

NETWORKING

Networking is probably one of the most underutilized job-search strategies. While statistics show that 60-80% of job seekers find their next position through networking and the “hidden or informal job market,” most job seekers continue to focus their search on the formal job market – postings, want ads or recruiting services. While the formal market is a valid avenue, it is important to utilize all available resources.

What is networking? Well, to start, it’s a skill that will serve you in many aspects of life – not just your job search, and chances are it’s something you already do. Consider how you locate a good restaurant – you ask friends and family for recommendations. This is networking! It’s asking someone you know for specific information to help you solve a problem. And often, if that person doesn’t know the answer, they refer you to someone they know who might be able to help. Now your network has expanded.

In your job search, networking is:

- Talking to people who know you, are familiar with what you want to do, and can provide information to help you progress toward your goal.
- Connecting with people who are employed in your field of interest and can share inside information on what the job field is really like.
- Contacting individuals within organizations for which you believe you’d like to work and learning about the culture and hiring process.
- Getting the inside track on a job that hasn’t yet been advertised.

Volumes have been written on the power of networking and how to do it “right” (many can be found in our Career Resource Center in Hoyt Hall). Below are some basics to help you get started.

Steps to Effective Networking:

Develop a personal marketing plan.

You need to be able to articulate to your network what skills you have and how and where you want to use them. Take the time to identify your skills, interests and goals. If you’re not focused, you won’t be able to help your network help you.

Make sure your resume is current and targeted to your goals. You’ll want to give people in your network a copy so that they have a ready reference to your background and abilities when they talk to their contacts.

Do your research.

Investigate the positions, industries and organizations that interest you. Try to find out as much as you can for several reasons: First, the information gained may help you narrow down your list and focus your efforts. Second, by being knowledgeable, you prove to people you meet that this is important to you. And third, you bring value to your network by sharing information about current industry trends and issues that you have uncovered.

Make a list of who you know.

The first response by most people is usually: “I don’t know anyone.” That’s not true. We all have a larger network than we think. Consider...

- Your parents and your friends’ parents

- Family – grandparents, aunts/uncles, brothers/sisters, cousins
- Friends of your parents
- Neighbors
- Faculty (current and former)
- Clergy
- Miami alumni
- Your doctor and dentist
- Former employers and co-workers
- Members of organizations you belong to – social and professional
- Anyone you know, who when contacted, recognizes you

Begin by writing these names down. If you get stuck, ask those in your inner circle to help jog your memory.

Make a list of people you’d like to meet.

Once you’ve listed those you already know, start working on a list of those you’d like to know. These are the people in a particular position or employed by a certain organization that interests you. Having this list helps you focus when contacting your network. It’s very possible that someone in your network has just the contact you need.

Utilize LinkedIn.

There are a multitude of websites to use for networking. A good place to start is on LinkedIn, a professional networking site. This differs from social networking

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sites such as Facebook. LinkedIn allows you to create a profile discussing previous work, volunteer, and educational experiences. There is also discussion space and an “Answers” section where you can post questions to other members and learn from their advice and expertise. In addition to social networking, you can develop your network and portfolio further by using Twitter, blogging, creating a website. For creative fields, maintain a Flickr or Photobucket account and consider researching virtual agencies (who may charge a fee) such as theispot.com. When joining any networking site, carefully read the Privacy Statement to understand how the company will use your profile information.

When you create a profile on any website, look to join “groups” which will expand your network. This would include any group for the Miami University Alumni Association (even if you are still an undergraduate) or professional association relevant to your career field.

Make contact with those on your list and those to whom you’ve been referred.

For many, this is the hard part. If you’ve received referrals, make sure you contact these people – after all, someone who knows you and what you’re looking for thought they would be a good connection for you. In turn, be certain to solicit additional names from these new contacts in order to continue to expand your network. *This is the essence of networking!*

There are a number of ways to make contact, depending on how well you know the person. If this is someone you speak with regularly, a phone call is all that’s needed. However, an introduction letter helps smooth the way before phoning someone you don’t know well, or were referred to. (Examples of an introduction letter and phone script can be found in our *Job-Search Strategies* Career Development Series guide.)

Conduct informational interviews.

Some Final Words...

Call it what you will – information gathering, market research, or any of the other terms used to describe networking – it is a skill that can help you both personally and professionally. While networking often receives bad press, the main point to remember is that the networking process is about building relationships. Through these relationships you gain *and* give important information. Job-seekers who take advice but don’t give anything back may see some short-term success, but miss out on long-term opportunities. You will find that if you take care of your network, your network will take care of you.

Informational interviews are a great way to structure your time with someone to ensure you have the opportunity to ask the questions most important to you. As the term implies, these are short appointments for gathering information from someone with experience. Informational interviews should not be confused with job interviews (a more detailed explanation of informational interviewing as well as sample questions can be found in our *Job-Search Strategies* guide.)

Attend networking functions.

Continue to build your network by attending professional organization meetings and conferences, career fairs, Chamber of Commerce functions, and other events that put you in contact with those who may be able to provide information.

Follow up.

Once you’ve met with your contacts, be sure to follow up as agreed. Chances are you were given new ideas and information which require more research. As you may now recognize, networking is an ongoing process.

Don’t neglect to follow up on leads you were given, and be certain to update your network on the progress you’ve made as a result of the information they’ve provided.

And don’t forget to say “thank you.” We all want to know we’ve been able to help and that our efforts are appreciated. Sending a thank-you note to everyone you speak with goes a long way in maintaining your network.

Keep a contact log.

Make sure to keep track of who you talk with, when you spoke, what you discussed, and what the next steps will be. As your network grows, this tool will be invaluable.