

Networking in a Nutshell

You've likely heard about the hidden job market, revealed only to a privileged few who either know how to find it or are so well positioned and networked that it finds them. But nobody's really hiding anything. The information is out there and readily available if you know how to get it. Since most jobs are not advertised in newspapers or on job boards, proactive networking is the key to uncovering opportunities. This summary gives pointers that will help to build an effective network for finding employment.

Personal Branding – Before you start, invest time to discover and develop your personal brand because networking success is based on how well you are perceived by your contacts. Coordinate your resume, portfolio, professional media and other social profiles, and have an elevator speech with career goals in mind. Having a resume website and even video resume can help to differentiate. Remove any digital dirt from your online image so it doesn't undermine your efforts.

Circles and Groups – Identify potentially helpful people to network with and figure out what groups or circles they're in. The more meaningful your connections, the higher value the network. These will include professional organizations, trade associations, fraternities/sororities, classmates/alumni, parents/relatives, college administrators, professors, teammates, coaches, mentors, co-workers, career counselors and other employment professionals. You can join as many as fifty groups on LinkedIn. Participate in industry blogs, follow companies on Twitter and join relevant social media.

Venue: Anywhere – The best networking is face-to-face. Attending meetings, events, job fairs, conferences, seminars or nearly any gathering of people (including parties) has great networking potential. Phone networking is second and works best when combined with email or some other social medium such as LinkedIn. Social media were built for networking. LinkedIn is currently the best online venue for professional networking and is a recruiter's dream because of the ease of finding people. Leads can come from anywhere but some selective targeting will help you reach the "influencers" so you can fulfill your networking goals quicker.

Mix Pleasure with Business – What used to be a "don't" is now an essential "do", at least within reasonable limits. People befriend people they have a connection with and like, and friends are the foundation of your network. Get to know your connections personally. The line between the social network and professional network has become transparent and may eventually disappear. Bringing people together with common interests and pursuits is a fast way to grow the network and develop friendships.

Be Helpful/Add Value – The saying, "What goes around comes around" directly applies to networking. The healthiest relationships are about give and take. Here are ways you can be helpful to others in your network:

- Gather and share valuable information. Become an industry expert.
- Volunteer or ask if you can help in some way.
- Help other job seekers by sharing leads you don't want or need.
- Participate in online discussions and offer support

Schmooze – Merriam-Webster defines it: “to chat in a friendly and persuasive manner especially so as to gain favor, business, or connections.” Not the most elegant term, but schmoozing is much what networking is about. **IMPORTANT** – It is OK to ask for a favor. Some of the most effective executives and politicians have asking for favors down to a science. With networking, the most frequent favor questions are:

- Are there any other people that you would recommend I connect with?
- Are you aware of any upcoming changes that may lead to an opportunity for me?
- Are there any departments that you know of that are in need of assistance?
- Are you aware of any other companies that are looking for people?
- Have you come across any opportunities that you would pass on to me?

Network members will be receptive, as long as you don’t ask for too much or too often so keep it light. No hard selling please. But drop names and ask for something you know you have a possibility of getting. Ask it the right way – politely with confidence and logic. Avoid making it seem like you leaning on them by just gathering information. Some are more comfortable with a less direct approach to networking which is fine but takes much longer. Recruiters who make their living through networking will cut to the chase and are much more direct in their approach.

Reciprocate – Any piece of information offered no matter the value should be met with a hearty “Thank You”, but more importantly with an offer of reciprocity such as, “If there is any way in which I can return this favor please just let me know.” The pay-it-forward principal works and makes the network grow and increase in value. Favors are rarely forgotten and you will have a lifelong networking partner when you reciprocate.

Some Tips:

1. Ask contacts if they would critique your resume. Even if they do not offer advice, they will have seen your background and know you are in the market.
2. Have personal business cards with all contact info including links printed. Hand them out and collect other’s cards. Make notes on the back and build a file.
3. Tracking is important and LinkedIn can help. When you do connect with someone, get their email address and send them a LinkedIn invitation.
4. When emailing, be very specific in the subject line. If this was a referral, mention the person’s name in the subject line. Save all emails in an archive.
5. Identify people at a target company and ask them for advice on how to get a job there. Tell them you are a beginner networker and would appreciate their help.
6. Use message boards or blogs to identify thought leaders, and ask them for their opinion on something. Add them to your network.
7. When you do get a job, send personal notes to all of your contacts. A phone call or message would be nice too. Tell them to call upon you when they need help.