

The Job Hunter's Network



Remember the old networking mantra - "It's not what you know, it's who you know"? Turns out that the contemporary version has shifted to "It's not who you know, it's who knows YOU." Ain't it the truth! If you're not confident that people out there know who you are and what you do, it's time to start building a reputation—a good one.

Networking should start long before your job search does. It involves building friendships, alliances, and contacts of key people who might be able to help you in some way. This might sound like a one-way street but in reality good networking is useful for both parties. Networking is always about connecting with people for mutual benefit. For you, this can mean access to the "hidden" job market. You never know when your name might come up in a hiring conversation. According to CareerXRoad's 2007 Annual Sources of Hire Survey, one third of new hires were from employee referrals. So get your name out there!

If you want to make your best impression when networking, you have to understand who you are first. What are your areas of interest and where do you want your career to go? What are your skills and experience, where do your passions lie? Knowing this will help you market your "personal brand" to your network contacts. With an understanding of your brand, your contacts will then be armed to market you to others.

So, who should be in your network? Anyone! Your network contacts are your former and current work colleagues, your life-long friends, your noisy neighbor, your loving family, your school chums, your principal, and even your sister's boyfriend. Anyone you meet can be a potential part of your network and can lead you to new and exciting hidden opportunities.

After meeting a business contact at a party, trade event, or even just a casual coffee meet-and-greet, it is essential to take mental notes. Later on, you can transcribe them on paper or electronically on your computer. Keeping copious notes about your encounters with potential contacts is a great way of building your network list. It also forces you to be organized so you'll always know who does what where...not to mention getting names right! This is one of the reasons you should always give and ask for business cards. In fact, give two, one for them to keep and one for them to pass along.

Electronic notes or a rolodex can also aid you in following up. After all, what's the point of having contacts if you never actually follow up? Keeping in constant communication with you network is vital. Sending a card during holidays and special occasions like birthdays is always appreciated and is a simple way of reconnecting with lost acquaintances.

Building a comprehensive network is important in any business. The benefits to your career can be tremendous as personal referrals are the easiest and fastest ways for growing organizations to find qualified candidates. But you can't tap into this hidden job market and work your network until you build it. So go out there and make a name for yourself!