

WELCOME ... TO THE WORLD OF NETWORKING

“Virtual Teamwork” is one way to view it. Or “It’s not what you know but who you know.” Networking is about leveraging relationships, to help yourself and to help others.

In job search networking can give you a competitive advantage in the job market by helping you to:

- Uncover opportunities (sometimes unadvertised), or are just being developed
- Get in front of many people, sometimes very senior, that you otherwise might not
- Overcome potential problems around background, experience or even age.

BUT, job search is just one application and you should bear this in mind as you develop your career and your contacts. Some points about networking generally:

- Increasingly employees (and management) are being valued not just for what they can do, but for what they can get done - i.e. “I know a man who can”.
- Networking can be very focused or/and very random. It does **not** only rely on getting access to ‘important’ or senior people.
- It is not about ‘using’ people to further your own interests. It’s about building relationships and making connections between what people need and what other people can offer. It’s a bit like hitchhiking - not everyone can reciprocate.
- Lasting networks are based upon mutual benefit, possibly friendship, **and** a willingness to be open to new people, situations and possibilities. Pseudo networkers take but don’t give. With any group this can only work in the short term.
- Networking is a journey, not a destination - more a way of life than an expedient tool.
- You don’t have to be ‘outgoing’ or an extrovert to use networking effectively.
- Networking is an act of faith: unpredictable, often long term, immensely rewarding. Those without the faith, imagination and integrity will not benefit fully from the process.
- Networking is incredibly cost effective - and has become increasingly recognised as an important management competence.
- Networking dividends requires ongoing investment in time and effort. **LinkedIn** may help you to build your contact list but you need meetings to build trusting relationships.
- There is no single ideal method - each individual needs to find an approach that suits their own needs and personality preferences. You may not value, or use all our suggestions, so take and use what you feel comfortable with.

WHO SHOULD NETWORK ... AND WITH WHOM?

Everyone should be responsible for managing their relationships and their careers.

- Internally with people who need help.
- Internally with people who can help.
- Externally with people who need help.
- Externally with people who can help.
- Internally/externally with anyone you like spending time with.

POSSIBLE NETWORK CONTACTS

- **Personal contacts** Family and friends
Old school or university friends.
Via LinkedIn, Facebook etc
- **Social clubs / associations** E.g. Golf, leisure - also professional memberships
- **Service organisations** People who sell to you, or service you
- **Business contacts**
 - Individuals**
 - In current and previous company
 - External (suppliers)
 - People/organisations you supply
 - Industry / common interest groups

WHERE TO NETWORK ... AND WHEN

Almost anywhere, almost anytime, that's mutually acceptable. I've listed the internet last, since for me personally face-to-face is the most enjoyable and effective method.

In company	Out of company	Restaurants/Pubs	'Smokers' group
Football, Golf	Place of Worship	Training courses	Schools
Public transport	Professional bodies	Clubs, charities	Internet

INFORMATION YOU MIGHT WANT ABOUT CONTACTS

NAME & ADDRESS - post & email	TELEPHONE NUMBER/S
JOB ROLE	ORGANISATION
NAME OF SEC /SUPPORT PERSON	COMPANY INFORMATION
REFERRED BY	COMMENTS

I have a peculiar memory for people's Myers-Briggs 'types' and find this helpful in when trying to understand 'where they are coming from' which can influence my approach.

NETWORKING - EXISTING CONTACTS

The easiest way to start, and that which offers minimal discomfort, is to **contact people you already know! This is a zero risk strategy and as a result will not mean any rebuffs.** This section will focus on making contact for the general purpose of identifying business or job opportunities.

A network 'stocktake' involves reviewing:

A Who do I know?

_____ etc

B Who, of these, do I currently see?

_____ etc

C The difference represents untapped opportunity. What is more, since you already know them making contact should be easy.

D Develop an action plan. Who you will contact and when. Whether there is anything particular you may want to find out about, or focus on. In what way you may be of help to them, etc.

It is as simple as that and the key is to start the process now. You don't need to speak to dozens of people, but you do need to start practising.

How you deal with the meeting will be covered later in this manual.

Don't wait to start. In my experience too many people find that a failure to stay in contact with people leaves them feeling exposed, or apologetic if they find that they do need to start networking in earnest, ie if they lose their job, or suddenly need help to solve a problem.

It is also the case that some people you need to contact may 'hold against you' the fact that you have not kept in touch. This is especially true if you have been less than willing to network, or maintain contact during 'good times'.

