Networking Tips

Experts Offer Their Tips for Fruitful Networking

By Stacey L. Bradford
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When it comes to finding a job, nothing beats good, old-fashioned networking – contacting friends, relatives and former colleagues, setting up face-to-face meetings in the hope of getting job referrals. Yes, it is awkward, but here’s why it simply has to be done: At any given time, about 80% of all available jobs aren’t posted in the classifieds or on job boards, says BH Careers International, a New York career-management firm. And 60% of people surveyed by BH said they got their last job by networking.

Here are 10 tips from experts to make your networking fruitful:

1. Prepare an “elevator speech.” Write a summary of what you want people to know about you that can be delivered in less than 30 seconds. Make it upbeat and succinct: who you are, what you do, what you’re looking for. More than that and you risk turning off the listener, says Debra Condren, a career coach and business psychologist with offices in New York and San Francisco. Since you get only one chance to make a first impression, she recommends practicing your elevator speech in front of a mirror, and then on friends, before taking it to a networking event.

2. Use your existing ties. Start by tapping existing contacts, including friends, family and ex-colleagues. Spread the word that you’re looking for a job and ask if anyone has a contact that might be able to offer advice. Then make sure to ask every person you meet for two or three more referrals. (“Do you know anyone else who might be helpful for me to meet?” can be an effective question)

3. Target trade groups. Don’t waste time at big events catering to people in many industries. Join the dominant trade or industry group in your area. Preferably, it should have a barrier to entry, at least a membership fee. Consider volunteering on one of the group’s committees, to meet members.

4. Show interest in others. Career experts say the secret is to stop focusing on you and take an interest in the other person. Ask questions and get the contacts to talk about themselves and their business experience. This is easier than you might think.

5. Don’t ask for a job. It may force the other person to say no to you. Instead, seek advice, says Dan Strakal, co-author of "Better Job Search in 3 Easy Steps" and owner of Success Positioning Systems, an Albuquerque, N.M., career-services firm. People are likelier to be generous with their time if you ask for their counsel. Don’t worry. If you seem qualified for an opening, they’ll refer you to the right person to set up an interview.

6. Build relationships. Strangers won’t put their reputations on the line for you. Build ties with a new contact before asking for help. Consider dropping a personal note to any new contact you meet at an industry event. Then follow up, perhaps with a helpful article or introduction to someone you know.

7. Don’t be selfish. No matter how desperate you are, remember networking is a two-way street. If you’ve met with a recruiter, you can always offer to introduce him to the smartest people you know in your industry, says Melanie Mulhall, a career coach and corporate consultant in Broomfield, Colo. If you are a young job seeker with little experience, you may not be able to help a finance chief land his next position – but his daughter might be applying to colleges and want to hear your take on a school.

8. Don’t abuse relationships. There’s no rule here for how many phone calls are too many. Just try to gauge if you’re coming across as always looking for a favor.

9. Follow through. Nothing can kill a budding relationship faster than not writing a proper thank-you note. In many cases, you can e-mail it, but don’t assume the content is any less important than in snail mail. A three-line message with a smiley face won’t cut it. Keep the other person abreast of how your meeting went with someone he or she referred you to.

10. Maintain your network. Cultivate ties even when you aren’t job hunting. Remember, the majority of jobs go unpublished, so you may hear of an exciting opportunity.
**Elevator Pitch**

Imagine that you are in an elevator. The doors open and in walks the CEO/President of your dream organization, company or non-profit. You have the time of the elevator ride to get your message across of who you are what you are about. **What are you going to say?**

**Prep Your Pitch:**
A good elevator pitch should sound impromptu, but you’ll need to prepare it in advance to get it that way. Keep in mind the following **five** questions that your elevator pitch must answer:

1. Who are you?
2. What do you do?
3. What can you do for me?
4. Why should I hire you?
5. How can I contact you?

**Things to Consider:**
- Start with a positive, confident and uplifting introduction. This sets the tone for the message and common sense courtesy goes a long way in this case.
- Practice, practice and practice your message. When you’re comfortable with it, practice it on family and friends, and ask them for feedback on the content and your performance.
- Keep the message concise. (Less than 30 seconds)
- Maintain eye contact. This displays confidence and trustworthiness — it’s all about a good first impression.
- Tailor your delivery to the circumstances of the moment: the goal is to maintain a conversational tone and not sound rehearsed.

Still stuck? **Check out this sample elevator pitch:**

“Hello, I am Jane Doe and I am currently a junior at Gonzaga University majoring in Public Relations. I believe one of my strengths is my ability to problem solve critically while working in a team. I enjoy learning and social media. I am looking for an internship opportunity that allows me to expand my developing leadership skills while gaining new insight into the field of communications. It is a pleasure meeting you and thank you in advance for your assistance with my search.”

**Write your pitch here:**

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