



Networking: The Core of Your Career

By Ford R. Myers
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After you've created all your "self-marketing documents" and verbal presentations, you're ready to take your job search "to the street" and begin networking. The goal is to contact people who can help you reach the hiring managers inside your target companies. Networking can be done on the phone, in person, via e-mail or even "snail mail."

Ford Myers, M.Ed., president of Career Potential, a Haverford, PA-based career consulting firm and developer of the "New Year, New Career Power Plan to Achieving Career Success in 2006" states, "Networking is a lot simpler and less scary than many people think. You do not need to be a good 'schmooser' to network effectively. In fact, the best networkers are often great listeners, as opposed to great talkers."

And no matter what, don't ever let-up on your networking efforts. Ninety-five percent of my clients land great jobs through their networks. It's not worth risking those odds to NOT be continually networking! Remember: If you're in career transition, networking IS your job. It should be the primary focus of everything you do. The quantity and quality of your networking time is directly related to the personal, professional, and financial satisfaction you'll have in your next job."

Who should be on your contact list? Who should you be reaching out to? The answer is: everyone you know. Everyone? Yes, everyone! Every single person alive who knows your name should be on your contact list! (The only exception is people who clearly don't like you)! It doesn't matter what these contacts do for a living, or where they live, or how much power or money they have. The key is not to pre-judge people or make assumptions about who can and cannot help you. After guiding thousands of clients through the networking process, I have learned that most new jobs are secured through people who were least expected to be of help!

Let's "de-mystify" the networking process, so it won't seem overwhelming or confusing to you any longer. What follows is a highly-structured and purposeful approach that consistently produces excellent results! Using your Contact List to focus on the specific people to contact, here are the basic steps you'll need to follow:

1. Build Rapport. State, "I was referred by (give name of mutual friend/colleague), or "I was referred by our mutual colleague/friend (give name), who suggested that" (Find some area of common interest to discuss). I'm contacting you about a career matter, but let me assure you that I am not calling to ask you for a job - nor do I expect you to even know of any job openings. Let me start by telling you a bit about

myself and my professional background....

2. State "where you've been" by using a Positioning Statement. This is a succinct, pre-prepared verbal statement that explains "who you are" professionally. Example: "I am a senior Financial and Operations Professional and graduate of Western General's Financial Management Program. I have more than 15 years of experience in the Manufacturing and Services industries. My strengths include analysis, problem-solving, communication and innovation. I have specific expertise in Financial Analysis and Reporting, Cash and Risk Management, and Productivity Analysis. I am seeking a leadership position with a focus on Financial Reporting."

3. Share "what happened" with an Exit Statement. This is a concise explanation of why you're no longer at your previous position, or why you're interested in leaving your current employer. Example: "As a result of a merger between two business units, over 1,500 positions have been affected, including mine. I now have the opportunity to explore other career options in Financial Services that will leverage my proven strengths in analysis, problem-solving, communication and innovation." The Exit Statement must be expressed in positive terms, so there will be no suspicion that you "did something wrong" to lose your job.

4. Ask for help. "Would you be willing to help me?"

5. "Decompress" - take the pressure off - reassure your contact again that you are not asking for a job. Reiterate, "As I said, I am not asking you for a job, nor do I expect you to know of any appropriate positions. However, I am interested in any advice or guidance that you could offer, in addition to any networking contacts you could provide. (Give name of mutual friend/colleague) told me that you'd be a great person to talk to for this purpose. Would you be willing to review some of my credentials, and give me candid feedback? I could send the materials right over."

6. Ask again for help, i.e., expanding contact network, guidance, advice, feedback. Leverage the notion of "six degrees of separation" - ask for contacts from your contacts! And always "come from generosity." This means you should be on the lookout for opportunities to offer something of value in return.

7. Share your main documents, and set a time to get back to them. State, "I'll e-mail (or fax) a one-page Professional Biography and list of Target Companies to you. Then I'd like to follow-up and have another conversation - when would be better for you, Wednesday afternoon or Friday morning? I know your input will be of great value, and I appreciate your willingness to help. Follow-up after your networking meeting and keep the conversation going with two-way value exchange. Note: if the contact is a "center of influence," try to have your follow-up discussion face-to-face instead of on the phone, unless the contact is outside your geographic region.

It's a smart career move to always be networking, no matter what's going on for you professionally. If you don't need help at this time, build-up your networking power by helping others. In general, people will want to help you. It makes them feel good about themselves. It boosts their self-esteem to be considered "a connector" of people with opportunities and information, and it makes them feel important." Networking is a great investment in your future, and over the long-term, it always pays big dividends!"

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