



CAREER CONNECTION



Your Network Can Get You Your Next Job

[By Puja Mahendru Afuwale]

Your friends from school, your ex-colleagues, your professors, and even your relatives and neighbors are all important contributors to your career growth. They are parts of your “network”—a ubiquitous career buzzword in organizations today.

Many of us set benchmarks for our careers, and there are two ways to reach these benchmarks. We can spend time and energy to prove our capabilities, or we can use our networks. Your network can give you information about job opportunities that is difficult to access through other means. Research shows that about 70% to 80% of job openings get filled by candidates who hear about them before others through their networks. Organizations also like to find candidates through networking because it saves them from having to pay recruitment costs.

Your network can connect you with a job opportunity or introduce you to someone who is recruiting. At other times, members of your network may simply tell you that job openings exist or introduce you to people who can increase your chances of landing a desirable job. It is important that you use your network for more than just getting a job, however. Seek career advice and feedback from those in your network as well.

The following rules can help you establish a better network:

1. Target everyone!

Your contacts do not need to be from your industry. Remember that they have their own networks of contacts—and that one of their contacts could bring you your big break!

2. You will only get what you ask for.

If you don't ask for something, you are not going to get it. So *ask*. Asking for a small favor may change your career and your life.

3. Pay back those who help you.

To keep your network alive, you have to reciprocate favors. If you have some information that can help others in your network, go out of your way to tell them about it. Your thoughtfulness will be appreciated.

4. Never fail to acknowledge a favor.

A simple “thank you” is the least expected in return for help. Plus, thanking your contacts for favors gives you more opportunities to keep in touch with them.

5. Find reasons to stay in touch.

Communicating with your network only when you need to exchange career information may become uncomfortable after some time. Consider meeting for lunch every once in a while, and don't forget that the longer you stay out of touch, the more effort it takes to reestablish the relationship.

6. Grow your network.

You can grow your network and keep in touch with its existing members by attending association meetings or similar gatherings

or even by participating in volunteer events. These are good avenues for socializing, and people tend to be more approachable at such gatherings than they are at their office desks.

Your network can help you in two ways: by connecting you with a job lead or by helping you convert a job lead into an offer. Build your network while keeping both of these objectives in mind. You also need to balance the quality and quantity of members in your network. You won't gain much by keeping a long list of contacts who are not there for you when you need help. If you have a quality list, it won't need to be very long. Cultivating relationships with a few influential people can boost your career substantially.

The Right Way to Use Your Network

To benefit from your network, be clear about what you are looking for and how your contacts can help you. You should be able to communicate this quickly—ideally, in no more than 25 seconds—when you meet someone you would like to include in your network.

If you are planning to use a targeted mailing to spread the word that you need help, compose a one-page letter that briefly describes your situation and send it to everyone on your list of contacts. Also, remember that personalizing each letter is a must! Don't underestimate the power of a personalized letter when it comes to getting support from others.

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The biggest hurdle many people face with respect to networking is shyness. If meeting people in person is a problem, bond with them over the telephone, via snail mail, or through email. Message boards are an easy-to-use option, too.

Whoever said "it's not important what you know, but who you know" understood the power of networking. If you are looking to develop a successful career, start by making the right contacts and expanding your network. Your professional life will

become much easier if you simply connect with others who can offer advice and opportunities!

ON THE NET

Job Search and Career Networking Tips
jobsearch.about.com/od/networking/a/networkingtips.htm

The Power of Networking
jobsearch.about.com/od/networking/a/jobster.htm

Top 6 Rules for Networking
careerplanning.about.com/od/networking/tp/network_rules.htm

Making Connections
careerplanning.about.com/od/networking/a/networking.htm

Networking Your Way to a New Job
www.allbusiness.com/human-resources/careers-career-networking/9112-1.html

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