Networking: An introduction

Networking is probably one of the most underutilized job-search strategies. While statistics show that 60-80% of job seekers find their next position through networking and the "hidden or informal job market," most job seekers continue to focus their search on the formal job market such as postings, want ads or recruiting services.

While the formal market is a valid avenue, it is important to utilize all available resources.

Hi, my name is Pat Hahn and I am the HR director with CBIZ Mayer Hoffman McCann.

Making use of personal contacts, or networking, is the most effective way to find a job. It is also essential for learning about your career options before you begin a job search.

What is networking?
In your job search, networking is:

• Talking to people who know you, are familiar with what you want to do, and can provide information to help you progress toward your goal.

• Connecting with people who are employed in your field of interest and can share inside information on what the job field is really like.

• Contacting individuals within organizations for which you believe you'd like to work and learning about the culture and hiring process.

• Getting the inside track on a job that hasn't yet been advertised.

Even if you are starting with limited connections, you can network successfully. What do you do next? The trick is to delve beyond the first layer of contacts. Here's how!

Make a list of who you know
The first response by most people is usually: "I don't know anyone." That's not true. We all have a larger network than we think. Consider, for example:

• Your parents and your friends' parents
• Family, your grandparents, aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters, cousins
• Your parents’ friends
• Neighbors
• Faculty (both current and former)
• Clergy
• UST alumni
• Your doctor and dentist
• Former employers and co-workers
• Members of organizations you belong to (both social and professional)
• Anyone you know, who when contacted, recognizes you

Begin by writing these names down. If you get stuck, ask those in your inner circle to help jog your memory.

**Make a list of people you'd like to meet**

Once you've listed those you already know, start working on a list of those you'd *like to know*. These are the people in a particular position or employed by a certain organization that interests you.

Having this list helps you focus when contacting your network. It's very possible that someone in your network has just the contact you need.

**Pay attention to both quantity and quality**

The number of connections you make in networking is important, but the quantity of contacts should not take precedence over their quality!

**Utilize the University of St. Thomas Career Information Network**

This online resource, found on the Career Development web site, is a collection of alumni volunteers who have agreed to discuss career-related topics with current students. The Career Network is another way to expand your circle of contacts.

In the next audio guide I will discuss how to make contact with those on your list and those to whom you've been referred.

These are a few points concerning Networking. If you have additional questions on this or any other career related concerns, be sure to visit the University of St. Thomas Career Development Center for additional resources or to meet with a counselor.
Networking: Making contact

Making use of personal contacts, or networking, is the most effective way to find a job. It is also essential for learning about your career options before you begin a job search.

[2 second pause]

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In this second audio guide to networking I will discuss how to make contact with those on your list and those to whom you've been referred.

For many, this is the hard part. If you've received referrals, make sure you contact these people – after all, someone who knows you and what you're looking for thought they would be a good connection for you. In turn, be certain to solicit additional names from these new contacts in order to continue to expand your network. This is the essence of networking!

Attend networking functions
Continue to build your network by attending professional organization meetings and conferences, career fairs, functions, and other events that put you in contact with those who may be able to provide information

Be sure that every contact you make is done with courtesy and tact, but also with a strategy that will get you what you want. Always have in mind specific questions to ask or information to get from anyone you speak with. People can best help you when they know precisely what you need.

Get to know people and let them get to know you. Don't just ask, "Do you have a job for me?" and then move on to the next contact when they say no. Try to meet with people face-to-face whenever possible. They'll be more likely to want to help you if they feel like they know you.

Be sure to keep in touch with your contacts, thanking them for their assistance or keeping them abreast of your plans. By doing so, not only are you giving something back to them but are also developing a relationship with them.

Follow up
Once you've met with your contacts, be sure to follow up as agreed. Chances are you were given new ideas and information which require more research. As you may now recognize, networking is an ongoing process.

Don't neglect to follow up on leads you were given, and be certain to update your network. Let them know the progress you've made as a result of the information
they've provided.

And, *don't forget to say "thank you."* We all want to know we've been able to help and that our efforts are appreciated. Sending a thank-you note to everyone you speak with goes a long way in maintaining your network.

**Keep a contact log**

Make sure to keep track of who you talk with, when you spoke, what you discussed, and what the next steps will be. As your network grows, this tool will be invaluable.

**Find your own style**

What works for one person can be daunting for another. For example, if calling someone cold on the phone makes you so nervous you can't even dial the number, consider writing a letter first, then following-up with a call. Perhaps you can also have the person who gave you the contact's name call the contact to let them know that you will be calling.

Also, think of the way that *you* prefer to meet people. True extroverts will probably enjoy doing their networking by meeting strangers at meetings or parties. Others may prefer to cultivate contacts on a more one-to-one basis – being introduced by a mutual acquaintance, for example. You will be most successful in your networking if you find the best method for you.

Call it what you will – information gathering, market research, or any of the other terms used to describe networking – but it is a skill that can help you both personally and professionally.

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