

The Networking Factor

By Captain Karen Kahn

One of the most celebrated 'secrets' in job hunting is what I call the networking factor. Simply stated, everyone who has been successful in his or her career has been helped by someone, somewhere along the way. It is an unwritten rule that each of us who benefits from this system is obligated to return the favor and make the "payback" in the form of helping some other deserving job seeker. The key word here is "deserves." Helping someone who is going to appreciate the assistance and put your efforts to good use is almost as important as the help itself. Your chosen mentor would not want to assist you if are not serious; especially if he or she finds his or her time and effort were wasted on your behalf. The idea, then, is to "pay it forward" (like the film of the same name) and when you accomplish your goals, you will help someone else who is struggling to make a go of it to get his or her start.



You should begin by spending a portion of your day talking with as many other co-workers as possible, taking an interest in what's going on, expressing your desire to learn all you can, and generally acting like the kind of person who's worthy of the mentorship. Then, you must prove your worth by demonstrating you will put this special assistance to good use. How? By showing them, you are hard-working, conscientious, dedicated, passionate and

the kind of person who will "pay it forward" and carry on this admirable practice.

The specifics of networking depend on your particular situation. You may have to do some serious research on the areas you want to target. If there is a specific company that interests you, become acquainted with it and learn about its key personnel and their needs. If there is a certain individual who might help you, direct your efforts toward him or her. Frequent venues where you can informally meet him or her and introduce yourself and become acquainted. If an informal meeting is not possible, a more formal approach such as an informational interview may be necessary.

The informational interview

The key to networking is to express your interest and desire in a person or firm without being obnoxious or patronizing. One approach is to seek an informational interview, in which your goal is to speak with an individual who can help you without actually asking him or her to do anything specific for you. You want to obtain suggestions on how you can best navigate your chosen career field or land a specific job.

Some questions you might ask your mentor include:

1. Whom do you recommend I contact to widen your circle of acquaintances?

2. If your mentor were in your shoes, whom might he or she contact for assistance, and how often should you contact them?
3. What kind of training or coursework should you engage in to assist in your job or career search?
4. What books or web sites should you be reading and visiting to learn more about your career path or job choice?

You are picking the brain of your subject and, at the same time, impressing him or her with your serious interest and determination. Should an opening become available, your actions hopefully will convince him or her to take a chance and hire you. What you do not want to ask is "Will you hire me?" Instead, you should solicit ideas and opinions and then put that information to work, demonstrating by your actions that you are worthy of the help you are not asking for. Once you have completed the interview, be sure to keep your contact informed of your progress, detailing what you have done with his or her suggestions.

After your first meeting, send a short thank you note. Then, at least quarterly, follow up with a note or greeting card containing a few lines describing your status, progress, and short-term goals. Keep a card on file of your key contacts, listing for each one: your initial meeting date, the person's advice and business interests, telephone numbers, physical and email address, and the types of actions you have taken.

Clipping and saving articles of interest also can provide a reason to re-contact your mentor and eliminate the nagging internal question "Am I being too pushy if contact him again?" Additionally, when you pass a new milestone—such as a new position, a promotion, or an award make sure to send a short note to all of your mentors, highlighting your good news.

More approaches

Attend as many local and national industry meetings and seminars as possible. Even if a local board meeting does not



Career Tips

personally fascinate you, this could be your next networking opportunity. A pilot friend of mine got his start in commuter aviation by introducing himself to the new airline's Director of Operations, who happened to be speaking on the company's inaugural service at the pilot's local airport commission meeting. Wanting to hire pilots who lived in the area, the Director was delighted to meet my friend and eventually hired him.

Always carry with you a supply of professional-looking business cards and an updated resume. Keep your resume in a folder in your car or briefcase at all times. Be sure it includes a self-addressed envelope and business card inside. Being well prepared will impress your subject – as will your professional appearance, appropriate, of course, to the event in question. Remember, as a job candidate, you have a public image to uphold. Ensure your first meeting with any prospective employer reflects favorably on your ability to handle public situations.

You are probably familiar popular adage, "It's not what you know, but who you know." I believe what is equally important is "Who knows you and your capabilities?" Now is not the time to be modest; sing your own praises. If you don't, who will?

About Captain Karen Kahn

Kahn has been actively involved in the aviation industry for 40 years. As a professional speaker, Kahn has presented numerous career workshops and professional aviation events helping audiences of all ages reach their personal career goals. She also provides professional advice, personal resources management, and airline interview coaching through her firm Aviation Career Counseling (www.aviationcareercounseling.com). She is also the author of Flight Guide for Success: Tips & Tactics for the Aspiring Pilot.

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