

Search

Job Openings and Companies



Networking Tips

Introduction to Networking

Employers search for employees in a variety of ways. Traditionally, employers have placed

advertisements, visited campuses, staffed job fairs, and conducted searches. These activities require time and resources from the employer. If you can learn about an impending job opening before the employer spends the time and commits the resources to search for an employee, you will save the company time and resources and you will have less competition for the position. Developing a strong network helps you locate new job openings before they become widely advertised. Follow this early knowledge of the open position with an outstanding resume and an excellent interview, and you will have exciting, new job opportunities to consider.

A college student has many opportunities to network for job leads. For example, she can discuss her career goals with faculty advisors who may know local employers who need the skills she has to offer. She can meet with alumni in her profession for job leads and initial introductions. By talking with recruiters at campus job fairs, she can learn not only about advertised openings, but

she can also discover the names of hiring managers, find out which departments are growing, and learn the employment prospects for her profession.

A mid-level manager can network by informing colleagues of her job search, talking with neighbors and friends about job openings, and using technology to learn about growing areas. If growth within her current company is his goal, she can meet with her supervisor and the managers of other departments, if this type of activity is support by the company's culture. If she is seeking opportunities outside her current company, then she probably needs to keep her job search more confidential.

A homemaker who is seeking to join the workforce outside the home can develop a network to help her find job openings as well. She can inform teachers and daycare workers of her plan, ask the parents of her child's playmates about job opportunities, and discuss potential job openings with volunteer co-workers.

Networking is a dynamic, ongoing process. Knowledge about job opportunities can come from unlikely sources. The more diverse your personal network is, the better your chance are of learning about new job openings.

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Types of Networks

Networks can involve people from the different areas of your life, not just from your professional life. One of those areas is your personal life. People in your personal life include family, neighbors, friends, schoolmates, and other casual acquaintances. Any of these people can support your job search by serving either as “feelers,” people who hear about job openings, or as sources of further contacts. In other words, they may not know about job opportunities in your line of work, but someone else who they know may provide valuable information about job openings.

Developing your personal network is not a job-search task. Your personal network is the collection of people with whom you typically interact. Instead of **developing** your personal network to aid a job search, you must **activate** your personal network to get your personal contacts involved in your search. You can do this formally or casually. Let your acquaintances know that you are searching for a job. Circulate your resume and educate your personal network about your career goals. Not only can they point you to new job openings, but they may also serve as a support group as you proceed with your search.

The key to maintaining your personal network is regular communication. When you find a job or redirect your search, be sure to let your personal contacts know about it. However, do not limit your communication with the members of your personal network to job-search information. Continue to nurture and strengthen your personal relationships for their benefit as well as yours.

Perhaps the most obvious area of your life in which to find networking contacts is your professional life. People in your professional life include employers, colleagues, teachers, professors, and members of professional organizations. Whether you can involve your employer and co-workers in your professional network will depend upon the culture at your place of employment. Some employers plan for and support their employees' searches for new positions either within or beyond the current company. For example, when businesses plan for downsizing activities, they usually offer outplacement services for targeted employees. Networking techniques may be part of the offered outplacement services. On the other hand, if your corporate culture looks down on those who plan to move to another department or company, then you should be very careful about disclosing your job-search activities.

“Have a 60-second summary of your experience, skills, and unique talents ready...”

Unlike your personal contacts, your professional contacts will have a better understanding of your skills and qualifications. Also, they will be more likely to learn about appropriate job opportunities. When developing your network, concentrate most of your time and effort on your professional contacts because these people will provide the most productive leads. Join professional organizations, such as trade associations or unions. Read the journals and Web sites for your profession. Contact authors of articles related to your field of work and ask them about opportunities. Let your professional contacts know you are job hunting. Discuss the specifics of your job requirements with your professional contacts in more detail than you would with one of your personal contacts. Explain your vision of the profession and help them understand your motivations for searching for a new position. By understanding your goals, your professional network contacts can help you extend your network and refine your search. ■

By staying current with your field and in touch with your colleagues, you can continue to maintain your professional network. When you move to a new position, let your network know about your new challenges. Remember to thank those who have assisted in your search. Be prepared to offer similar assistance to other professional colleagues. Maintaining an active network is a two-way street. You can't just ask for help without being willing to offer assistance in return.

