

NETWORKING

This involves you building a network of contacts, both business and personal. Through this network you will hear of companies with a problem that needs to be solved (if you can solve it there may be a job for you), companies expanding/winning new orders (they may need to take on additional staff), job openings (people leaving a company or a new position being created), etc.

If you manage to uncover a vacant position or a new position before a company thinks of advertising the position there may be very few candidates or just one (you!). If you are a specialist in your field, companies have been known to create a position just for you to utilize your talents.

Your success in networking will depend on your ability to communicate and interact with other people. If you find it difficult to communicate or to get on with other people easily, then you will find networking a real struggle. If on the other hand you are very outgoing and enjoy meeting new people and possess excellent communication and interpersonal skills, you will take to networking very quickly.

You will be talking directly to the decision-makers and you must be confident both on the phone and in a face-to-face meeting. These people will always be busy, so you will have to pick the right moment to approach them and you will have to intrigue them fairly early on in any conversation otherwise they will lose interest.

To be a successful net worker you must be prepared to talk to a large number of people both on the phone and in person. Expect to receive some rejections using this method. This approach to finding a new job can be much more effective than the other traditional methods, but these are still worth pursuing nevertheless.

In the following sections we will teach you how to build your network and how to use it as an active part of your job searching campaign.

STARTING YOUR NETWORK

To start your network you will need to list everyone you know including business colleagues, personal friends, casual acquaintances and people you meet in your every day life. When listing business colleagues you should include everyone you have known at your present and previous employers. You should also include people you have had dealings with in other companies. This may include customers, suppliers, competitors, accountants, solicitors and anyone else you have dealt with. Do list literally everyone you know.

Record Keeping

When you are networking you will need to keep meticulous records of both people and companies. You will also need a diary to put your appointments in and you should keep an up to date 'to do' list. After each telephone call/meeting you should update your records with any information you have collected. You should use a sheet of A4 paper per record, i.e. one per person and one per company. Store your records alphabetically - otherwise you will never be able to find anything.

For each person you will need to know their full name, home address and telephone number (if you know them very well), the name of the company they work for, business address and telephone number (if you do not know them very well), the name of the person who referred you to them (if you do not know this person directly), the names of people this contact has referred you to and the companies they work for, how does this person know the referee (e.g. they may be a supplier, friend, etc). You should also keep a record of each telephone conversation/meeting with this person, including date/time of meeting, what was discussed and any actions arising from the meeting.

For each company you are interested in (or may be potentially interested in) you will need to know the company's full name, its address and telephone number, the names of any contacts you have in the company, any other information you have on the company, including press cuttings, annual reports, company brochures and any information you have collected from your contacts.

Making Initial Contact

Your main aim when you make initial contact with someone is to secure a face-to-face meeting with him or her. If you already know someone you can just pick up the phone and ring him/her for a ' chat' . If you do not know the person directly (i.e. someone referred you to them) you might prefer to write to them first and then call them a few days later. Always mention the name of the person who referred you, as people will then take more notice of your letter/call, e.g. start your call with "Good morning my name is Christopher Jones. I am calling you because Philip of Jerry Engineering said I should contact you".

If you know the person well, you might arrange to go round to their house in an evening or at the weekend for a coffee, or you could go out for a drink with them. You really need to talk to the person whilst you have them on his or her own. If you have not seen them for a while or you lost contact with them, they may or may not be glad to speak to you - in these circumstances you really have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

Business people make appointments, so if you are contacting someone at work arrange to meet them at lunch time/after work/in the evening or at their place of work. If they will not give you an appointment, you will have to try and get as much information as possible out of them whilst you have them on the phone.

Writing an initial letter to a contact

You probably will not need to write a letter to a friend or business colleague, but if you do, keep it short and perhaps include a copy of your Resume. When you are writing to someone you do not know you probably will not want to include a Resume. Once you have sent your letter by post or fax, you should make a note in your diary to call them.

Handling Networking Meeting

When you are meeting someone in a work related environment you should dress smartly and look neat and tidy. This may not be an interview, but you should treat it as if it was. If you are going to a public place such as a pub/restaurant make sure that you are the one facing the door and the other person has their back to the door - you do not want the other person constantly watching to see who is entering/leaving; you want them to give you their full attention!

When you are talking to somebody you have not met before it is important that you put them at ease. Do not directly ask them for a job as this will put them under pressure and they may just try and get rid of you as quickly as possible. It is far better to say that you are looking for some help and advice with your job searching campaign - if they happen to mention that they have a current vacancy whilst you are talking to them all well and good.

Most people are generally willing to help other people they know. The worst that can happen is that they say they are not prepared to help you - big deal! Just cross them off your list and move on to the next name.

If you know the person well you can just start talking to them as you normally would, e.g. asking them how their family is, etc. Talking to someone for the first time can be more difficult, so make sure you have already thought of a few work-related topics of conversation. Do not dwell too much on small-talk; get on to the subject of your job search fairly quickly.

