

SMART NETWORKING TIPS FOR JOB-HUNTING GRADS

Summary: Learn how to network properly in order to find a job out of college.



Question: I've heard and read plenty of advice about the importance of networking, but I don't quite understand how to do it. I graduated last May and don't know anyone in my industry that I can grill for tips and connections over lunch. How do I find these people and convince them to talk to me? I've also heard that I should join professional associations and read industry publications, but I'm not sure how to find these. Help!

Answer: You're not alone in your confusion. Networking is the best way to move into a new position, yet the most misunderstood of all job-search approaches. The process of networking is simply about connecting with people to share information, ideas, resources, leads and support.

Two types of barriers block recent graduates in their networking efforts. Psychological barriers come with internal messages that say, "I'm not comfortable with the concept of networking. I feel inadequate or like I'm imposing." Practical barriers also obstruct the process: "I'm not sure how to do this. Who should I contact and what exactly should I say?"

Use these guidelines to make networking work for you:

Replace negative messages about networking with a personal view of yourself as a capable and contributing party to networking relationships. Most people you contact will want to help, and they can decline if they're not interested.

Prepare an extensive list of potential contacts. Create a written list or database that includes family and friends, college connections, former colleagues and social acquaintances. If you don't have a ready-made network in your field, your college alumni directory is a great place to start. You don't have to know them personally or have graduated in the same year; your alma mater is the connection. On a daily basis, remember that everyone you come in contact with is a potential resource.

Practice a brief introduction and a few key questions. Before you show up at the door or initiate a conversation, consider your message. Think of it as a 30-second commercial that includes your name, an identifying feature about yourself, your link to the contact and the purpose of the conversation. Be creative and flexible in your approach. Networking can happen formally or informally, on the telephone, through online chat or in person. If you network over lunch, save the grilling for the chef and spend more time listening than talking. A genuine interest in others and ability to be yourself contribute to successful networking relationships.

Provide a variety of ways for people to help (advice, insights into their field, resume critique, or brainstorming ideas). Most of your contacts will want to assist, but it's your responsibility to be clear, concise and precise when approaching them. Apply the tips they offer and keep them informed of your progress.

Seek support from a friend who has a knack for networking and a career counselor from your college who can critique your approach. It will help to have people rooting for you as you endure the highs and lows of the process. In the networking arena, it's not the sprinter's speed, but the endurance of the long-distance runner that reaps the rewards.

See **33 Quick Tips to Improve Your Networking Experience** for more information.