

## NETWORK, NETWORK, NETWORK

“This may seem an overused buzzword, but it’s still the name of the game. Cultivate professional contacts in your chosen field who can advise, recommend, and alert you to job opportunities. One sure-fire way to get your resume on top of a pile of similar ones on a hiring officer’s desk is a single letter or phone call of recommendation from a trusted contact.” (“Managing Your Career”, Wall Street Journal)

Networking is the single most effective job search tool today, far outweighing all other sources for finding jobs. Today, jobs are being filled without ever being advertised, through hidden leads, referrals, etc. Until recently, people were reluctant to network, to “ask favors”, but today it is expected, accepted, and vital to a successful job search. The primary function of networking is to obtain hidden leads, to obtain “industry specific” information and contacts. It is the process of “purposefully developing relations with others,” of “linking you to people in your target companies.” When networking, focus on what you want. Don’t tell everyone you are looking for any job that pays “big bucks”.

Before you make a definite career choice and start interviewing for jobs, do some research. Schedule **“informational interviews”** with key people in different fields and organizations. Investigate various career opportunities. Do you have the necessary skills? Would you want those jobs?

The purpose of informational interviews is to gather first-hand information, leads and contacts. Try to get interviews with hiring managers, people who are hiring, and get “inside” the company. Interviews can be arranged by phone, mail, or email. A referral from a friend or acquaintance increases your chances. A letter of introduction is advisable before telephoning. Assure the person you are interviewing with that you are not looking for a job at his/her company, just looking for information and further contacts. According to Dee Helfgott (**“Take 6 STEPS to NETWORKING SUCCESS”**), “Career counselors advise against asking contacts for a job or about openings; if your contacts know of a job opening, they will tell you.” Be prepared when going on an informational interview. Research the company ahead of time, be ready with intelligent questions, and don’t waste the interviewer’s time. Know what you want and how they can help you.

Informational interviews offer an excellent opportunity to develop networking contacts, gather information, practice your interviewing skills, and market your abilities, in a relaxed atmosphere – you are in control, you are the interviewer. The more information you gather, the more informed career choices you can make.

### START BUILDING YOUR NETWORK AS SOON AS POSSIBLE...

- You’ve got to start somewhere, so start with – friends, faculty, parents of friends (POF’s), friends of parents (FOP’s), - you “interpersonal environment”. Eventually you will fine-tune your network contacts and focus on those people in your targeted field, location, and companies.
- Check with our office, Business Placement (BUS 228), and Dept. of Career Services.
- Contact alumni in your field. They have inside information and possible leads. Ask them what it’s like out there and how they got started. Ask for advice and any leads they can offer you.
- Become active in local clubs, civic and community-based organizations, and networking clubs, both during college and after graduation.
- Link into other people’s networks to further expand your own network.
- Contact previous employers, people you worked with on previous jobs, internships, co-ops.
- Attend company information sessions, meetings with corporate guest speakers, panels, etc.
- Once you’ve targeted a career, you should start scheduling “networking interviews”, where you are focusing more on a particular career and/or a particular organization.

# NETWORKING QUESTIONS...

## **EXPLORING NEW FIELDS OR FUNCTIONS**

- What education and training are required to work in this field?
- What experience is required?
- How do you see my background fitting with what a hiring manager would look for?
- What in your background has prepared you most for this position/field?
- What is your typical daily routine?
- What do you find most rewarding in this field? Most frustrating?
- What can a person reasonably expect to earn in this field?
- In addition to formal education/training, what else could I do to prepare me to work in this job or field?
- Who else do you know who could provide additional advice on market trends, opportunities, preparation, or perspectives in this field? May I use your name as a referral?

## **DEVELOPING JOB LEADS**

- How do people typically find out about openings in this field?
- How does my background fit with positions or opportunities that might exist in this firm?
- Who are the people in this firm who might have positions for which I might qualify?
- Who could recommend other companies that might have openings?
- Who else might know of opportunities or could suggest others who could assist me?
- What other companies or organizations should I explore?
- Are there professional or trade organizations with which I should get involved?
- What other advice or suggestions do you have for me as I continue my job search?

## **NETWORKING TIPS**

- Know exactly what it is you want from others. Prepare questions in advance of a meeting or telephone conversation. Be succinct, courteous, and appreciative.
- Have a positive attitude when you network.
- Talk to strangers, and mingle with people you don't already know at meetings and events. Introduce yourself!
- Share information, ideas, resources, and contacts with others. Networking is a two-way process.
- Don't ask for too much at one time. Limit the amount of assistance or information you seek from one person.
- Don't neglect to follow-up on leads you have been given. You don't want to embarrass those who have made connections for you.
- Don't betray other people's confidentiality. Trust is a vital part of networking.
- Don't monopolize other people's time when networking. Keep you conversation brief and make arrangements to call or meet at another time if you discover areas of mutual interest.
- Continue networking even after you've found a job. There will always be ways an active network can help. Everyone needs a personal and professional support system. Keep yours in place throughout your career.
- Incorporate networking into your everyday life. It is a powerful tool for marketing yourself, but also a powerful tool for enriching your life and the lives of those in your network.
- Always send a thank-you letter to people who give referrals, resources, and support.

(Dee Helfgott, M.P.A., "Take 6 STEPS to NETWORKING SUCCESS")

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