



# Networking

## WHO YOU KNOW

You've no doubt often heard it said that it's not WHAT you know, but WHO you know that gets you the job. It is true that getting to know prominent people in your field is still the best method of conducting a professional and effective job search.

Simply stated, networking is the process of getting the people you know to introduce you to the people you don't know. It means utilizing contacts (friends, neighbors, classmates, co-workers, colleagues, relatives, and associates) to gain insider information and learn about opportunities and possible job openings. It is the active cooperation between two people engaged in the same field of interest. It is the intentional process of getting to know people and building relationships.

Networks are people meeting each other, establishing rapport, talking to each other, sharing ideas, and exchanging information. Networking is learning about hidden opportunities by actively seeking out information from your contacts, and, in the process, generating additional leads. Networking can take place at a professional conference, a career fair, or in your community. It might take place in a formal business setting or in a casual social setting. It can even initially take place through on-line networking sites.



## CIRCLES OF INFLUENCE

**Hot Circle...** people you speak to and interact with on a regular basis. They include family, close friends, and individuals you are comfortable dealing with.

**Warm Circle...** people you may have worked with in the past, current co-workers, acquaintances, and friends of friends.

**Cold Circle...** people you have not met or do not know personally. They might be strangers. They include people you have heard of or admire but are intimidated to talk to.

## GETTING STARTED

Some job seekers say that they don't know anyone or that they are unsure how to begin the process of networking. If that seems to be the case for you, consider the obvious starting point. Begin networking through your POFs (Parents Of your Friends) and your FOPs (Friends of your Parents). Begin on familiar ground and see what happens. One thing usually leads to another.



## MAKING CONTACT

"Schmoozing, sucking up, being fake, political or cheesy. These images often come to mind when students are asked what they think of networking. Many picture a used-car salesman in a polyester suit, a flesh-pressing, baby-kissing politician or the superficial rush chairman in *Animal House* (Hi! I'm Eric Stratton! Damn glad to meet you!). Sure, there are people like that, but they're the exception. When done properly, networking isn't sleazy at all. It's simply building relationships. Think of networking as a referral or recommendation. Meeting someone through a mutual contact or referral is like having a seal of approval. These *pre-approved* contacts are what the professional world revolves around. Almost 80% of all positions are found through some type of networking, personal relationships or connection. Like it or not, networking is an integral part of how business really operates... Contacts and relationships can be hard to establish and even harder to maintain. The best networkers realize that it's a two-way street. The telltale sign of a sleazy networker is calling only when you want something. Successful networkers aren't sleazy, selfish or opportunistic. They're sincere ... When it comes to networking, what goes around comes around."

-BRADLEY RICHARDSON / *JobSmarts For TwentySomethings*

## SERIOUS CREDIBILITY

According to industry insiders, people who know people in their field have more credibility. It is assumed that people who have made it their business to get out into the field and meet other people are more ambitious, more assertive, and more excited about their profession. They are regarded as having a greater passion for their careers, they are seen as being more dedicated, and they are considered by employers as possessing a higher level of initiative.

The best candidates in any field are those individuals who make it a point to gather information beyond the textbook and gain experience outside the classroom. As a result, meeting people in one's field happens rather naturally, as an extension of the individual's desire to learn more about his or her chosen profession. Therefore, people who have established relationships with people in their field are more serious about their careers, are truly better candidates, and find better opportunities.

## WHAT TO SAY



Seek out information, referrals and advice. Seek out opportunities to meet key people in your field. Seek out opportunities to engage in meaningful discussions. But, do not hit people up for jobs. Express an interest in the person and his or her organization, but do not ask for a job yet.

You might ask: What skills and qualifications are critical in your field? What trends do you see in your field? Do you have any ideas how a person with my background and skills might go about exploring options in your field?

Networking provides you some of the most valuable learning opportunities. The insiders you talk with can provide you organizational details, industry data, and contact information that might be otherwise difficult to obtain.

## WHERE TO GO

Networking can take place just about anywhere. Networking opportunities are more likely in settings where you are able to interact comfortably with people who share common interests and values.

Become an active member of your professional association. Become active in civic organizations. Get involved in fraternal, religious, or social clubs. Get involved in volunteer community service work. Join a local athletic or health club. Attend career fairs, meetings, conventions, or conferences. Attend cultural, theatrical, musical, or sporting events.

## THE RULE OF FOUR "R"s

Your hot and warm contacts can be very helpful. However, a candidate is warned never to treat his or her contact as a "courier." Nor should they be expected to get you a job. No contact should ever be expected to do the footwork on behalf of any candidate. The candidate conducts all the footwork while the contact provides the assistance that only an insider is able to offer. Consider the Rule of the Four "R"s regarding your insider contacts...

**Resource** - Your contact can serve as a resource to you. Your contact can be a good source of insider information and provide you with names, addresses, and other helpful facts and data.

**Referral** - Your contact can serve as a referral. Perhaps you can use your contact's name in your letter of introduction or in your introductory phone call.

**Recommendation** - Your contact can serve as a recommendation. Your contact may be willing to "put in a good word for you." He or she might simply offer some positive or favorable comments in your behalf to the appropriate individuals.

**Reference** - Your contact can serve as a reference. If he or she has been in a position to have observed the quality of your work, your contact may be willing to be listed on your reference list. Your contact could then be called to provide further insight in your behalf.

