

Informational Interviews

The # 1 method for job search strategies is NETWORKING. Over 80% of jobs are obtained through this avenue. It is also the most frightening for many HR professionals, especially introverts. It may mean getting out of your comfort zone. But be aware, getting a job in this market means marketing and branding YOU, just like a business.

Networking succeeds because:

- It gives you visibility & “top of mind” awareness. Expands your champion circle.
- Keeps you from being isolated and boosts your confidence
- You can get feedback on your skills and experience and presentation
- Gets you face-to-face with “insiders”. Keeps your information up to date.
- Many jobs are not published. Why is that? (still in planning stages, reorg coming up, impending retirements, back from placement agency to name a few)
- Familiarity and referrals reduce much of the uncertainty involved in hiring a new employee
- People can give you the scoop on working at a company, refer you to others who can hire, tell you about future hiring needs. Only people can do this!

Networking is the on-going process of obtaining industry information leading to job leads. One of the most effective ways of networking is through **informational interviews**.

How to start??

Remember *Six Degrees of Separation*—it’s a small world! Level A contacts (you already know), Level B (the “bridge” to others) and Level C (have needs and can hire you or influence the hiring decision or know others in your target industry or field) should be diagrammed.

Steps in the networking process include:

1. **Create your contact list.** Start with 30-50 individuals you know. Where could they come from? Don’t censor or second guess any leads. There is no way to predict who will lead you to your next opportunity! Categorize this list as industry or personal contact.
2. **Create a list of target companies.** Start creating “bridges” into the companies. Get an annual report. Call and ask who they use for banking, auditing, advertising, attorneys, etc. to find someone who knows someone within the company. Watch business news and read their website.
 - a. Your “bridge” campaign—“it’s who you know, not what you know”. Research and network to get the management list, financial info, press releases.
 - b. Target an executive within the target company (go for functional managers who have authority to hire, not HR). Identify who might know them in your network.

3. Telephone or write a letter introducing yourself using your “bridge’s” name and ask for a meeting. Learn to get past gatekeepers by saying you are following up on personal correspondence if you wrote or refer to the mutual acquaintance who referred you. Do not send your resume. Do your homework before making the call. And have a list of outcomes you want to achieve (a face-to-face meeting!) Ask for a short meeting—15 to 20 minutes. Have your research handy to identify company knowledge and your experience. Write your networking script so you won’t get caught off guard. The best time to call? Important calls early in the morning or after 5:00. Voicemail? Don’t leave it. Stay in control. After five calls, leave your name only
4. The meeting. First, thank them for their time and make sure you just take the time promised. You may want to start by referring to your telephone call (“As I said when we spoke on the phone, I’m exploring opportunities in the HR field and would like to hear from you where you see the growth areas...”). Do a soft sell of your potential contribution—your elevator speech! Say “the way you could be helpful to me is...” Ask great questions to get them talking 80% of the time. Ask for referrals. Do not whip out your resume. Your networking profile is OK to give. Always write down your questions to keep on track. Treat them as the “expert” in the industry and ask their take on future trends. Remember to ask WHO do you know that may help me? WHAT organizations may have an interest in me? WHAT recruiters (or industry specific websites, associations or strategies) do you know that I might contact? MAY I follow up in 10 days? Objectives of this meeting can be:
 - a. To identify key players in your target companies
 - b. Obtain info about growth or hiring trends of other companies in your industry
 - c. Get three names of other professionals and ask if he/she would make an introductory call so it’s a “warm” call.
 - d. Brainstorm about your career options. What transferable skills can move to a related industry?
 - e. Discover or discuss the company’s charter and where you might fit.
 - f. Get feedback on your profile or resume (if asked for it).
 - g. Ask for those referrals. They will fall into one of these areas: personal contacts, professionals at any level within your target industry/company or decision makers within your target market.
5. Send a handwritten Thank You note the following day, identifying your contributions and ask to be considered. Every 10-14 days, follow-up in a friendly way. Give value.
6. The golden rule of networking is keeping in touch! Send out articles, call to touch base, congrat if they receive an award, invite to events, acknowledge birthdays, anniversaries, etc.

Susan RoAne, author of the book “Secrets of Savvy Networking” states: “(Networking).. is a lifestyle of sharing resources, information and ideas.” It is not something you do when you’re unemployed, but something you do throughout your career!

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