



Job Networking Tips

How to Find the Right Job by Building Relationships



Networking is a strategy to reveal more opportunities and more possibilities. It's a way of connecting with others: people you know, but don't *really* know, and new people you've never met before. Networking starts with a mindset and an intention to discover, explore, and be open to what you may encounter. It's about helping others *and* helping yourself.

We are wired both to connect with and help others. Without these connections we can be isolated and experience loneliness and even depression. So, real networking is about re-invigorating your relationships and engaging new connections and new networks.

You already know how to network

Are you hesitant to network out of fear of being seen as pushy, annoying, or self-serving? Don't be. Networking isn't about using other people or aggressively promoting yourself—it's about building relationships. And while it may sound intimidating, it can be rewarding and fun, even if you're shy.

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.

Tapping the hidden job market may take more planning and nerve than searching online, but it's much more effective. Adopting a networking lifestyle—a lifestyle of connecting and helping others in good times and bad—will help you find the right job, make valuable connections in your chosen field, and stay focused and motivated during your job search.

Networking is the best way to find a job because:

- **People do business primarily 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.

Job networking tip 1: You know more people than you think

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

Make a list of the people in your network

Your network is bigger than you think it is. It 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.

Yes, you *do* have a job network, and it's more powerful than you think:

- You already belong to many networks (family, friends, colleagues, fellow civic club members, etc.) and your job search network can be natural outgrowth of these primary contacts.
- Each network connects you to another network (e.g., your child's teacher can connect you with other parents, schools, and school suppliers).
- Each member of a network may know of an available job or a connection to someone who will know of one.

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 that you'll have better job luck if you leave yourself open to all the possibilities, but the reality is this "openness" creates a black hole that sucks all of the networking potential out of the connection.

A generic networking request for a job is worse than no request at all, because you can lose that networking contact and opportunity. Asking for specific information, leads, or an interview is much more focused and easier for the networking source. If you're having trouble focusing your job search, you can turn to close friends and family members for help, but avoid contacting more distant people in your network until you've set clear goals.

Start with your references

When you are looking for a job, start with your references. Your best references—the people who like you and can endorse your abilities, track record, and character—are major networking hubs.

- ▶ Contact each one of your references to network about your possibilities and affirm their agreement to be your reference.
- ▶ Describe your goals and seek their assistance.
- ▶ Keep them informed on your job search progress.
- ▶ Prepare them for any calls from potential employers.
- ▶ Let them know what happened and thank them for their help regardless of the outcome.

If you're nervous about making contact—either because you're uncomfortable asking for favors or embarrassed about your employment situation—try to keep the following things 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 sympathize with your situation.
- Unemployment can be isolating and stressful. By connecting with others, you're sure to get some much needed encouragement, fellowship, and moral support.
- Reconnecting with the people in your network should be fun—even if you have an agenda. The more this feels like a chore the more tedious and anxiety-ridden the process will be.

Tip 3: Focus on building relationships

Networking is a give-and-take process that involves making connections, sharing information, and asking questions. It's 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 you—the real you—should be your goal. Hiding who you are or suppressing your true interests and goals will only hurt you in the long run. Pursuing what you want and not what you think others will like, will always be more fulfilling and ultimately more successful.

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 need. 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. If they're able to hire you or refer you to someone who can, they will. If not, you haven't put them in the uncomfortable position of turning you down or telling you they can't help.

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.

Slow down and enjoy the job networking process

The best racecar drivers are masters of slowing down. They know that the fastest way around the track is by slowing down going into the turns, so they can accelerate sooner as they're heading into the straightaway. As you're networking, keep this "Slow in, fast out" racing mantra in mind.

Effective networking is not something that should be rushed. This doesn't mean 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.

Don't be a hit-and-run networker

Don't be a hit-and-run networker: connecting, getting what you want, and then disappearing, never to be heard from until the next time you need something. Invest in your network by following up and providing feedback to those who were kind of enough to offer their help. Thank them for their referral and assistance. Let them know whether you got the interview or the job. Or use the opportunity to report on the lack of success or the need for additional help.

Tip 4: Evaluate the quality of your network

If your networking efforts don't seem to be going anywhere, you may need to evaluate the quality of your network. Take some time to think about your network's strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities. Without such an evaluation, there is little chance your network will adapt to your needs and your future goals. You may not notice how bound you are to history, or how certain connections are holding you back. And you may miss opportunities to branch out and forge new ties that will help you move forward.

Taking inventory of your network and where it is lacking is time well spent. If you feel your network is out of date, then it's time to upgrade! Your mere awareness of your needs will help you connect you with new and more relevant contacts and networks.

Rate your network

Give yourself 1 point for each question you answer yes.

- Do you trust your network to give you the truth about the real you?
- Does your network challenge you as much as it supports you?
- Does your network feel vibrant and dynamic?
- Does your network represent your future goals as much as your past?
- Are the networks connected to your network strong?

5 pts – Your network is in great shape!

3-4 pts – You need to enhance your network.

0-2 pts – Your network needs a makeover.

Tip 5: Take advantage of both “strong” and “weak” ties

Everyone has both “strong” and “weak” ties. Strong ties occupy that inner circle and weak ties are less established. Adding people to networks is time consuming, especially strong ties. It requires an investment of time and energy to have multiple “best friends.” Trying to stay in touch with new acquaintances is just as challenging.

But adding new “weak tie” members gives your network vitality and even more *cognitive flexibility*—the ability to consider new ideas and options. New relationships invigorate the network by providing a connection to new networks, viewpoints, and opportunities.

Tips for strengthening your job network

Tap into your strong ties. Your strong ties will logically and trustingly lead to new weak ties that build a stronger network. Use your existing network to add members and reconnect with people. Start by engaging the people in your trusted inner circle to help you fill in the gaps in your network.

Think about where you want to go. Your network should reflect where you're going, not just where you've been. Adding people to your network who reflect issues, jobs, industries, and areas of interest is essential. If you are a new graduate or a career changer, join the professional associations that represent your desired career path. Attending conferences, reading journals, and keeping up with the lingo of your desired field can prepare you for where you want to go.

Make the process of connecting a priority. Make connecting a habit—part of your lifestyle. Connecting is just as important as your exercise routine. It breathes life into you and gives you confidence. Find out how your network is doing in this environment, what steps they are taking, and how you can help. As you connect, the world will feel smaller and a small world is much easier to manage.

Tip 6: 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. Focus on cultivating and maintaining your existing network. You're sure to discover an incredible array of information, knowledge, expertise, and opportunities.

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. Invariably, there will be some you have lost touch with. Reconnect and then schedule a regular meeting or phone call. You don't need a reason to get in touch. It will always make you feel good and provide you with an insight or two.

Prioritize the rest of your contacts

Keep a running list of people you need to reconnect with. People whose view of the world you value. People you'd like to get to know better or whose company you enjoy. 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

Collecting cards and filing them is a start. But 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. Put these updates and notes on the back of their business cards or input them into your contact database.

Find ways to reciprocate

Always remember that successful networking is a two-way street. Your ultimate goal is to cultivate 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 they might be interested in, and check in periodically to see how they're doing. By nurturing the relationship through your job search and beyond, you'll establish a strong network of people you can count on for ideas, advice, feedback, and support.

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