

What Really Is Networking?

Networking is simply defined as an informal process asking for:

Advice

Suggestions

Tips

Leads

Ideas

Information

The Power of Networking: A True Story

Jack lost his job as a manager right after he turned 40. He attended a career management session to learn about the phases of career transition, job search techniques, and networking, in particular.

Others in the group shared skepticism and doubted the value of getting others to help them in their job search, saying, "Why should they want to help us?" and "To be honest, I just don't have that many friends!"

Two weeks passed and the group gathered to share their successes in networking. Some had made calls, others had scheduled a few lunches. Finally, it was Jack's turn to share.

He came to the front of the room, beaming with pride and energy. "Well, let me tell you what I did and what happened," he said.

"I talked with my wife about the networking component of searching for a job. We discussed the need to get referrals, numbers, contacts, and email addresses and decided to throw a party!"

"We called friends, relatives, and neighbors to invite them to a Networking Party. Before passing through the kitchen into the party room, we asked each guest to write down three contacts for me!"

"I got plenty of numbers, leads, and some of the contacts on the list gave me other ideas, helping me think way beyond my most recent job to identify other possibilities."

The Networking Process

Networking done best is ongoing. However, most people only network when faced with a job search. This is okay, you have to start somewhere. Networking is a critical component of the job search process. Networking will help you:

- Discover positions that may not be advertised (hidden job market).
- Learn about career paths (informational interviewing).
- Increase the chances that hiring managers will see your resume and consider you for open positions.

Many people find a job through networking. In some fields, networking accounts for locating up to 90 percent of positions. Even if you're uncomfortable with the process, it's vital that you include it as a major tool in your job search. Today, social media, especially LinkedIn, plays a huge role in your networking strategy. Be sure to update your LinkedIn profile—this is crucial to a successful job search.

Most people are willing to assist others in a job search. It offers a chance to "give back," and it gives them a glimpse into what's happening in the employment market. Many people understand the value of networking, so it's likely that your contacts have used networking, too.

Remember to offer to help the other person as well. End the contact by offering appreciation and asking, is there something I might be able to help you with? Be clear on next steps.

Ask if you may contact the person again as you advance in your job search.

Always follow up with a thank-you note. (Handwritten or via email)

How to Network

Building a network involves two steps:

1. Develop a list of people to contact.
2. Create a target list—companies or organizations where you would like to work.

The first step in networking is to build a list of contacts. Start your list with family, friends, neighbors, parents of your children's friends, friends of friends, former classmates, former coworkers, and nearly everyone with whom you have had an association through the years. Add people you know from every area of your life.



Building a Network—Developing a List of People to Contact

In the space below, write the names of up to 25 people you know. Include family, neighbors, professionals, coworkers, former supervisors, customers/clients, vendors/suppliers, and members of community organizations and religious organizations. After completing the list, choose five people to contact in the next week.




Building a Network—Creating a Target List of Companies and Organizations

The second step of building a network is to create a target list of companies and organizations in which you have an interest. Your goal is to use networking to connect with people in these target companies and organizations. There are many ways to identify companies and organizations for your target list. Start your research by locating hard copy or online business and professional publications that cover your geographic area. Look for articles about companies and industries of interest. These publications will often have a “top 25” list of companies by industry or specialty. Many general daily papers and business publications publish occasional “Best Places to Work” features.

In the space below, make a list of 10-20 target companies and organizations you are interested in exploring for career opportunities:

Research each of these companies and organizations through the Internet (including company websites), informational interviews, and job postings.



Wait! Don't Pick Up the Phone Yet!

Networking requires preparation. Before beginning networking, it's important to have a good idea of who you are and what you are looking for, at least in a general sense. This is where your Statement of Introduction comes in!

Develop Your Introduction—Refer to Your Statement of Introduction

You are well prepared now for the question, “Tell me about yourself.” Use your statement of introduction to sell yourself and make a strong connection. Be personable and maintain balance. Consider how you can help the other person—try to make the benefit of the contact mutual.

Research is essential, too.

Research the person who you will be contacting. LinkedIn is a great place to start. Look for a personal connection—same college, both support the same organization through volunteer work, etc. This type of nugget is a great way to break the ice after you identify who you are and why you are making contact.

Business Cards as a Networking Tool

Using a personalized business card supports your networking efforts. After a casual conversation with someone about your interest in finding a new position, it’s both convenient and professional to hand out a personalized business card rather than hunt for a scrap of paper to write your name and contact information. Your business card will be a reminder of your visit, and your network contacts can use the back of your card for notes about follow-up activities they may offer to help you with your search.

A personalized business card can be as simple as your name, phone number, and email address. Include your field (administrative professional, graphic designer, engineer, etc.) and a few key marketing points.

Most rapid print shops can print quality cards at a minimal cost, and good-quality online business card services are also available. If you decide to print the cards yourself, use a laser printer to avoid ink smears and use high-quality card stock.

Personalized business cards are useful for networking activities such as:

- Casual conversations with people on a daily basis
- Formal networking or job support group meetings
- Job or career fairs
- Professional meetings
- Conventions
- Friends and family members networking on your behalf

Setting Up Appointments

When you contact people on your networking list, try to set up face-to-face meetings if possible. If you reach your contact by phone, explain that you'd like a face-to-face meeting to ask for advice and information, not a job. Ask for 20 minutes of time. If your call reaches your contact's assistant or another type of gatekeeper who's screening the contact's calls, point out that you're calling to set up a meeting to get advice or information, not about finding a job.

