



## **Networking: The Master Key to Opportunity**

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Seventy five percent of the job market is hidden. That's right – hidden.

We have all heard, "It's all about whom you know." In today's competitive job market, that statement couldn't be truer. The hidden job market consists of open positions that never make it to the classifieds or the Internet. These are roles that are filled by someone who had an inside track through friends or family. Whatever the case, before the outside world even knew there was an opening, it was filled.

This situation seems unfair, but those professionals were not just lucky. They earned those positions through networking; they made the right contacts. That is the objective of networking – getting your name out in the marketplace. The more you do, the better the chance that your name will magically pop up the next time an opportunity is available.

The key to successful networking is to realize that networking is a continuous process. However, networking for networking sake differs from networking with a specific purpose in mind. You must alter your networking approach to align with your current goals.

### **Networking – When you are content in your current job**

No one likes someone who just comes around when they are in need of something. That is why networking is a continuous process. Network before you need to in order to build up your contact list and hone your relationships.

- **Join an industry-specific association.** Increase your niche network.
- **Volunteer in your community.** You'd be surprised how small the world really is.
- **Keep in touch with contacts.** Call or write once a month "just to see how they are" and to keep your name current in their minds.

### **Networking – To advance within your current organization**

If you are in this situation, you have a small target audience. Your networking targets are with you 40 hours a week – your co-workers and bosses. In this respect it is easier, because you can network everyday; however you must also realize that you are on stage everyday and must never let your guard down.

- **Stand out.** Show up early and leave late; join committees; and be confident in your work.
- **Show initiative.** Successful professionals reach the top by leading, not following. Don't be afraid to try something new – innovative risk takers often open doors for themselves.
- **Hob-Knob with leaders.** Show interest in your work and look to your boss for information; ask how the company is doing, the direction it is heading and how you can help.
- **Dress to impress.** If you want to be important, then dress like you are important.

### **Networking – To find a job**

Networking while in an active job search is more structured, because you have a specific immediate goal. Don't get networking confused with job searching; networking is meeting new people who are able to give you advice and guidance, not necessarily a job.

1. **Compile a list.** Make a list of everyone you know: business professionals, friends, family and clients. Don't restrict your list; you never know who could be a link to the CEO of your dream employer. Also write down approximately 20 organizations that you would like to work for. In an



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ideal world, your contacts will provide links to your target companies, but don't be alarmed if this isn't the case.

2. **Write your commercial.** Prepare yourself by writing your sales pitch. This three-minute commercial should introduce your "business" self to your contacts. Include your credentials and your future objectives. Know this by heart – you must be able to recite it naturally when put on the spot.
3. **Schedule meetings.** Call your contacts to set up brief meetings. Before picking up the phone, jot down notes regarding what you want to say. Be professional and polite.
4. **Plan your agenda.** Don't waste your contact's time. You want to build bridges, not burn them. Know what it is you wish to accomplish when entering the meeting. You won't have much time; use it wisely.
5. **Present your best.** Remember you are not there for a job interview; enjoy yourself. Walk into the meeting with confidence, a positive attitude and energy. Build instant rapport by agreeing on a time allocation. Make it clear that you are there to learn; professionals love to share their industry knowledge.
6. **Follow up.** Send a note to let your contacts know how much you appreciated their time and insights.

Networking is the key to opening the hidden job market, whether it is an opportunity tomorrow or ten years from now. Network anywhere and everywhere and one day you will be the epitome of "It's all about whom you know."