

## TOP 5 TIPS FOR NETWORKING AFTER YOU GET A JOB: WHY YOU NEED TO KEEP NETWORKING AFTER GETTING HIRED



A popular misconception is that networking is about getting a job. In reality, it's much more than that. Networking can be defined as "working a net to catch information." It's about establishing relationships that provide you with valuable feedback and allow you to make educated decisions. You do it every day without even realizing it.

Let's look at an example. Suppose within days of your move to a new town, your car breaks down. How would you handle this situation? Would you open the yellow pages and take your car to the first mechanic you see, or would you ask your colleagues for a recommendation? The second option is an example of networking. Think about why many successful businesses don't need to advertise. They obtain new clients by word-of-mouth -- otherwise known as networking.

The purpose of networking is to gain information, increase your visibility in your field and establish personal connections that will help you move forward in your career. Even if you're happy with your job, you always should be looking ahead to the next one.

### Networking 101

How do you use networking as a tool to improve your career prospects? Follow these five steps:

#### 1. Look for ways to expand your network.

Look beyond your company for business contacts. This way your networking will have continuity, regardless of the specific jobs you hold. She suggests joining professional organizations that you have a genuine interest in and attending at least one activity a month. At the same time, you should habitually ask people in your circle if they know anyone who might be a good contact for you. At its core, networking should be fun. If you seek out people who care about the same things you do, you'll enjoy networking and won't view it as a chore.

#### 2. Know what you want from your contacts and what you can offer them.

Many people dislike networking because they think asking a relative stranger for help is an imposition. Remember that it's human nature to want to help someone. You'll find that most people will be receptive provided you approach them the right way.

If you know you're going to be meeting potential contacts, don't just drop a pile of business cards in your briefcase and call it a day. Prepare for networking conversations in advance by considering what you need from the contact. Will a phone conversation do, or would you like to meet your contact for coffee or a meal?

Additionally, because networking is collaboration, every time you ask for something or meet with a potential contact, you should think about how you can help him or her in return. Listen to your contacts carefully so that you can glean insights about how you might assist them. Favors you do will eventually be reciprocated.

#### 3. Contact the person.

When approaching a potential contact, be friendly, respectful and brief. E-mail usually achieves better results than a phone call, but if you're attending a networking event, an in-person conversation is often the best option. No matter how you make contact, always keep in mind that the person is doing you a favor. If he or she is in the middle of something, don't interrupt, and be conscious of the person's time commitments. When you sit down with your contact one-on-one, offer to pay any expenses associated with the meeting, and remember to send a thank-you note afterward.

#### 4. Follow up with your contact regularly.

After a successful first networking meeting, it's your responsibility to keep the lines of communication open. Did your contact give you any advice or suggest a course of action? If so, touch base every so often to remind him or her who you are and keep the person apprised of your progress. Keep on top of his or her career moves and make sure your contact stays informed of yours. Invite this person to get together again, and during the holiday season, send him or her a card with a nice note.

#### 5. Overcome any shyness.

Even the most natural networking interactions can be challenging if you're shy. You might not like asking people for anything, whether it's advice about a particular industry or a piece of gum. I overcome my anxiety by talking to potential contacts about the aspects of my career I feel most strongly about. Should a networking opportunity present itself during an impromptu conversation, I make a conscious effort to be myself and stick to subjects I know well. Before making a networking call, I jot down a few notes so that I won't forget what I want to say. I also set aside time in the morning when my energy level is high. I make it a point to stand up during each call because I tend to sound more professional when I do so.

After several years of practice, I'm still nervous talking to people I don't know. However, every time I do it and experience a positive outcome, I gain a little more confidence. I promise that you will, too.