



Networking Your Way to a Great Job

Searching for your job by relying on postings – on LinkedIn, Indeed, company websites, etc. -- may make you feel productive, however, using job postings is a low odds method for landing job interviews. Networking is more work and a little less comfortable, but it is far more likely to produce interviews and land a great job.

Networking, or having conversations to share mutually beneficial information, is a process. One reason b-school students give up on networking is that it isn't always immediately gratifying. You can't guarantee that every networking conversation you have will translate into a job. While you can't predict which people will be able to help or who they know, there are many reasons why you shouldn't give up on networking.

Networking works because it helps the people you meet begin to know, like and trust you. These three things are the foundation of any transaction. Without them, you are a risky candidate. Have you ever considered buying an expensive product or service without asking for recommendations from people you trust or reading online reviews?

Another reason networking works is because hiring managers use their network to find qualified candidates. They ask their professional colleagues and personal network for referrals.

By meeting people in your desired industry and career path, you are getting the word out about your qualifications. You are also learning about the qualifications and characteristics specific companies are really looking for. Ultimately, you will be referred to hiring managers.

Your goal is to build a strategic plan to guide your networking activities. You will begin to see the benefits of networking and the progress you are making in building relationships with people who could introduce you to your next employer.

The Hidden Job Market

The Hidden Job market refers to jobs that are available but have not been shared publicly or advertised.

There are several reasons a company does NOT advertise a job opening. First, once a job is posted, the company becomes inundated with resumes, emails and phone calls. Responding to inquiries and applications requires a significant investment of time. While most companies use applicant tracking systems (ATS) to help with the screening process, it is still very time consuming to review resumes, screen candidates and conduct interviews. A second reason companies may not advertise a job is because a candidate has already been identified. A third option for why a company may not publicize an opening is because they plan to replace someone, and they don't want the employee to find out until a replacement has been hired.

The only way you will learn about jobs in the hidden job market is to network with people, especially those who work inside companies. Employees tend to know about job openings before anyone else.

Hiring is Risky Business

Identifying a candidate for a job is only one piece of the puzzle. The hiring manager needs someone who will do the job well and complement the existing team members. This is not easy to evaluate through the interview process. It is difficult to predict how the candidate will actually perform on the job and fit with the company culture. Referred ►



candidates tend to make better hires, meaning they stay in the job longer and come up to speed faster. More and more, companies rely on referred candidates and have implemented employee referral programs to help fill openings.

How to Tap Into the Hidden Job Market

It should be clear to you by now that networking is the best way to tap into the hidden job market, reduce your perceived risk as a candidate and ultimately increase the chance of getting an interview. You want to meet and speak with people who work inside companies where there may be an opening that hasn't been advertised.

If you haven't networked before, there's just one rule you need to follow.

You never ask for a job.

Your purpose in networking is to gather advice, information and recommendations to help you make an informed career move. You also want to be perceived as a valuable resource, so be sure to offer something in return to the people you meet with.

Network Strategically

Develop a strategy to organize and prioritize who you will meet with. Otherwise, you'll meet with lots of people but won't uncover any relevant career information or job leads, and it will feel like a waste of time.

Here are seven questions to help you map out your networking plan.

1. Who do you need to meet?

Be purposeful in who you choose to meet with. While some degree of serendipity is involved in networking, you do want to drive the process by contacting people who work at target companies, appropriate alumni, friends, family, classmates and past work colleagues, as well as people who are experts in the industry or occupation you are interested in. (See "Eight Types of People To Ask For A Meeting")

2. What is the purpose in meeting with them?

Before reaching out to anyone, determine what your purpose is for networking with them or what you want to learn from them. Do you want to ask for career advice, tap into their expertise (and network), learn about a company, or are there other reasons meeting someone will help your job search and career?

3. What is the best way to meet them?

There are many ways to generate a meeting with a good contact without reaching out through a cold email. Here are some of the ways you could connect: ask a mutual connection for an introduction; attend an event the person will be speaking at or attending; engage with the person using social media; or join a LinkedIn group the person belongs to and add comments to their posts and discussions.

