

# CAREER CORNER

# II IN A SERIES

## Networking: Creating Connections to Your Next Job or Career

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**Networking — it's one of the most commonly used buzz words today. The truth is that networking is one of the best methods for finding strong job leads. It is an important endeavor for all job seekers and an essential component of the job search.**

### WHAT IS NETWORKING ?

Networking involves utilizing personal and professional contacts to help you locate and obtain employment. Through networking, you can share career aspirations, request advice, and exchange information and experience. It is a great way to build relationships that can help foster potential job opportunities. It is important to recognize that networking is a two-way street, and should be mutually beneficial whenever possible. If you are asking others to assist you with job leads, you must be willing to offer your support in return when asked.

### IS NETWORKING REALLY IMPORTANT ?

By creating an extensive list of contacts, you will be building a broad network that will allow you to obtain greater visibility and expand your career possibilities. The U.S. Department of Labor estimates that nearly half

of all job hunters obtain their jobs through referrals or word of mouth, also known as the "hidden job market" [quintcareers.com]. Securing these referrals is most often a direct result of networking efforts. Career experts note that the majority of job openings are never advertised or publicly announced. Many employers want to hire people who have been recommended to them and come with a ready seal of approval. Often, jobs are discussed with friends and colleagues before they are advertised. Through your network, you may have the opportunity to present your qualifications and experience to a hiring officer before a job announcement becomes public.

In addition to job leads, networking contacts can assist in many other ways. The people in your network can provide information on career fields to explore, current market trends, "insider information," additional networking contacts, strategies for pursuing work in a particular field, and resources such as associations to join and professional journals to read.

### HOW DO YOU CREATE A NETWORK ?

Networking contacts come in many forms and are more accessible than you think. In fact, you probably already have a network of family and friends. Additional contacts to consider when developing your network can include co-workers, employers, business affiliates, former professors, classmates, alumni, and members of clubs, religious groups, community organizations, and professional associations you belong to. Once you have identified all potential contacts, generate a master list for your reference.

### WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO BEGIN NETWORKING ?

Before you begin networking, think about your mission—what do you really want? Clearly define your career objectives so you can articulate them to your contacts. People generally enjoy helping others, but they must be able to understand your needs in order to assist you. Remember, networking is also about building relationships, so take the time to listen and share your ideas and knowledge as well. There are several different methods you can use to network your way to your next job or career. Here are a few ideas to get started:

- Initiate Informational Interviews: One of the best ways to establish a solid contact and glean more information about an occupation is to conduct an informational

interview. This is an interview that you request with someone who is currently in the field. The primary purpose of the interview is to obtain information. In addition to gaining a contact, you can obtain an in-depth view of job responsibilities, training requirements, salary range, growth potential, and referrals for other people in the field. (For more on informational interviewing—see Related Resources.)

- **Join a Professional Association:** Career-related professional associations are an ideal way to network. These organizations are excellent sources for reaching potential contacts and updating knowledge on current trends in the field. There are numerous options available; presently, over 140,000 associations exist in the United States alone [asae.net.org]. (For more information on professional associations—see Related Resources.)
- **Consider E-Networking:** Also known as online networking, e-networking, or Internetworking, can add another dramatic dimension to your networking options. The Internet opens the door of your network to a global community of virtual contacts. Online networking allows you a timely way to increase your list of contacts and opportunities for job leads and referrals. There are a variety of social and professional Web sites for online networking such as discussion groups and seminars, newsgroups, job clubs, message boards, job boards, alumni organizations, and professional associations.

The Internet can provide many viable venues for networking. However, before actively embarking on e-networking, be sure to establish a suitable approach. Seek multiple online networking opportunities, but take the time to determine which options best meet your needs. Locate and note any site rules before joining online communities. Review netiquette guidelines and maintain professionalism in all communications. Also keep in mind that although e-networking can be a useful tool, it is only one of several methods for initiating career connections. (For more information on e-networking—see Related Resources.)

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## **ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR NETWORKING SUCCESSFULLY :**

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- **Organize Your Network:** Create a filing system using a computer database, spreadsheet, index cards, or file folders to keep track of your contact information, your resumes, business cards, and other related materials.
- **Diversify Your Network:** Don't limit your contacts only to individuals who mirror you. Expand your horizons. People who are different from you can bring new perspectives and new opportunities to your career.
- **Follow-up With Your Network:** Make sure your contacts are aware of your career progress. Keeping them informed and thanking them for their help will nurture and sustain this alliance.
- **Always Network:** The key is to begin networking before you need a job. Even if you are not presently job hunting, you can be cultivating ties for the future.

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## **MORE THAN A SUGGESTION :**

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Networking is a necessary step for your job search. Developing an effective network is the key to career mobility. Successful networking creates the connections you need to establish a competitive edge, empower your career, and enrich your life.

### **RELATED RESOURCES:**

- Key Career Networking Resources for Job-Seekers, Quintessential Careers**  
[http://www.quintcareers.com/networking\\_resources.html](http://www.quintcareers.com/networking_resources.html)
- Networking and Your Job search, The Riley Guide**  
<http://www.rileyguide.com/network.html>
- Informational Interviewing Tutorial, Quintessential Careers**  
[http://www.quintcareers.com/informational\\_interviewing.html](http://www.quintcareers.com/informational_interviewing.html)
- General Professional Organizations and Associations for Networking, Quintessential Careers**  
[http://www.quintcareers.com/professional\\_organizations.html](http://www.quintcareers.com/professional_organizations.html)
- E-Networking, by Nancy Halpern, The Riley Guide**  
<http://www.rileyguide.com/enetwork.html>
- Internet Career Networking Tutorial for Job-Seekers, Quintessential Careers**  
[http://www.quintcareers.com/Internet\\_Networking/](http://www.quintcareers.com/Internet_Networking/)
- Enrolled students and alumni can access many additional career-related links on the Excelsior College Web site. Go to [www.excelsior.edu](http://www.excelsior.edu), then log in and click on the Career Resources link on your MyEC page; for graduates, click on the Alumni Connection.

### **QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS ON THIS ARTICLE?**

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