

How to exercise your networking muscles

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Just as exercise is critical for a healthy lifestyle, networking is imperative for a healthy career.

In fact, some experts estimate more than 60 percent of job seekers find new positions through networking, and most hiring managers fill open posts at their organizations the same way. Of all job search components, networking is the most important part of your campaign for employment.

Here are some practical tips for breaking the barriers to networking:

1. Develop a targeted list. The first step in building a network is putting together a list of everyone you know and want to know.

2. Ask for introductions. Make a list of people you think could influence your job search or provide advice by searching online directories and communities such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Plaxo; and databases such as ZoomInfo, Hoovers, and Yahoo Finance.

Once you have compiled your list, decide who from your existing network can assist you in expanding it, and ask them to make an introduction for you.

3. Prepare multiple messages. The first message you want to prepare is your "30-second elevator speech," which is a consolidated statement about who you are, what you are looking for, and what makes you unique. You will use this message countless times when networking, so it's in your best interest to draft one that you can articulate naturally and enthusiastically.

Once you have your message



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down, consolidate it into a five-to-ten-second version that your network contacts can use when advocating on your behalf: "John is a solid and driven business development professional who used to head-up sales and marketing at ABC. He's looking for a new opportunity at a manufacturing start-up that is environmentally responsible."

4. Attend events. Identify professional associations, alumni groups, user groups, civic organizations, or social groups that could benefit you. Find out when and where each of these organizations meets and join in. Ask colleagues what organizations they belong to, and if you could attend as their guest.

Arrive early, get a copy of the attendee list, study it, and start introducing yourself to those around you.

Also look into alternative organizations such as the Boston Young Professionals Association or networking groups such as WIND. If you need assistance in identifying organizations that might be of interest, try the Wed-

dle's Association Directory.

5. Use the power of online social networks. Online networking sites such as LinkedIn and Facebook are fertile ground for job seekers because of their capacity to easily and exponentially expand your network. Set up or update profiles on these sites to include descriptions of your current and past roles, titles, names of employers, responsibilities, skills, technologies, certifications, awards, and degrees.

Next, spend some time cleaning up your other online profiles. Many young professionals are on social networking sites like MySpace and YouTube and may have a history of questionable pictures, blogs, and comments that can follow them into the professional realm. Take the time to clean up your online image.

6. Overcome shyness. Networking is often a stressful and intimidating exercise for introverted or shy people, but it needs to be done. To help overcome shyness, develop a list of questions in advance.

7. Watch your behavior. Net-

working meetings might be shorter and more informal than interviews, but they share decorum. You are asking someone to be your ambassador in the marketplace; you must show them how highly you value their time and attention.

8. Set goals. Establish some attainable, concrete networking goals and hold yourself accountable. For example, pledge that you will e-mail three new contacts a day and call one, meet one person face to face per week, spend an hour online each day uncovering new targets and updating your profiles, and attend an event at least every two weeks.

9. Realize networking is a two-way street. Effective networking relationships are reciprocal. While you may be asking for help now, in the future you will be in a position to offer it. If you think you may be imposing on the person, think about a time when someone asked you for help. You probably weren't angry or rude, you were most likely happy to oblige, even flattered.

There isn't one professional who hasn't had to ask for an introduction, lead, or interview at some point.

10. Give thanks and keep in contact. The most common mistake in networking is letting your efforts lapse. People are best at networking when they need something, but the most effective networkers are those who continually find ways to keep in touch with their contacts.

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