

Networking

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Building Relationships

Networking is a concept that often sounds intimidating to job-seekers. When you break it down into its basic elements, however, networking is two not-so-scary tasks: 1) building relationships and 2) sharing information. Nearly everyone has implemented networking in the past whether they realize it or not. Have you ever asked a classmate for a suggestion on what class to take? Needed a suggestion for a good restaurant in the area and asked a friend or co-worker? This is networking!

Why Networking is Successful

It is estimated that 60% or more of jobs are found via networking. Employers prefer to find candidates via referrals because studies show that those employees tend to be more successful on the job and also stay in the position longer than those hired through other methods. It is also more time efficient and cost effective to hire someone via a referral.

Another reason networking is so highly successful is that the process of networking allows you to showcase skills and qualities that employers seek: communication skills, motivation, initiative, and confidence.

Networking Steps

Step 1: Create a List of Those in Your Network

Create a networking list that includes every friend, family member, or acquaintance that might be willing to help you out regardless of their line of work. Next, contact the people on your list, explain to them your career goals, and then ask if they have any advice or if they know of someone that you can talk to in the industry. Collect any names and contact information they provide. Ask if you can mention their name when you call the new contact.

Step 2: Call New Contacts Using Your “Elevator Speech” or “Personal Commercial”

To be effective in networking, you need to call contacts and clearly communicate what you are looking for in terms of work and what skills and experiences you can bring to the table. As a result, you should have a quick 30-60 second statement that summarizes your education, related experience and your goal.

Example

“My name is Sue Smith and I plan to graduate in May with a degree in Clothing Design. I have spent the past six months working part time at a bridal shop doing alterations. I also have extensive pattern making and construction experience through my coursework. I am currently looking for a full time job in the New York area and I am wondering if you might know of anyone who might be hiring and/or if you might be able to meet with me to give me some advice on my job search.”

Below are other great ways you can use your elevator speech with only slight adjustments:

- When someone you just met asks you “What do you do for a living?/What is your major?”
- Family members, friends or acquaintances ask you “What’s new?”
- When introducing yourself to recruiters at job fairs.
- When cold calling a stranger for an informational interview.

Step 3: Attend Events, Be Visible, Meet Others

An important part of networking is to put yourself in places to meet new people and re-connect with old acquaintances. Always be ready to use a formal or informal version of your elevator speech. You would be surprised how often strangers will share job lead information or contacts! Some ideas connecting with people:

- Join a professional association: attend professional events, and/or volunteer for the organization.
- Go to family reunions, extended family gatherings, or parties and talk to people you meet there.
- Consider striking up a conversation with a stranger on a bus, airplane or in a class.
- Join the alumni mentor program or attend alumni events in your college to meet professionals.

Step 4: Conduct Informational Interviews

Once you have generated contact names of people in your industry through family and friends, your goal should be to meet with these new individuals face to face to see their organization, get job search advice, and to learn about their jobs. This process is called Informational Interviewing and is outlined in detail on a handout in the St. Paul Campus Career Center.

Networking Tips

- Do not bluntly ask someone for a job when networking; this makes many people uncomfortable. Instead ask for more broad advice on your job search or ask them broadly if they know of any organization that is hiring (if they have an opening, they will often share it at that time.)
 - More phone calls lead to more job leads. Assign yourself a quota of calls and informational interviews to be made each week to stay on task.
 - If calling makes you uncomfortable, consider introducing yourself via email and following up with a telephone call. For a sample letter visit: <http://www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/2002/summer/art03.pdf>
 - Follow through with referrals, and always thank contacts in writing for their time.
 - Keep a resume or business card with you at all times should a chance encounter become a contact.
 - Write down your elevator speech and practice it so it flows effortlessly.
 - Stay organized when networking. Have a system for tracking contacts and take notes to remember the details about new contacts you develop.
 - Staying in contact with people is key! Ask if you can keep them posted on your search, send them articles that may be of interest, and let them know when you followed their suggestion.
 - Those who are successful at networking respect that people are busy and don’t ask for too much time.
 - Never use someone’s name without permission when calling a new contact.
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