

Networking Skills and Methods

YOU HAVE PROBABLY heard the expression, “It’s not what you know. It’s who you know.” It is easier to find a job when the employer already knows something about you. However, you do not have to rely on your relatives to give you a job. Instead, you just need to figure out how to meet the “right” people. In this unit, you will learn how networking can give your career or business the boost needed to succeed.



Objective:



Explain networking methods and techniques.

Key Terms:



hidden job market
network
networking
social networking

Understanding Networking

Networking is the act of building relationships for professional reasons. There are a variety of reasons to network and a variety of ways to do it. Networking is an ongoing process, so you should do it throughout your career, as you look for a job or build your own business.

THE IMPORTANCE OF NETWORKING

A **network** is a group of people with whom an individual has a professional relationship. Having a large network provides many benefits for your career or business. Your network includes all the people you know, but proper networking allows you to make contact with

other people your friends know. For example, you could call an associate to ask a question. Even if that person does not know the answer, he or she may know an expert in that area and put you in touch with him or her.

Networking provides opportunities for employment. It is easier to get an internship or job if you have work experience first. Networking may help you find a job, advance in your current position, or find a better job.

Hidden Job Market

The **hidden job market** is a term used to describe employment opportunities that are never officially advertised. Human resources experts estimate that only about 20 percent of job openings are advertised in traditional ways, such as newspaper ads and job search websites. The other 80 percent of jobs are filled through word-of-mouth, recommendations, and networking connections. Therefore, if you limit your job search to advertisements, you will automatically miss out on 80 percent of the available jobs. By letting your network know you are looking for work, you may find many more opportunities.



FIGURE 1. Experts estimate that only about 20 percent of job openings are advertised in traditional ways, such as newspaper ads.

Referrals

Business owners benefit from networking, as well. They may gain clients through referrals from people in their network. Likewise, they may find prospective employees and receive recommendations for vendors and contractors. In some cases, business owners may even find potential investors.

Professional Development

Networking provides opportunities for professional development. You may receive advice or different perspectives on problems. In addition, you may find someone in your network that is able to serve as a mentor. Also, networking may alert you to training opportunities, conferences, and new trends in the business.

METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

There are many ways to build a network, but the most important way is to talk to people anywhere you go. You never know when you might meet someone who could use your help or provide help to you.

Introductions

When you meet someone, introduce yourself with a smile and a firm handshake. Many networking events serve food and drinks. But remember, if you have a plate of food in one hand and a drink in the other, it will be difficult to shake hands. Therefore, it is wise to alternate between holding an appetizer and a drink. If a nametag is provided at the event, wear it on the right side of your chest, thereby making it more visible when you shake hands with a person.

Questions

Ask questions to “break the ice.” Some people find it difficult to strike up a conversation with a stranger. Asking questions helps put others at ease while you learn more about them. Examples of questions include: “Where do you work?” and “What type of work do you do?”

Connections

Establish a connection with the person you just met. After you ask questions, point out if you have the same ideas or philosophies, if you went to the same school, or if you have mutual friends or contacts.

Listen

Be a good listener. Repeat the person’s name to help you remember it, and pay attention to the details shared.

Business Cards

Keep business cards on hand to pass out as you meet new people. Ask for business cards from others, as well. If they do not have cards, write down their name, company, and any other important information as soon as you can, so you do not forget.



FIGURE 2. Exchange business cards when you meet someone new. Then you can contact him or her later.

Assistance

Offer help instead of always asking for it. You may think that you do not have anything to offer a more experienced business person. However, you still may be able to provide information, opinions, or new ideas. At the very least, occasionally make contact when you do not need anything, so it does not seem like you are always asking for favors.

Follow Up

After you make a new contact, it is important to follow up with him or her. Send a note or email, or make a phone call to touch base after the meeting. You may want to set up another

meeting or arrange to have coffee with the person to continue a previous conversation. Send a thank-you note if the person shared information or offered to help you in some way. If you offered help or promised to do something, it is important to follow through and keep your word.

Opportunities for Networking

There are endless opportunities for networking and meeting new people. Community events, such as charity fundraisers, school functions, county fairs or local festivals, and performances of the arts (e.g., ballet and theater) provide a chance to mingle with people in your community with a variety of backgrounds.

