



NETWORKING IS ABOUT MAKING CONTACTS AND BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS THAT CAN LEAD TO JOBS OR OTHER WORK-RELATED OPPORTUNITIES.

Thoughtful networking provides a focused way to talk to people about your job search. Done right, it can help you obtain leads, referrals, advice, information and support. It is an essential component of any successful job search, but it requires calculated planning.

The good news for older job seekers is that by virtue of more years and more experiences, you generally have an edge over your younger counterparts in the scope of your networks. But older workers may be less experienced in identifying and using those contacts. Here are some pointers on how to build and sustain your employment networks.

Know How to Make Your Pitch

A key part of effective networking is being clear about your employment goals. A careful self-assessment can provide pertinent information about who you are and what you want when communicating with contacts. Prepare talking points and practice delivering them, whether you have 10 seconds for an elevator pitch or 10 minutes for an informational interview.

Keep Track of Your Contacts

When a contact gives you leads or referrals, be sure to ask for permission to use the contact's name. Keep detailed records of your networking activity: to whom did you talk? About what? When? What were the results? For each contact, identify next steps and develop a reliable follow-up system. A collection of index cards will work; so will a notebook or a computer application. The key is to be persistent and actually follow up.

Expand Your Horizons

Your network will include people you know well, acquaintances and referrals. Be creative. Here's a partial list of common sources for networking contacts:

- Alumni organizations
- Children's contacts: PTA, Little League, Scouts, parents of their friends
- Classmates (any grade or school)
- Community job clubs
- Former employers, including supervisors and coworkers
- Friends: local and out-of-town
- Hobby groups: bridge clubs, gardening, model trains, quilting, etc.
- Members of clubs: health club, softball team, hiking club
- Members of your church, temple, synagogue or mosque (some religious organizations also sponsor job search groups)

- Past military friends
- Neighbours, current and past
- Participants in trade shows, seminars or workshops you've attended
- Political groups
- Professional associations
- Professionals: attorneys, accountants, doctors, dentists, insurance agents, pharmacists, veterinarians
- Relatives: local and out-of-town
- Service or fraternal organizations and groups: Rotary, Kiwanis, Soroptimists, Elks
- Services: travel agents, stockbrokers, realtors
- Volunteer associations: past and present

Build Your "Net Worth"

Your network is your "net worth." To get the most from your investment, thank everyone who helps you (in person and with a written follow-up), and keep those who are interested posted on the progress of your search or career change.

And remember: make yourself available as a resource for other job seekers, and treat them as you would like to be treated by those with whom you network.