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# Networking: The Key to Career Success

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If you're not networking, then you are missing out on a vital part of career management. While credentials are impressive, the ability to build relationships will set you apart from others in your field who share your same qualifications. In fact, networking is a great way to break actuarial stereotypes. Actively networking shows that you are genuinely interested in those around you and that you care about building your social and professional networks.

There are several ways to engage in networking. The most common and effective method is face-to-face networking. Social networking has also become popular. This includes participation on sites such as LinkedIn, Facebook and MySpace. Reserve sites such as Facebook and MySpace for your personal relationships—they are not places to make business connections. However, LinkedIn can be a great resource for building your professional network. It allows you to keep up with your colleagues' projects and professional statuses, as well as to see which of your contacts might be connected to someone at your dream job. Create a profile on a social network to supplement your face-to-face networking time (not to replace it).

A common misconception of networking is that it only matters when you are looking for a new job. While networking is an important part of a job search, you should make it a point to always be networking—not just when you “need” something.

People network to:

- Stay current on what is happening in the business world
- Learn the needs of the organization
- Determine if your transferable skills are a fit for other positions
- Receive career advice and guidance
- Create your own new position
- Be seen as a mover and a shaker
- Set yourself apart
- Be prepared for future career changes



Who do you network with?

- People you know in your organization—your boss, coworkers and clients
- People you know inside other organizations that you admire
- Individuals who are members of target professional organizations
- Anyone else who can provide you with fresh points of view and ideas

There are three main purposes for networking: for ongoing career management, moving up in a current role and finding a new job.

## Networking as part of ongoing career management

Even if you are not looking for a promotion or a new role, networking should be a continuous process. Network to build your contact list and hone your relationships. There are several ways you can implement your networking skills every day:

- *Join an industry-specific organization.* Increase your niche network. Attending events with those in your field will keep you up-to-date on current industry trends and also provide tips and insights on your present responsibilities.
- *Volunteer in your community.* Expand your professional network by engaging with those who are not a direct part of your industry. You never know who they might be connected to.
- *Keep in touch with your contacts.* Call or write once a month “just to see how they are” and to keep your name fresh in their minds.
- *Compile a list.* Make a list of everyone you know: business professionals, friends, family and clients. Don’t restrict your list; you never know who could be a link to the CEO of your dream employer. Also, write down several organizations that you would like to work for. In an ideal world, your contacts will provide links to your target companies, but don’t be alarmed if this isn’t the case.
- *Write your commercial.* Prepare yourself by writing your sales pitch. This one- to three-minute commercial should introduce your professional self to your contacts. Include your credentials and future objectives. Know this by heart and be able to recite it naturally when put on the spot.

#### **Networking to advance in your organization**

If you are looking to advance in your current organization, you have a small target audience. Your networking targets are with you 40+ hours a week and include your co-workers and bosses. That means you are able to network every day, yet must always be “on stage.”

- *Stand out.* Show up early and leave late, join committees and be confident in your work.
- *Show initiative.* Successful professionals reach the top by leading, not following. Don’t be afraid to try something new; innovative risk takers often open doors for themselves.
- *Get to know your organization’s leaders.* Show interest in your work and look to your boss for information; ask how the company is doing, the direction in which it is heading and how you can help.
- *Dress to impress.* Dress for the role you want and outwardly demonstrate that you take pride in yourself and in your work.
- *Schedule meetings.* Call your contacts to set up brief meetings. Before picking up the phone, jot down notes regarding what you want to say.
- *Plan your agenda.* Don’t waste your contact’s time. Know what it is you wish to accomplish when entering the meeting and do not expect your contact to lead the meeting.
- *Present your best.* Remember you are not there for a job interview; enjoy yourself. Walk into the meeting with confidence and a positive attitude. Build instant rapport by agreeing on a time allocation. Make it clear that you are there to learn; professionals love to share their industry knowledge.
- *Follow up.* Send a note to let your contacts know how much you appreciated their time and insights. Also, be sure to reciprocate when you are tapped as a resource. ☆

#### **Networking to find a job**

Networking as part of an active job search is structured and has a specific immediate goal. Remember that networking is not the same as job searching. Your goal should be to meet new people who are able to give you advice and guidance, not necessarily a job.