

Tips for Networking and How to Get Started

Making connections through networking is an easier task than you might think. In fact, you have probably been networking in school, at work, and with family and friends already without even realizing what you were doing. But when it comes to professional networking, some intentional effort may be needed in order to get the maximum return on investment of your time and energy.

We've all heard the saying that sometimes it's not *what* you know, but rather *who* you know that matters. It's a simple fact of life that networking is one of the best ways to improve your career. Whether you're looking for a new job or working toward a promotion, the best advice anyone can ever give you regarding networking is to not wait until you need it before you start building yours. It takes a good deal of time to build a strong and meaningful network, and you will want it in place ready to leverage when the time comes.

Why do I need to network?

- **Networking is one of the most effective ways of finding a job** – between 60-70% of all jobs are found through networking, and referrals account for approximately two-thirds of all job search successes. The reality is that hiring managers would rather hire a referral from someone that they know and trust than take a chance on someone based solely on their interview. Hiring a referral also cuts down on the overall recruitment time, which is financially beneficial for an organization.
- **80% of jobs are not advertised.** This applies to both external jobs as well as opportunities within your current organization. And even if an advertisement is placed, odds are the hiring manager already has someone in mind. Your goal is to be that person they already have in mind.
- **Your job may not exist yet.** Sometimes an organization does not know what they need until they meet you. It's not uncommon for jobs to be created based specifically on someone's qualifications.
- **Expands your knowledge of career possibilities.** Networking provides opportunities to increase your knowledge about the industry, company or occupation you are interested in pursuing. Sometimes people discover jobs or industries that are a perfect fit for them that they didn't even know existed until they connected with someone in that industry.
- **You never know when an opportunity will present itself.** You may not be actively searching, but your dream job can still land in your lap through your network. Having a strong and active network means others are always

Tips for networking:

- **Don't sacrifice *quality* for *quantity* – although you should strive for both.** Aim to build lasting quality relationships with your network. One great connection who is willing to support and go the extra mile for you is worth far more than 20 connections who aren't willing to go out of their way. But you should strive for both.
- **Let people know how they can help you.** Are you looking for a job? Looking to expand your business? Need a mentor? Odds are that most people you encounter will want to help you, they just need to know how. Be clear and concise with how they can help – whether it's providing feedback, introducing you to a colleague, providing a letter of recommendation, or something else.
- **Stay in touch with your network.** A simple personal note on occasion will keep the connection going. Seek them out on social media and “like” or comment on their posts, or forward articles that you think they might find interesting. The longer you are out of touch, the more difficult it is to regain the relationship, but small and meaningful gestures along the way will keep you connected.
- **You can network everywhere and anywhere!** Any time you have access to other people is an opportunity to network – your kid's social and sporting activities, where you volunteer, church events, anywhere! Networking is about the sharing of information and services among groups or individuals with common interests. Take the time to connect with others wherever you are, you never know what that connection will bring.
- **You've got to give, in order to get.** A critical piece of building a strong network where you receive the most benefit is to be willing to support and provide assistance to others within your network. This doesn't have to be anything fancy, it could be anything from sharing a recipe, a vacation tip, or a contact at a potential employer. A network isn't just for your personal benefit, both parties need to feel that there is value added.
- **Be an expert.** Providing your knowledge and expertise to others is a great way to build a strong network. By lending your expertise to others, you develop a reputation for being valuable and your network will grow naturally.

Getting started:

- **Have a standard opener.** Something as simple as “What brings you here tonight?” is an easy way to get a conversation going and potentially find some common ground.
- **Focus the conversation on the other person.** The one thing everyone likes talking about is themselves. In fact, the more you ask someone to talk about themselves the more likely they are to find you interesting. Strange how that works, but it's true.
- **Know your elevator pitch.** It should be about 30 seconds long and give a summary of who you are professionally. If you are at a networking event, it should also include why you are there or what you are hoping to get from the event. Practice this in advance as many times as needed to sound natural. Once you give your 30-second pitch, use

something about yourself to draw the conversation back to the other person. For example, if part of your elevator speech covers where you went to college, turn the conversation back by asking the person where they went to college (with a follow up to why they picked that college if needed).

- **Try volunteering.** If you plan to attend a networking event, volunteer to help out in some way that gives you something to do other than just wandering around looking for people to talk with. Perhaps work the registration table where you can meet and chat with a variety of individuals but have a specific purpose and time limit. You can always follow up later with the individuals who merit a longer conversation.