

How to Build your Career Network

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “70 percent of people end up in their current position thanks to networking.” So, how do you build a professional network? Here are 10 tips.

1 Remember that you are networking everywhere you go. When talking to anyone you meet or know, you can mention that you are job hunting and talk about the type of position you are hoping to find. If you have business cards, always carry them with you. Otherwise, you can ask for the person’s contact info or to connect on social media whenever you speak with someone.

2 Keep in mind that networking is a reciprocal relationship. When speaking with others, don’t make it all about you. Ask them about their life, too. Networks are relationships just like friendships. Often, your professional network is made up of many friends and acquaintances.

3 Don’t ask for jobs directly. When speaking with others about your job search, you can ask for possible leads or connections to people you’d like to add to your network or you can ask for general advice. A good way to ask for leads is, “I’d love to get to know (so-and-so), would you feel comfortable connecting me?”

4 Volunteer your time. Finding an organization within your professional field of interest is a great way to make connections with people who can eventually hire you or recommend you to others in the field. You can build and demonstrate your skills this way, too; and volunteer positions look great on a resume.

5 Connect with your college instructors, professors and career services staff members. Develop a relationship with these people so that they really know you and what type of job you’re looking to find. Getting a “warm” introduction to someone in your field of interest through one of these college connections carries a lot of weight.

6 Ask for informational interviews. Typically 15-20 minutes in length, these meetings allow you to learn more about how the person secured their current position in the field that interests you and what background and training they have (and what you might need to do). Most people are happy to talk to you about how they moved up the ladder in their career. You should ask many different people for informational interviews. With each one, you build your network and the person you are interviewing may offer even more contacts for you.

7 Re-connect with former co-workers, vendors or clients. Often when we leave a job, we lose touch with people. Reach out to people you've lost touch with and ask to get a cup of coffee to rekindle the relationship. If these people have moved on to other positions and companies, you can help each other by offering connections and referrals.

8 Attend networking events or other professional meet-ups or conferences. People are actively networking at these places. Remember to move around and try to talk with as many people as possible rather than getting into a long conversation with just one person. The goal is to make many new connections so it's ok to say something like, "I'd love to talk to you more in-depth at another time. May I have your business card?" and then you can move on to meet others at the event. Bring your own business cards to pass out.

9 Keep your LinkedIn page up-to-date. Most everyone uses this social media platform when looking at potential employees or even when deciding whether to speak with you for an informational interview.

10 Set a goal of making a certain number of new contacts per month. One article suggests making 100 new contacts each month! Even when you are working full-time, you want to continue to build your professional network for when you're looking for that promotion, to move to another company or even to switch career fields entirely.