

Maximise Your Networking Success

Why is networking important?

Networking offers a path to the hidden job market.

According to *6 Ways to Crack the Hidden Job Market* in the August 12, 2013, edition of *Forbes*, 80% of jobs and business opportunities are found through networking and are not formally advertised.

It is a long-term strategy that requires investment of your time and energy to build relationships. The time to network is not when you decide to search for a new job. It is while you have a job with the aim of connecting with others on a regular basis.

The Golden Rules of Networking

- Give to others before you ask for something. When you meet others' needs, you build *social credit* and *relationship currency* and are more likely to have your needs met in return.
- Don't set out with the goal of collecting business cards! Aim to connect with people in a meaningful way. Often people really do want to help you, if they know what you want. Whilst not everyone will have the power to employ you or connect you with someone who can, use a statement such as *I don't expect you to give me a job*, and Follow up with *Who else do you know that I could talk to?*
- Networking means finding people to talk to inside target employers. Ask questions. Be assertive as your own advocate. You are worth it and have something to offer.
- Value and cultivate your networks as you would your garden. Care for them and you'll reap the rewards.

Before You Network

- Understand what types of networking activities you're willing and unwilling to do. Categorise them and don't waste time on activities you don't want to do, as you will only set yourself up to fail.
- Networking can be intimidating. Try to envision networking as stepping out to meet people with similar interests.
- Whether you meet people online, on the phone, or face-to-face, remember that each one is a person, just like you. Be yourself. Relax. Listen attentively. Focus on getting to know them better than you did before this meeting or contact.



- Start by creating a list of all the people you have worked with in the past. Include colleagues, suppliers, partners, customers, service providers, etc.
 - Reach out to those you feel can champion you and support your job search
 - Schedule a meeting over coffee or by phone
 - Offer to buy that person a cup of coffee for an in-person meeting.
- Don't underestimate the value of your non-professional networks. Often there will be hidden gems of contacts—people who would benefit from knowing you professionally too.
- Identify a person you would like to meet and have someone in your network who knows that person make the introduction. LinkedIn's Introduction feature is a good place to start.
- To motivate you to action, develop a set of networking objectives or goals that guide your direction.

Face-to-Face Networking

- Smile—a genuine smile builds rapport and amiability.
- Dress appropriately for the event. If you are unsure about the dress code, call ahead and find out.
- Have an organised plan for the networking meeting. Know what questions to ask beforehand as well as which specific people you wish to engage in conversation.
- Set a goal to meet 3-5 people. Have a 5 to 10 minute conversation with each, exchange business cards, and connect on LinkedIn.
- Never work the room. Don't stare over the shoulder of the person you are with, looking for your next target. Work instead on *being in the moment* with the person you are speaking with.
- Pay attention, be yourself, and aim to strengthen *one* relationship. Networking is about building genuine relationships, not about numbers.
- Others can be just as uncomfortable as you are and will appreciate your efforts to initiate a discussion. Seek out people who are standing alone and introduce yourself. Make them feel comfortable and treat them as your guests, even if you are not hosting the event.
- Ask people what they have been doing recently. A great icebreaker!
- Know how to explain who you are and what you do in 30 seconds or less. By giving others enough interesting and relevant information about you, they will want to contact you for details.
- Be authentic and be yourself! Don't be too focused on your professional persona at the expense of letting them know the real you. Sharing a fishing story or something about your child's first day at



school and you will seem more approachable. Just keep the professionalism during most of your interactions.

- Ask others for their business cards first if you feel uncomfortable sharing yours. (Yes, even unemployed job seekers should have a professional networking business card).
- Have LinkedIn Mobile on your phone so you can access information on people you meet. There is now the option of finding others within your immediate vicinity. This in itself might be a great conversation starter as you can identify them by their pic.
- Use the back of business cards you receive to note a few things you talked about with the person. This will help you remember them and give you the seeds for following up.
- Lend a favorite business book to someone to read. It's a nice thing to do, plus it gives you a great excuse to get back in contact with that person.
- Attend as many networking events as often as you can. It's a numbers game. The more events you attend, the more people you'll meet.
- End the conversation quickly and walk away if you encounter a rude or abusive person. You are in search of positive and uplifting experiences.
- Treat everyone you meet with respect. The decision maker is not always the CEO.

Social Media Networking

- Ask others for their opinions about interesting facts you come across and share or comment upon. It shows you value their expertise and is a great conversation builder.
- Make social media social. To foster a discussion, email group members outside the group thanking them for the question, post, or comment.
- Strike up a conversation by talking about what you enjoy doing. Establishing similar interests will help you broaden your networking resources and ease you into comfortable dialogue in establishing new relationships.
- Set up a private Facebook group and invite anyone you meet in social media who you think has the same interests as you. Continue more in-depth and confidential discussions outside of the public social media group where you met.
- Expand your reach on groups such as Twitter and LinkedIn. This allows you to make career-related connections with a broad range of people.



- Focus your social media time on cultivating a smaller strategic subset of individuals for a meaningful, high-value exchange of industry information, leads, resources, and ideas.
- Interact with Twitter followers directly. Get to know their interests, and then invite them to an offline conversation.
- Join networks or groups that meet your personal and professional needs. Don't just be a member; contribute your expertise.

After You Network

- Follow up! Ask for business cards and follow up with everyone you meet, asking for an offline conversation when it is applicable.
- Connect with everyone you meet on LinkedIn and always personalise the connection. Tell them how you know them or why you'd love to connect with them. When they connect, start a conversation.
- Send a note, an article, or an update after meeting with people. Show that you care about their ideas and input. Keep the relationship going, even if it is only quarterly or less.
- Pick up the phone (not to type on it, but to call from it)—you'll stand out, be more memorable, and show your sincerity.
- Keep track of whom you talk to, how they helped you, and how you can help them, whether with an Excel spreadsheet or a simple notebook. As you network, your activities will have a domino effect. Keeping track and acting upon it will make all the difference in your networking success.
- Deliver. If you said you would do something, do it within one to two days. And pat yourself on the back for giving back.
- Remember, "Your money is in the follow-up." The value is in what you do after the event with the contacts you make. Typically, 80% of sales are made on the 5th or 12th contact—this is why follow-up is so important.