If you have not maintained your contacts in recent years, take this opportunity to promise to yourself that you will in future. Not only will it be easier when you do need contacts, but you will probably be exposed to many more job opportunities on an ongoing basis!

NETWORKING - NEW CONTACTS

A network targeting exercise involves reviewing:

A Who would I like to know, or who might it be helpful to know?

_____ etc

B Who in my present network can introduce me to them, or act as a 'bridge'?

A bridge is a person who can be a 'bridge' or link between you and an individual or organisation you might want to meet. A bridge may be someone you already know, in which case the link is easy. It may be someone you don't yet know, but who you need to meet to get to your target.

_____ etc

C Know and make known your 'target' individuals and organisations. This will focus you and help your contacts to help you by clearly identifying your needs. If you let your existing contacts know of other people you have 'targeted' they may be able to be more specific when offering contacts. In my experience it is amazing how often people you already know, know people you want to know.

D If they can't help, what do you do? There are two options:

1. Use the contacts they offer, but in an 'un-targeted' way
2. Look for a 'bridge' that may be able to 'get you in'.

GETTING A 'BRIDGE'

This means thinking about the type of people or organisations who come into close contact with the person or organisation you want to reach. Some examples are

Target company or individual	Bridge examples
Managing Director	Their lawyers, bankers, auditors
Sales Director	Customers, suppliers, recruiters
Marketing Director	Advertising agencies, consultants
Finance Director	Fellow Finance Directors, auditors, bankers
HR Director	Consultants, recruiters, employees, ex employees, fellow HR professionals

Doing this is easier if you keep your eyes open. Research the internet, use LinkedIn, clip articles from newspapers and business magazines such as Accountancy Age, Marketing Week, and Financial Times etc. Also use annual reports that will list their bankers, lawyers and auditors - and are available free by post!.

MAKING CONTACT

There is no one, best method. Different approaches suit different people.

- Use an approach you feel comfortable with
- Use a method that your bridge, or referrer suggests would be appropriate
- ‘Harness’ target support staff - e.g. secretaries/assistants by treating them personally and considerately.
- Do **some** preparation but don’t overdo it.
- **If you are job-searching make it clear that you are not going to talk to them about employment**, rather that you want their advice, etc. People do not like being ‘put upon’ and if you can take this pressure off them they are invariably willing to spare some time.

The following approach is most comfortable for me and usually gets results.

I take advice from my bridge as to what approach would be best.

I email introducing myself using my bridges name.

I follow up with a phone requesting a meeting.

If they can’t spare time now, I ask if I can recall in 3 months (or 6 months or a year).

I try to involve their PA or assistant and use their name (rather than bypassing them).

For me this gets results nine times out of ten.

MEETINGS - PREPARATION

It is important not to waste people’s time so be clear about what you want from the meeting and be prepared.

- **Your objective:**
 - In job search, to get them to ‘review’ your CV!
 - To get information on the company/industry
 - To uncover possible roles
 - To get referrals
 - To ‘do business’ or capitalise on any opportunities
- **Preparation**
 - Know about the person
 - Know about company
 - Know what questions you want answered
 - Have your ‘target’ list of people or companies
 - Know your offerings - skills or contacts
 - Be prepared to offer network contacts or help

MEETINGS - PRESENTATION

Whilst some people you meet will have a structure or approach they prefer, many will be happy to go with yours.

- Prepare a **brief** but comprehensive introduction about yourself – 2 minutes max! Sometimes referred to as an ‘elevator pitch’.
- Explain your purpose
- Clarify what time they have available
- Ask focused **but** open questions
 - E.g. - changes in the organisation / business
 - structure
 - scale
 - needs/issues
- Qualify answers with closed questions – yes / no to get specific data / numbers
- Ask/listen mostly, the more you talk, the less you learn
- Be interested - don’t strive to be interesting
- Clarify anything they **or** you don’t understand
- If real opportunities/jobs do arise ‘respond’ - or suggest a separate meeting
- Ensure you’ve met **your** objectives, but stay within **their** time limits
- Thank them and confirm any follow up that you, or they will do
- Try to ensure that you come get some further contacts to expand your network

NB *In job search you are essentially ‘researching’ so it’s important not to create any discomfort or feeling of obligation, however it’s important to ensure they understand enough about you to be able to help you. Therefore showing them your CV and asking for their comments/feedback can help achieve this.*

MEETINGS - FOLLOW-UP

Write or phone and thank them. Phone is more personal, but if you leave a thank you message you can’t be sure it will get through. Many people don’t, thus spoiling things for others. It’s rude, it’s selfish and it’s unprofessional and you can bet it is noted!