Before you begin your phone calls to request meetings, prepare a script or list of key points you want to include in your phone discussion. In some cases, you may need to call back at a better time. In other cases, the network contact may be very busy and prefer to talk to you right then rather than in a subsequent face-to-face meeting.

Be prepared with alternate calling times, and be prepared to conduct phone networking right on the spot. If you're not successful setting up a meeting, send an email to the contact, including information about your background and your career plans. Include your resume.

Conducting a Networking Meeting

Effective networking can be fairly informal. Because you are the person requesting the meeting, you're responsible for preparing and leading the discussion. Respect your contact's schedule by arriving on time.

Each networking meeting has a twofold purpose:

- To gain information that will help you focus your job search.
- To obtain additional contacts and job leads.

The typical networking meeting agenda includes:

- An introduction to establish rapport.
- Thanking the contact for taking the time to meet with you.
- Mentioning the name of the person who referred you, if any.
- Setting the contact at ease by assuring the contact that you do not expect him or her to find you a job.
- Explaining the objective for the meeting (obtain advice about industry trends, companies to target).

A 2-minute personal commercial

- Be prepared to deliver a 2- or 3-minute summary of what you've done and what you intend to do next in your career. Mention a few of your major strengths and accomplishments. Be as clear as possible about your intended career direction.

Questions

- Use a list of open-ended questions to obtain the information you need. Ask questions that will provide information about a target industry or occupation that will help focus your job search.

A request for suggestions

- Request the names of two or three people you should contact, and ask for permission to use this individual's name when you contact the new referrals.

During the meeting, monitor the time. Keep to the 20-minute time limit. If your contact keeps the conversation going longer, it is appropriate to continue talking. As you close the meeting, thank the person for helping you. After the meeting, follow up! Send a thank-you note the next day. If your contact suggested additional connections, after you've met with them, send a note to the original contact. This will keep your connection fresh, and your original contact will remember you if another good contact comes to mind.

As appropriate during the course of your job search, follow up with your contacts to tell them about your progress and share information that they may find helpful. Let them know when you find a new position. They've been involved in your job search, have been rooting for you, and will be happy to hear they contributed to your success.



Worksheet—Informational Networking Interview Meeting

Person _____ Organization _____
Title _____ Address _____
Phone _____ Address _____
Referred by _____ Date/Length of Meeting _____

Purpose of Meeting (what do you want to accomplish through this meeting?)

Points to be covered in this meeting (explain why you'd like to meet and why you selected that person as a contact)

My 2-Minute Personal Commercial

Questions to Ask

Closing Remarks

Networking Rules to Remember



DO

- Make a record of every contact.
- Research the person and/or company. Be prepared.
- Dress appropriately.
- Be clear about what you are seeking.
- Be sincere in your approach.
- Give a short summary about your background.
- Be gracious.
- Always listen.
- Send a thank-you note.
- Think about what you can do better on the next call. Networking takes practice.



DON'T

- Use an individual's name without permission.
- Feel as if you are taking advantage of someone.
- Apologize.
- Talk negatively about your job loss.
- Monopolize the conversation.
- Continuously call or email to reach the party. Leave 3 messages and then move on.

Informational Interviewing

Informational interviewing is networking taken one step further. In informational interviewing, you develop a set of questions to ask a professional in a field you are exploring. It is one of the most effective ways to research a specific occupation and get information you need to make a decision.

Informational interviewing is a formal process:

1. **First**, identify people you want to interview.
2. **Second**, contact the person(s) to propose an appointment at his or her convenience.
3. **Third**, prepare an agenda and questions for the meeting. Use your statement of introduction as a way to open up the meeting.
4. **Fourth**, try to obtain two or three leads from each person you interview. You could say something like, "Are there other people you can think of that I might call?"
5. **Finally**, express your appreciation to the person who met with you. Send a thank-you note the next day.

Sample Questions for Exploring a New Occupation

1. What education and/or experience are necessary to get into this occupation?
2. How did you get into this occupation?
3. Describe an average day.
4. What do you like most about your job?
5. What is the most challenging aspect of your position?
6. What types of individuals are most successful in your position?
7. What do you like least about your job?
8. If you had it to do over again, would you choose the same field of work/occupation?
9. What is the salary range (entry level to top level)?
10. What is the outlook for this occupation?
11. What are the most important personal traits for this type of job?
12. What advice would you give someone entering this field?
13. Does the job involve travel or relocation?
14. What are the working hours? Is there flexible scheduling?
15. What are the major responsibilities and duties for this job?
16. What skills are required to start the job? What skills are usually learned on the job?
17. Is there much contact with customers/other departments/etc.?
18. What are the physical conditions (workspace, level of noise, lighting, etc.)?

Sample Questions When Considering Changing Industries/Fields

1. Tell me about your company and its history. (Remember to do your research.)
2. What is your background?
3. How did you get into this field?
4. Where would a person with my experience and qualifications best fit in an organization like this?
5. What are your thoughts on industry trends and growth?
6. How do you see the local market? National market?
7. What type of organizations do you think would have an interest in a person with my background?
8. Based on what I have told you about my background, skills, and abilities, where might I fit in this industry?
9. What ideas or suggestions do you have for me about discovering or identifying job opportunities?
10. Could you refer me to anyone else in this field?