

Marketing Yourself

By Barbara Kofman and Kaitlin Eckler

Q: I am not a good networker and the idea of it sends shivers up my spine. Help!

A: Networking is a skill you need to succeed in the working world so you might as well warm up to it. It is a way of communicating your unique attributes and accomplishments, a critical facet of a job search, and one of the most important capabilities for progressing in your career. Few people easily gravitate to networking at first, but if you learn the right approach, develop a professional attitude about it, and make it a regular part of managing your career, it will benefit you immeasurably in the future.



In order to feel comfortable about networking, you need to be prepared. Follow these steps:

- #1** Identify your authentic self – who you are, the things you have accomplished and where it is that you think you may want to plug in those attributes. (Review the September Career Zone at www.jobpostings.ca for tips on how to do this.)
- #2** Put together a list (with contact information) of everyone you know, not just individuals you believe may be of help in advancing your career. This list of advancers may include family, friends, neighbours, professors, and anyone else who may direct you toward a contact in your area of focus. Do not limit your list by making assumptions that someone cannot help you. You will be surprised at where the leads come from.
- #3** Become familiar with industry publications, the websites of companies you are interested in, and attend industry association meetings – all are starting places for picking up valuable information and potential contacts to assist your networking.
- #4** Develop your elevator pitch – a brief 20-second summary about your professional self – the brand that you would like the world to associate with who you are, your key competencies, and what you can do for a potential employer. Be clear and concise about what it is that you do, as well as what distinguishes you from other people who have similar

skills. Marketers refer to this step as identifying your “unique selling proposition.” Consider including:

- Who you are
- Your career focus
- 2-3 major strengths that relate to your goal
- What you’re seeking from the dialogue

#5 Now, commit to action – put together a Networking Agenda to identify who you will contact and when, in order to schedule a face-to-face meeting. Start by contacting a person on your list who is “safe,” an individual you know and can come back to in the future if you wish to set up another meeting, and then move to the riskier, high-potential ones. This way you get to warm up and learn to be more comfortable with networking.

Networking has consistently proven to be the best way to “market yourself” to the right job opportunity, and therefore must be considered an integral part of your job search plan, as well as a future means of climbing the career ladder. Later in your career it will become a tool for becoming acquainted with people who can make a difference in getting your expertise recognized or your product known and in helping you become familiar with what other people and companies are doing. It truly is the way to build your personal brand. And while we are speaking about brand, remember that your brand must always be your authentic expression of who you are and what you do.

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Q. I am planning to move to another city after I graduate and will not know anyone there; everyone tells me that the only way to get a job is through contacts. What should I do?

A. As you can see from the above response, networking is not only a smart way to market yourself it is also an essential skill to hone. Relocating is disorienting, but it also offers you a fresh start and a perfect opportunity to develop a great network of people who may advance your career, based on the fact that you are new to their city.



How to Get Started

We recommend that you prepare the networking plan as outlined, paying particular attention to the places where people in your industry--those with inside information and contacts--spend their time congregating socially and professionally. Socially you will find that like attracts like and people in similar industries often frequent the same establishments such as coffee shops, lunch places and bars. And, professionally it is wise to attend professional/industry association meetings, conferences, developmental programs and school alumni gatherings.

Get to Know Your New City

You can get a sense of what is going on in your new city by checking out local professional publications, newspapers, and websites. For example, www.torontojobs.ca is a Toronto-based job board that lists job fairs and other resources for job seekers in the area. Calgary has www.calgaryjobs.com. Most cities have similar sites, so Google the city you're moving to, to see if they have a site. Consider doing volunteer work. It's a great way to contribute to your new community, to meet people and to learn about opportunities that you would not otherwise be aware of.

**Technology is Only One Tool...
Get out There and Meet People**

No matter how tempting it might be to use technology as your sole source for job leads and for contacting others, you would be short changing yourself by passing up the rewards that accrue from face-to-face networking. Even though, work itself is

mostly technical, the workplace itself is social and interpersonal; you need to develop a database of contacts who will become personally committed to helping you do well. By relying only on the Internet, you pit yourself against thousands of other faceless job seekers and greatly diminish your chances of success.

The net result of networking--doing the research to identify companies and key people with jobs for you, and then placing yourself in situations where you can network to meet them or others who can connect you with them -- will be not only landing the right job but also making friends in your new city.

How to prepare for successful networking?

Commit the following to paper:

1. Who you are, what you do, and what distinguishes you.
2. Identify and list the individuals in your target organizations or industries who need to know about you.
3. Make use of alternate avenues for marketing yourself e.g., write magazine articles, volunteer, join a professional organization (many associations give special rates to students).
4. Practice your elevator pitch -- your 20-second summary.
5. Set up a 'Networking Agenda' and start with someone with whom you are comfortable. 

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