The sort of questions you will ask will depend very much on whether the person is working in your field/industry and whether their company is the sort of company you want to work for. The following is a list of questions you might want to ask:

1. If you know the person you should ask them how their job is going. You should always show interest in the person you are talking to - do not appear to be totally self-obsessed.
2. Is their company/department doing well? (There may be a job opening for you here!)
3. If their company is not doing well can you solve any of their problems? (There may be a job for you with the company if you can help.)
4. Is their market contracting, expanding or stagnant?
5. Any new emerging markets?
6. Is their company expecting to win a large order? (They may need to take on new people to fulfill this order.)
7. How well are their competitors doing?
8. Do they know of other people within their company or in another company who might be able to help with your job hunting?

It is very important that you ask for referrals to other people/companies otherwise you will quickly run out of names on your list. Try to get as many names/companies as possible from them. You should write everything down whilst they are reeling off the names, rather than relying on your memory. You need to know their name, the name of the company they work for and either home or work address/telephone number.

If the person you are speaking to is not in your field/industry, find out if they can give you the names/addresses of people who are. It is generally best to contact people directly rather than letting your contact ask for help on your behalf - that way you stay in control. However, if they agree to set up a meeting for you it might be a good idea to accept their offer. What you do not want is for them to ring up their contact and say "Do you have a job for Christopher Jones?". You need to talk to this person to obtain new contacts as well.

When you are networking with people always try to help them with any problem they may have - they may be able to repay the favor at some time in the future. Whilst you are talking to people you should ask them what they think of your Resume.

After Networking Meeting

When you get home you should record the salient points of the meeting itself on the individual's record sheet, including the names of companies and individuals, market intelligence, etc. It is always important to remember who knows who. You may need to create new records for any individuals mentioned in the meeting - remember to record who introduced you to this person. For new contacts you will need to know their full name, company name, position in the company, telephone number/extension, address, relationship to your contact (e.g. supplier) and any other information you have on them.

You will also need to update the records of any companies mentioned in the meeting or create new records if necessary. Write down any market intelligence you have gathered, including details of potential new contracts they are bidding for, new contracts already won, acquisitions, take-over, and changes in personnel within the company (Who is on the way up Who is leaving/joining?), the names of people within the company and who referred you to them (it is useful to duplicate this information).

Make a note on your 'to do' list or in your diary to contact these new referrals. If you have added some new companies to your list of companies you may want to do a bit of research on the company before proceeding further, including obtaining press cuttings and perhaps their annual report.

Thank you letter

If you feel it appropriate you might want to write a letter to thank the person for meeting you. Writing a thank you letter will also make you stand out as few people these days bother to say thank you properly.

When to call/Write to people

People are generally freshest during the morning, so try and make your calls at this time. If you cannot get past the receptionist/secretary who is 'guarding' their boss, try calling early in the morning (before 9am) or late in the afternoon (Lunch Time), when the receptionist/secretary is not likely to be there.

Calling people at home can be more problematical. If you know someone has young children, try calling him or her at about 9pm, when they are likely to be more relaxed after having put the children to bed. If you are going to call someone after sending them a letter you should try and ensure the letter arrives on a Sunday or Monday, then you will be able to call them later in the same week - whilst they still remember your letter.

Marketing Yourself on the Telephone

If you are a confident speaker on the telephone you should positively enjoy networking. But supposing you are not confident on the telephone and you freeze when the person at the other end starts talking to you. The answer to your problem is forward planning. Before making your call go over in your head what you are going to say and try and prepare for all possible outcomes. It may help you to write down on paper what you want to say - your telephone sales script!

Just like any other script your telephone sales script will have a start, middle and an end. You should start by saying who you are and why you are calling them. The middle part will either be arranging a meeting time/place or just finding out information if they will not agree to meet you. Always remember at the end to thank them for talking to you.

Building Your Network

To find a job through networking you may need to build an extensive network of contacts. You will need to constantly add to your list as well as maintaining a rapport with your existing contacts.

The network you build during your job searching campaign will not only prove useful in uncovering jobs, but will also prove very useful to both you and your new employer in the future. Never under estimate the power of personal contacts - people are often recruited to a company because of their good connections.

Whilst you are networking you should be prepared to ask everyone you know whether they are aware of any suitable vacancies. You may even hear of job vacancies from your hairdresser or doctor - so do ask everyone.

Maintaining Your Network After Your Job Search

Once you have found yourself a job it is important not to just lose contact with the network which you have spent so much time building. This network can still be very useful to you in your new position, giving you vital market intelligence. Just little things like a Christmas or birthday card or a hello call on the telephone every six months, is enough to keep in contact.

You should also remember how much the people in your network have helped you. If these people come to you for help, try and use your network to help them solve their problem. If you help someone they will be more willing to help you in the future.