4. How will you introduce yourself?

What information can you share that will make the person most receptive to the idea of meeting with you? Your professional qualifications may not be the first thing to mention. Think about including the name of a mutual connection, name of the school you both attended, skills or areas of mutual interest, or even shared interests outside of work. (See "How To Create A Great Pitch")

5. What questions will you ask?

Determine in advance the types of questions you will ask someone before you reach out. Do you want to learn more about what really happens inside a company or the ins and outs of a career? Maybe you're interested in understanding the day-to-day activities of your desired career. Develop a list of questions you want answers to. (See "Eight Steps to Prepare for Your Informational Meeting") ►



6. What can you offer in return?

Before and during the conversation, listen for opportunities to offer something in return. You may have read an article that would be beneficial to share or you may have worked on a case study or project that would be of interest. Perhaps you know someone from your networking that the person would benefit from meeting. You could facilitate an introduction. If you are still unclear as to how you can help the person you are meeting with, ask at the conclusion of the meeting.

7. How will you stay in touch?

Sending a thank you message after the meeting is just the first step. You want to stay in contact with the person, especially if the meeting revealed potential for future opportunities. Vary your follow-up methods between phone calls, email and social media. Also use different reasons to stay in touch, from sharing industry news stories to updates on your job search progress. (See “12 Ways to Stay in Touch with Your Network”)

Types of Networking

There are four types of networking activities you will be involved in:

1. Attending A Networking Event

You should plan to regularly attend networking events that allow you to interact with new people in your industry or occupation. From alumni networking events to career conferences to industry meetings, you’ll want to prepare to make a strong first impression at these events.

2. Conversation with People You Know

Reach out to people you know. Because these people are already familiar with you, it is easier to reach out and re-educate them on what you are looking for and to request their advice or help. People you know are also more likely to want to help and refer you to people in their network. Consider asking people you know for names of people who work at target companies and people they think you should meet.

Talk to people in class, on social media or around campus. Be open to meeting new people, learning new things and finding common interests.

3. Requesting An Informational Meeting

There are two types of people you will want to meet with for an informational meeting – company insiders and industry experts.

Start by asking for a meeting with people who work inside target companies. Using your target company list, identify alumni, mutual connections, and even people you know who work for companies you are interested in. Your purpose for wanting to meet with company insiders is to learn about the company. These people will know about the company and will be the first to hear about new opportunities.

You also want to meet with people who can share their expertise about an industry or occupation. They may not work for a target company, however, the information they share will be valuable.

4. Pursuing A Job

There will be times when you discover a job posting or hear about a job and want to learn more. In this case, you are networking to acquire information about the posted job. Be clear that your purpose for reaching out is to learn more about the job, what the ideal candidate might look like, the steps in the hiring process and any information that will help you best present your qualifications. Also be sure to ask if the company has a referral hiring program. If there is one, ask if you can use their name as a referral or if they would be willing to refer you as a candidate. ►



Nurture Your Networking

It isn't enough to meet someone once and expect they'll remember you in a couple of weeks or months. It is your responsibility to develop and nurture the relationship. Look for opportunities to keep in touch with the people you've met so they don't forget about you.

Track Your Networking

Maintaining a prioritized list of people you want to network with helps you plan your outreach efforts and maintain momentum. You also want to keep notes on topics discussed, suggested actions or people they recommend you reach out to. Tracking this information helps you stay organized and allows you to easily reference information when needed. (See "Seven Tips to Hold Yourself Accountable to Network")

ACTION PLAN CHECKLIST

Carve Out Time

Networking your way to a new job is a marathon, not a sprint. Invest just 15 minutes a day to help move your search forward.

Daily:

- Review LinkedIn Notifications for work anniversaries, new jobs, promotions, and birthdays. For each, send a personalized LinkedIn message or email.
- Scan your LinkedIn home feed for news from your network or companies you follow, like or leave a comment.
- Like or share one article related to your career goals on LinkedIn.
- Look for articles to share that mention target companies.
- Read industry publications to stay on top of current events.
- Review group discussions on LinkedIn and add to the conversation.
- Monitor job boards (Indeed.com, LinkedIn, niche industry sites and your school's job postings)

Weekly:

- Send an outreach email to 3-5 people you would like to meet with from your list of networking contacts.
- Follow-up with the people you previously met or have been in contact with.
- Conduct at least one informational meeting.

Monthly:

- Attend at least one virtual or in-person networking event.
- Plan your outreach for the month — who do you need to contact and when.
- Assess your progress and evaluate what is working and what you can improve.