

Networking Guide

Networking

Many people think of networking as a negative form of schmoozing, but the reality is that networking is the best way to land a job, especially in a tight economy. Once you become comfortable with the idea of networking, the process becomes much easier and productive. Many forms of networking exist, but three in particular are important for your job search:

- 1) Contacting friends, family members, colleagues, peers and others to discuss your job search
- 2) Attending professional meetings and both formal and informal networking events
- 3) Informational interviewing (discussed in greater length later in this guide)

Throughout the process of networking, you will want to keep good notes on any information you learn as well as the contact information for people. You might consider keeping a contact log so you will know when you last spoke with somebody or where you met that person and how. Doing so makes follow up much simpler.

Using Your Current Network

We all have families, friends, neighbors, professors, former employers, etc. who can help us in our job search, and it doesn't require much energy or effort on their part. Essentially, you want to let everyone know that you are seeking employment. Let them know the types of work you would prefer to do (and perhaps any jobs you might be willing to do beyond the initial preferences). Be succinct but thorough, and make sure they have an understanding of what you are seeking. In addition, you should give them an idea of what types of places are most attractive to you. If you are interested in a large corporate firm, give them examples. If you want to work for the government or in a small non-profit setting, describe the type of organization to them so they have some idea of the kinds of places that interest you. Not only are you hoping to find someone who works in your area of interest, but you are also trying to see if anybody has contacts at an organization where you might like to work, even if that person is not in a position or in an area of the organization where you want to work. Remember, you only want to find a way into the organization to get yourself in front of people who might know someone else who could be helpful to you in your search.

Your friends, family and other associates are not the only people you know. If you make a list, you will find that you are already part of an extensive social network. For example, your barber or hair stylist, your doctor, local politicians or representatives, community activists, members of religious organizations and your health care professionals are just a few of the people you know and interact with who might be able to talk to you about your interests. Even if your initial contact isn't able to provide information, chances are good that they may know someone who does have useful insights.

Professional Meetings and Networking Events

Professional organizations and associations often host formal networking events, but they also host other informational or programmatic meetings and workshops. These events are an important part of your job search because you can connect with professionals in your area of interest. People within a profession tend to have a decent knowledge of trends within the field, and they often know when someone inside an organization is looking to hire a staff member. These types of events require you to have a quick spiel about yourself ready. Think about what you would want to communicate about yourself to someone in 20-30 seconds. Certainly, you would tell them your name, but you also want to indicate a bit about who you are or why you are at the event. In some cases, events are organized exclusively around job search networking and thus, the reason for being there is apparent.

Informational Interviewing

During your job search, informational interviewing not only helps you make appropriate contacts within your field, but it also assists you in learning the insiders' view of your interest area. You control the course of the informational interview, and it also allows you to make others aware of your job search goals and who you are as a job seeker.

First off, you should locate potential interviewees through your network and contact them. People often prefer e-mail contact, but some might prefer the phone. Start with e-mail and follow-up with a phone call as necessary. You should request 20-30 minutes of someone's time and find out if they would want you to meet them at their office or for coffee (sorry, you'll have to buy since you are asking for the favor) or if the phone is a reasonable way for you to communicate. In-person is the best mode if the contact is local. It is sometimes necessary to interact over the phone or email if someone is out of town or if they are too busy to meet with you. In either case, you should have a few directed questions ready to ask them. During an informational interview, taking notes is acceptable, but make sure you are having a conversation and not writing out lecture notes. It helps to have done some basic research on the field so that you can make the most of your limited time with a valuable human resource.

Some sample questions to ask an informational interviewee include the following:

- What is your role in the organization?
- What kinds of projects do you work on?
- What is your typical day/week like?
- What do you enjoy most about what you do? Least?
- What are the characteristics of someone who would be successful in this field?
- How did you get into this field?
- Can you recommend ways for someone with my background to get into this field?
- What skills do people use most in this type of work?
- Is there any other advice you could give me?

Always be on time for both phone and in-person interviews. You conduct the interview, and you should always stay within your stated time frame unless the interviewee allows you additional

time. If the interview goes well, tell the person that you are interested in the field, and ask if they could review your resume and give you some feedback. In addition, you should ask if the person knows of anyone else you might contact who would be helpful. NEVER, NEVER, NEVER ask directly for a job on an informational interview!!! You asked for information, and you do not want to appear to be a beggar, and you do not want to violate your agreement of seeking information.

After the interview, send a thank you note and follow up on any suggestions the person gave you. If he or she made recommendations on how to tailor your resume for your career field, then send a copy of the revisions to them. (Try to send it electronically since that allows them to circulate your document more easily.) Compile your notes from the interview, and contact anyone the interviewee recommended.

Networking Resources

As mentioned previously, professional associations provide a wealth of resources for the job seeker. These associations often have student memberships that are significantly cheaper from their regular membership costs. In many cases, you don't even have to join to attend events, or you can pay for individual programs and workshops. Following is a list of professional organizations broken down by career areas and other interests. This list is NOT comprehensive by any means, but it will give you a sense of the groups that exist in the Chicago area.