

Networking Tips

According to CNBC, some estimates suggest that up to 70% of all jobs are not published on publicly available job search sites, and research has long shown that anywhere from half to upwards of 80% of jobs are filled through networking. If you aren't currently networking in your job search it's time to get started!

You already know how to network

Networking is nothing more than getting to know people. Whether you realize it or not, you're already networking every day and everywhere you go. You're networking when you strike up a conversation with the person next to you in line, introduce yourself to other parents at your child's school, meet a friend of a friend, catch up with a former co-worker, or stop to chat with your neighbor. Everyone you meet can help you move your job search forward.

Being open to connecting and helping others can help you find the right job, make valuable connections, and stay focused and motivated during your job search.

Networking is the best way to find a job because:

- **People conduct business 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 intense 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.

Tip 1: Make a list of the people in your network

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 else who can give you career advice or point you to a job opening. You'll never know if you don't ask!

Your network includes all of your family members, friends, neighbors, co-workers, colleagues, and even casual acquaintances. Start going through your social media accounts and address book and writing down names. 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.

Tip 2: Reach out to your network

All the connections in the world won't help you find a job if no one knows about your situation. 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. It's hard to get leads with a generic, "let me know if you hear of anything" request. You may think you'll have better job luck if you leave yourself open to all the possibilities, but the reality is that this "openness" creates a black hole that sucks all of the networking potential out of the connection.

Tip 3: Focus on building relationships

Networking is a way of relating to others, not a technique for getting a job or a favor. You don't have to hand out your business cards on street corners, cold call everyone on your contact list, or work a room of strangers. All you have to do is reach out.

Be authentic. In any job search or networking situation, being yourself—the real you—should be your goal.

Be considerate. If you're reconnecting with an old friend or colleague, take the time to get through the catching-up phase before you blurt out your appeal for help. On the other hand, if this person is a busy professional you don't know well, be respectful of his or her time and come straight out with your request.

Ask for advice, not a job. Don't ask for a job, a request comes with a lot of pressure. You want your contacts to become allies in your job search, not make them feel ambushed, so ask for information or insight instead.

Be specific in your request. Before you go off and reconnect with everyone you've ever known, get your act together and do a little homework. Be prepared to articulate 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 make sure to provide an update on your qualifications and recent professional experience.

Effective networking is not a process you should rush. This doesn't mean that you shouldn't try to be efficient and focused, but hurried, emergency networking is not conducive to building relationships for mutual support and benefit. When you network, you should slow down, be present, and try to enjoy the process. This will speed up your chances for success in the job-hunting race. Just because you have an agenda doesn't mean you can't enjoy reconnecting.

Tip 4: 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.

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. Reconnect and then schedule a regular meeting or phone call.

Prioritize the rest of your contacts

Keep a running list of people you need to reconnect with. 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

Maintaining your contacts, new and old, requires updates. 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.

Find ways to reciprocate

Always remember that successful networking is a two-way street. Your ultimate goal is to have 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 might interest them, and check in periodically to see how they're doing.

If you're nervous about making contact ...

Perhaps you're uncomfortable asking for favors, for example, or embarrassed about your employment situation. Whatever your fears, try to keep the following 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 empathize with your situation.
- Reconnecting with the people in your network should be fun—even if you have an agenda. The more it feels like a chore, the more tedious and anxiety-ridden the process will be.

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