone number, e-mail address, how you contacted them, the outcome, and any tasks you need to follow up on.

By following the basic networking strategies outlined in this article you can gain access to the hidden job market and greatly increase your odds of finding satisfying employment. Although we do not recommend that you give up the more passive techniques of searching the want ads and sending out resumes to targeted companies, we do recommend that you give networking a fair try. Resolve to begin networking today and you will soon find that you have politely self-promoted yourself into a new job. Even more important, the relationships that you establish today with professionals in your field, will help you not only with your present job search, but every time you are ready for a career move.

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