

Networking

What is networking?

Networking is meeting people and creating mutually beneficial relationships that can support your job search, business success, or personal development. It's all about developing relationships and nurturing them.

1. How to Get Started

Make an inventory of former bosses and colleagues.

Add people you've met through volunteer work and through classes. Talk to professors for ideas on people to reach out to.

Join organizations and associations where like-minded people will be. For example, if you want a job in human resources, join the local chapter of Human Resources Management Association. Become a member of school organizations and get to know current members, as well as alumni of the group. Most career tracks have professional organizations, and many are looking to expand their membership with young energetic people. Many offer special discounts on memberships and events to students. Attend conferences and seminars and introduce yourself to the guest speakers and other attendees.

Follow organizations on social media and check out blogs, especially when focused on career-related issues. Professional networking sites like Plaxo and LinkedIn are good resources for researching new contacts and making new connections.

Make contacts out of strangers. Strike up a conversation about the beautiful shrimp with the person next to you at the buffet. Ask the person in front of you at the gelato shop if she likes her basil and coconut gelato. Comment on the book the man seated next to you in the coffee shop is reading. Ask open-ended (not yes and no) questions to encourage a conversation. Show true interest and ask to keep in touch.

WHO IS IN YOUR NETWORK?

Many students and young alumni believe they are too young to have a network. This is not true. You already have a vast network, but you need to acknowledge and nurture it.

Your network already includes:

- Family, family friends, friends' families
- Professors, alumni, and fellow students
- Previous bosses and colleagues from internships and jobs
- Fellow members of associations, whether special interest or professional
- People you encounter during regular life events, such as the person sitting next to you on an airplane, a woman you met at church, your family's insurance agent, or the woman behind you at the coffeehouse.

DEBUNKING A MYTH

You don't have to be funny, beautiful, or extraverted to be good at networking. The best networkers are people who are good listeners, warm, confident, look successful, and can speak on a variety of subjects. They nurture their relationships and become valuable resources to others. Networking has great payoffs. Not only can it provide leads for a job search or to build your business success, but it can be fun. Get out there and meet some people.

PRO TIP: PEOPLE LOVE TO TALK!

You will find that many people enjoy talking, especially about themselves and their interests. Inquire about their hobbies, their travels -- anything that is non-invasive. Listen carefully; you just might have something to add. Use their name several times in the conversation. This will not only help you remember it, but will also make the other person feel like you are really interested in them.

2. Using Your Network to Find A Job

It's a daunting fact, but 75 to 80 percent of jobs are not posted. Instead they are found through referrals and direct company contact. The most successful way to get access to these non-posted positions is through networking.

Make personal contact (over coffee, e-mails, phone calls, etc.) as much as possible with people in your network and be clear that you are looking to start your job search. Share with them the kinds of jobs or industries you are interested in, as well as a few skills and talents you bring to the positions. Ask if they would help make an introduction to other professionals in your field or if they've heard of any open positions or companies that are expanding.

Do not ask "Can you help me find a job?" Instead say "Do you know of someone in my field with whom I may talk to learn more about X,Y, Z?" When you use this approach, your contacts won't feel responsible for your success, but will feel more like an advisor or supporter.

Don't just contact your network once. Keep the people who are interested in your job search up to date on your activities. Drop them a quick e-mail stating something like:

"Your advice that I contact hotels for a management training position was very helpful. Next week I have two interviews: one with the Windsor Court and one with the Hilton. Thank you so much! I'll let you know how they go."

"It's been a few weeks since we last spoke, so I want to let you know about the interesting job leads I've found. I just had a phone interview with the Children's Museum and I've had two interviews with the Audubon Institute. It is exciting to learn that I have some marketable skills in event planning. Thank you for helping me recognize that this is a growing industry in New Orleans. I'll write again as soon as some offers start coming in."

SAMPLE COVER LETTER TO MENTOR

March 12, 2010
Colonel Erastus Wells
Security Consulting Company
456 Smithdale Avenue
Harahan, LA 70125

Dear Colonel Wells:

I am so grateful that you offered to assist me with my search for an internship in government policy. I'm very excited about the opportunity to parlay what I have learned in the classroom and through leadership positions to an organization's success.

Here are a few skills I would bring to an internship. First, I'm fluent in French and have experience in translating documents. Second, I have excellent communication skills – writing, presentation, and phone. Third, my advocacy and service experience, along with my relationship-building skills, have provided me with a unique perspective for dealing with people of various cultures and personalities; this work has also given me an appreciation for proper protocol. Fourth, my Jesuit education in political science has prepared me well for a position involving critical analysis and problem solving.

I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss the value I believe I could bring to an organization with you or any of your contacts. Again, I cannot thank you enough for taking an interest in my future success.

Sincerely,
Lillian Guillot

3. Nurturing Your Network

There's an old marketing adage: To get someone to remember a message, they have to hear it three times; to get them to act on the message, they need to hear it six times. In these days of hyper-stimulation and information overload, these numbers are rising rapidly. **Find ways to get through the clutter and create multiple opportunities to connect.** You'll build deeper relationships quicker.

Always ask for a business card or get their contact information. Then add it to your contact management system, whether you use a Gmail address book, LinkedIn, Outlook, Plaxo, or another system. Staying organized will help a lot in networking. You may want to keep notes on people you've met to help trigger your memory down the road.

Find some way to follow-up with your new contact. Arrange to meet again over coffee, invite them to a lecture you think they would enjoy, or send them an interesting Internet link on a subject you discussed. Relationships are two-sided; make sure you are investing in the relationship, not just taking from it.

Lack of follow-through is a sure way to kill a good contact opportunity. If you promise to send something, make a call, or do any other action, do it. Confirm your interest in the relationship and the person, while demonstrating your professionalism.