If you are in job-search mode let them know once you are placed, or self-employed.

If their help produced results let them know. E.g. if as a result you got a meeting with one of their contacts. Also offer to reciprocate if they want to refer people to you or need your help themselves, in the future.

TIPS TO GET THE BEST FROM NETWORKING

- **Take an interest in people** rather than trying to be interesting to them. Learn to 'Interview conversationally'. You can't help people if you don't know about them, their likes, dislikes, needs, organisation, even personal information.
Two ears - one mouth - use accordingly.
- **Acquire knowledge about your contacts** (memory or notes) so that you can:
 - find areas of mutual interest/experience to strengthen and enrich the relationship.
 - make 'connections' and see ways of helping them, solving problems **or** providing them with relevant contacts.
- **Build many relationships** - don't just rely on 'revisiting' a few key people. Try to use each meeting to add to your contact list and check what sort of approach is preferable.
- **Nurture your contacts.** Revisit, help, inform, involve them.
- **Respect their 'type' and their time.** "Is this a good time to call, or when shall I call back?" If you know their type use it to deal with them in ways they prefer. Check how much time they have allocated to meetings and stay within it.
- **Appreciate your impact on others.** Manage your behaviour to become as user friendly and 'customer' focused as possible. You only get one chance to make a first impression and **if it is poor, it will reflect on the person who made the network introduction.** Learn to manage the less acceptable aspects of your type.
- **Make an effort to go outside your 'comfort zone'.** Don't follow the line of least resistance, follow up all your leads. Get used to phoning, especially if it's not naturally an easy thing to do. Make sure you don't miss out by prejudging the potential 'worth' of a contact. Some networkers attach undue importance to seniority, whilst in reality a 'warm' but less senior person can often turn out to be more useful.
- **Offer to help them (or people they know who may need help).** I run open courses and offer spare places at cost, or in some cases free, to out of work job changers and 'adult children' of people I meet - typically university leavers or school leavers.
- **Develop your knowledge and skills**
 1. from training courses - such as those run by PeopleFocus.co.uk
 2. From reading e.g.
 - How to Win Friends and Influence People - Dale Carnegie. Old but good!
 3. From tapes e.g.
 - The Science of Personal Achievement - Napoleon Hill
 4. From the Internet e.g.
 - www.PeopleFocus.co.uk - free resources section.

INTERNAL NETWORKING – OFTEN OVERLOOKED!

In corporate life, there is a huge need to network and develop relationships that will help you to do business. In meetings, many initiatives never get off the ground because people are isolated in their position, or fail to check the value/acceptability of their suggestions. This can often be avoided by using contacts to canvass support or bounce ideas off. Perhaps the most important application is in the area of promotion, or career development. Talent is not always enough. Success is often due as much to self-marketing and networking as it is to professional skill. So internal networking is crucial. An internal network ‘stocktake’ involves reviewing:

A Who should I know/spend time with? _____
 _____ etc

B Who do I currently interact with? _____
 _____ etc

C The difference represents potential to influence.

D Develop an action plan. Who you will contact, why and when. If it is a colleague, no formal ‘approach’ is needed. If it is someone senior, or not directly connected, you should try to work out in what way you can ‘sell them on you’. Try to think through what’s in it for them, or for the company, to help you. E.g. if you work as a director in a subsidiary, you may find a director or senior manager in a parent company willing to ‘mentor’ you. To the mentor, this can be both flattering and rewarding. Get to know people if there are work / social occasions - pub, conferences, or meetings – try to find common ground, music, sport, kids, animals, photography. Put yourself forward for cross-functional or project teams that will offer scope to get to know people. Be seen as someone who has a contribution to make – ideas, initiatives, etc. Look for opportunities to represent the company, or your part in it. Make connections ‘across functional lines’ e.g., with sales, marketing, finance, etc. Develop good relations with PA/Sec to managers – they are ‘gatekeepers’ and decision influencers! Finally, be sincere, look for chances to truly help others and you’ll find that help will come to you, often not from sources you’d expect.

PROBLEM-SOLVING NETWORKING

Networking is also a very quick and cost-effective way of solving problems, but be straightforward. Ask them for their help, don’t have a long semi-social chat and throw in at the end what you really called for! If anything do it the other way around. People will respect this and you are more likely to get future help as a result.

1 You can use other contacts to connect you with specific people to solve problems which otherwise may take you hours or days to figure out. I call this ‘recycling time’.

2 You can use other people who have different personality characteristics, or skills to your own to help you become a more rounded manager.