Another source of networking contacts can best be described as a community network. This type of network can include members of religious organizations, community groups, school-related organizations, and volunteer groups. Even online Web sites that include professional partnerships for success, such as ResumeMaker, can be a valuable networking source. For example, if you are searching for a new job in your current hometown, you could join the local Kiwanis or Optimist Club and get to know its members. While you are participating in the projects of these service organizations, you can learn about the other members and begin to form your community network. Similarly, if your child participates in scouting, you can volunteer with her activities and meet other parent volunteers. They may be helpful additions to your community network as well.

Developing a community network needs to follow a careful and deliberate process. Community organizations exist to support their own goals, not to provide a forum for you to enhance your job search. If you are serious about developing and utilizing a community network, be very sensitive to the culture of the community organizations you join. Many groups explicitly forbid their membership lists from being used for unrelated business. However, as you meet and become acquainted with the other members

and their professional lives, you may find occasions when discussing your job search is not inappropriate. When you do locate community network contacts, treat these people similar to your personal contacts. While they won't be as committed to helping you as your family and friends would be, community network contacts can provide both diversity and local knowledge. The diversity is a result of the variety of professional backgrounds usually found in community groups. The local knowledge results from the local base and history on which community groups are built.

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To maintain your community network, keep involved with the organization and participate in their project and events. Let those who have helped you know about any developments in your search. Offer to assist others by providing the kind of assistance that you needed to succeed in your job search.

The final form of networking is similar to what you are currently doing – using technology to discover leads about job openings. Technology-based networking involves using job search tools, such as Job Finder, and resume placement tools, such as Resume Caster. Also, keep reviewing the Web sites of companies that meet your search criteria, noting any expansion announcements or new project initiatives. Similarly, read the publications for your profession and research new developments that may lead to future job opportunities. Finally, because technology is changing frequently, keep your technology tools updated and learn how to use the new features as well as any new tools that are developed to aid your job search.

Networking Activity

When you are conducting your job search, your networking activity can be either casual or formal. Casual networking activity involve including information about your job search in

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your everyday conversations. For example, when you are talking with your neighbor at a weekend barbecue, you may mention that you have begun a job search and explain what type of position you are seeking. Casually ask your neighbor for advice and help if he happens upon any leads in your profession. Similarly, as you are volunteering to accompany your child's class on a field trip, you might strike up a conversation with other parents about their professions and seek their input about job leads.

Formal networking is more direct and less personal than casual networking. You can send letters or e-mail messages to your network contacts. You can keep them updated with regular telephone calls and continue to ask for leads and advice. The main distinction between casual and formal networking is the main purpose of the communication. With casual networking, the information about your job search is secondary. While the job search may be the foremost item in your mind, it is not the main reason you are conversing with your network contact. Instead, with formal networking, discussing the details of your job search is the main reason for communicating. For example, as you develop professional network contacts, keep a list of specialties for each one. When a potential opportunity occurs within one of the specialties, you can tap your professional network by sending a directed e-mail message to each person with that specific specialty. In the e-mail message, ask them for input or leads about the specialty. Granted this is a more impersonal method for communicating, but it also allows you to leverage your network to gain inside information while allowing your contacts to respond at their convenience. You might also keep your professional network contacts updated by leaving very brief telephone messages at their office numbers outside of normal working hours. This keeps

them apprised of your progress without unnecessarily interrupting them during their typical work day.

Maintaining Your Network

Keeping your network intact will help you throughout your career. Here are some points to consider for maintaining your network:

1. Stay in touch – let your contacts know about your activities and successes. Don't just ask for help and then wait for them to contact you. Provide brief, regular updates about your progress. Ask about specific opportunities that come to your attention. Let them help you brainstorm about extending your network and strengthening your job search.
2. Circulate your resume – not only will your network contacts better understand your background and experience, but they can also provide advice on polishing your resume to address your career goals. With your current resume in hand, your contacts will be able to pass it on to hiring managers and other potential employers.
3. Ask for leads – think of your network as a growing, evolving job-search tool. Every new lead that you obtain will help you extend your network into new areas, which will help you gather information about new job opportunities from a wider variety of sources.
4. Show your gratitude – when someone helps you with a job lead or a new network contact, show her that you appreciate the assistance by sending a card or note. Depending on the degree to which your contacts help you with your search, consider sending small gifts to show your appreciation. Treat your contacts as your personal guides in the hunt for a new position. When they have guided you to success, let them know that their help was valuable and that their efforts were appreciated.

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