You should consider joining professional clubs and associations related to your career. They often sponsor opportunities for networking (e.g., cocktail parties, awards dinners, and conferences). Likewise, alumni associations and civic organizations provide opportunities for you to interact with a variety of people.

Online social networking sites have become important, too. **Social networking** is the use of Internet-based programs or websites to build relationships for professional reasons. Like traditional networking, the goal is to build relationships with people whom you may help or who may help you in career advancement. One benefit is that online networking is constant. It is available 24 hours a day, and you can update your information or search for others anytime and



FURTHER EXPLORATION...

ONLINE CONNECTION: LinkedIn

Facebook, Twitter, and blogs are examples of social networking websites that can be used for social interaction and for business networking purposes. LinkedIn, however, is specifically designed for business networking. Recruiters and human resources professionals may check your LinkedIn profile, so use it to “sell yourself.” It is not the place for you to post about your dinner, your kids, or the party you went to last Saturday. Instead, build a profile to share information about your education and employment history. Highlight your special skills or training. Update your profile often to ensure your information is current.

A basic LinkedIn account is free, but the paid subscription offers more services. Once you are a member, you will have access to other people’s profiles. You can make connections that will help when you are looking for a job, and employers can find connections that will help them find potential employees. You can request “introductions,” which would allow you to connect with those who already know your contacts.

Visit the LinkedIn website, <http://www.linkedin.com>, and explore some of the features. In addition, visit the following websites to learn more about LinkedIn. Create a short presentation, sharing at least three tips for creating and maintaining your profile as well as for expanding your network.

http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-505125_162-51219860/how-to-use-linkedin/

<http://jobsearch.about.com/od/networking/a/linkedin2.htm>

anywhere. Online social networking is not a replacement for face-to-face interaction, but it is another useful tool for building your network. *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *LinkedIn*, and blogs are examples.

Networking Goals

The goal of networking is to find contacts in different fields and job types. In addition, it allows you to make connections with people in other geographic areas. Networking allows you to make yourself “visible” to recruiters or human resources professionals. Online social networking is especially important for that reason, as it allows you some control over the information that people learn about you. Use your “profile” to highlight your strengths, skills, and goals.

Obstacles to Networking

Some people are naturally shy or introverted. They may not be comfortable talking to many people at a networking event. You should not use shyness as an excuse to avoid networking, though. Practice introducing yourself until it feels comfortable and natural. Join groups that you enjoy, and support causes that are important to you. That will make the event itself more enjoyable, so you will look forward to attending. Look for smaller groups or events, which can be less overwhelming than large groups. Once you meet one person at a networking event, you could ask him or her to introduce you to someone else.

If you are busy looking for a job or working, it can be difficult to make time to network. You should view time spent networking as an investment into your career. If you find it hard to make time for networking events, consider scheduling time into your day for networking and following up with the people you meet.

Summary:



Networking is the act of building relationships for professional reasons. Your network includes all the people you know, but proper networking allows you to make contact with other people your friends know. Networking provides opportunities for employment.

Hidden job market is a term used to describe employment opportunities that are never officially advertised. Human resources experts estimate that about 80 percent of jobs are filled word-of-mouth, recommendations, and networking connections rather than newspaper ads.

When you meet someone, introduce yourself with a smile and a firm handshake. Ask questions, make a connection, and exchange contact information. After you make a new contact, follow up with a note, email, or phone call. There are endless opportunities for networking and meeting new people, such as community events and professional associations.

Checking Your Knowledge:



1. What is networking, and why is it important?
2. What is the hidden job market?
3. Explain the keys to successful networking.
4. List three examples of community events that offer networking opportunities.
5. What are some ways an individual can overcome shyness to feel more comfortable networking?

Expanding Your Knowledge:



Talk to family members and other adults to ask how networking has helped them in their careers. Find out how many of them were hired for their current jobs because of networking, rather than by answering an advertisement in a newspaper or on a job search website. Do their experiences reflect the statistics about the hidden job market that were explained in this unit?

Web Links:



Hidden Job Market

http://blogs.hbr.org/cs/2011/08/crack_the_hidden_job_market.html

Networking

<http://www.job-hunt.org/job-search-for-academics/what-networking-is.shtml>

Effective Networking

<http://freelanceswitch.com/finding/9-steps-towards-genuine-effective-networking/>

Breaking into the Hidden Job Market

http://www.cbsnews.com/2100-500173_162-7167784.html