

Companion Document to Workshop “Networking for Professionals” (version 2.0 1/12/2021)

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WHY IS NETWORKING IMPORTANT

In many industries, networking is by far the largest source of job landings. The longer you are into your career and the higher your compensation level, the greater the importance of networking.

In 60-70% of mid-career landings, networking is the KEY ingredient of success. Many middle level and senior level openings are never posted. They are part of the “hidden job market.”

Consider: if 60-70% of landings are based on networking, why do job candidates spend 70% of their time on job boards and only 20% of their time networking?

SOME EXAMPLES:

Recent College Grad:

Bill is a recent college grad majoring in finance. His network of 10 individuals gives him a sense of current opportunities and leads to 12 additional networking referrals. One of the new referrals suggests that he talk to a bank VP that offers Bill a job.

Mid-Career Professional:

Joan Brown has great experience as a software development manager. Her network has grown to include 40 individuals that are part of the software development world.

Meanwhile, Chicago based XYZ Corporation is looking for a software development director, preferably a woman, and sees no available internal candidates. The ten XYZ employees that are part of this process reach out to their external network of 50 individuals.

If any of the 50 individuals in the XYZ extended network connect with any of the 40 individuals in Joan Brown network, Joan will be on the inside track to interview for a position that was never posted.

In the microcosm of the Chicago software development world, such a connect between the two networks is quite possible.

Two Notes:

1. The goal of networking is learning of openings where you can add great value and hopefully become the “sought after” candidate. Then, once you are in front of the hiring manager, you usually have good odds of landing the job.
2. Networking is key to landing but is typically not an instant “magic bullet”. Mid-career professionals need to plan for 6 months+ of networking / interviewing.

WHY DO JOB SEEKERS AVOID NETWORKING?

- Many job seekers are hesitant to contact friends and strangers to seek help

- Many job seekers do not want to ask others for a job – see below.
- Many fear rejections. Yes, you will face some direct & indirect rejection. That is part of job search.

The good news is that many people are willing to help you, even co-workers that you have not talked to in 5 years. (As you would likely try to help them.) Also, networking is NOT asking for a job. You network for the following:

- A clearer understanding of what your job market is looking for
- Information that helps you understand who might be looking for help
- Add new contact to your network list

NETWORKING OFTEN TAKES TIME

Networking can give you fast results in some situations. Examples include:

- Entry level job seeker gains a key piece of information or a contact in the target firm.
- A mid-career job seeker connects with a hiring manager with a critical need or learns of a critical piece of job search information. For example, after I retired from full-time work, I wanted to teach part-time at Harper College, but could not connect with anyone. One November day, I basically gave my elevator pitch while playing golf with three strangers. One of the players told me that Harper expects job seekers to apply on-line and has a policy of not returning calls from job seekers. With this information, I had an interview within a week and was hired on the spot. My informal networking gave me the missing piece of information.

However, in many cases, job seeker for mid-level and senior positions will spend months networking before they gain interviews at target opportunities. A recent research study states that mid-career professionals average 300 networking interactions as part of successful landings. (For example, averaging two interactions with 150 people.) You need to develop and maintain mental and emotional stamina to stay positive during the job search.

STARTING YOUR NETWORK

Sort your list into three categories.

Category #1

Others in your functional area
Recently hired and promoted
People who are an ideal fit

Category #2

Anyone who works or recently worked for a target firm
Anyone part of target industry (vendor or customer)
Professional associations
Search professionals

Category #3

Consultants
Community leaders
Friends and neighbors

Do not limit your network to the Chicago area. Former coworkers and customers on the east and west coast may have great advice as well as links to their Chicago operation. You might even connect with a work remote gig.

NETWORKING WITH LINKEDIN

Many job seekers limit their LinkedIn connections to people they already know. Use LinkedIn to align yourself with industry professionals you have never met, including people who work for other companies but share your same title or target job title.

Connect with people at companies you want to work for. A job does not have to be open at a company for you to network your way in. In fact, the best time to network is when a job is not posted. That way when a role opens, you will already be in the mix. Find the employees who work in the departments you are interested in being a part of.

Always send a personalized note when sending connection requests, a quick message introducing yourself or explaining why you wish to connect will help you establish a relationship and you won't come across like you're on a random adding spree to bump up your numbers. Once you have connected, reach out and ask for some advice or if they are willing to have an informational phone or video chat. Also, do not be surprised if your "connection rate", even with good filters, is only 1:8 or 1:12.

In addition, be sure to "follow" your target companies on LinkedIn.

REQUESTING A NETWORKING MEETING

Only reaching voicemail is quite common, do not leave a detailed message. Leverage your referral with a message like the following: "Hi Joseph, this is Gene Flynn. Marybeth Schulz suggest we connect. Please call me when you get a chance at 847-487-6622."

Do not say "I am looking for a job." Joseph will likely call you back because of his link with Marybeth, much as he would expect Marybeth to return a call to his referral. If he does not call back in a few days, try again.

Script to Request a Networking Meeting (with Person on the Phone): "Good morning Mr. Smith. My name is Peter Jones. I was referred to you by Marybeth Schultz. I understand you and Marybeth were together at the U of Chicago Booth School of Business. I am a senior HR executive and currently in career transition. Marybeth and I met recently, and she felt our meeting would be of mutual benefit. I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you for 20 minutes and solicit your advice relative to my search strategy. When would you be available to meet?"

Two notes:

- 1) When someone gives a new name to network with, ask how they know each other. Notice how Peter Jones mentioned the Booth School above to build credibility.

- 2) After the meeting is set, confirm with an email and send your resume. Do NOT call to reconfirm, even if you will spend six hours to attend a 20-minute loop meeting.

Handling Objections Like: "Why don't you send me your resume: I will get it to HR."

Suggested response: "I appreciate your willingness to do that for me; however, that is not why I called. I am really interested in obtaining your advice and input regarding my career search. Once we meet and you have personal knowledge of me, you may be able to suggest others I might contact. I assure you I am only asking for a focused 20-minute Zoom meeting."

AT THE NETWORKING MEETING (IN PERSON OR ZOOM)

Many job seekers perform poorly at this point. For example, Tom asked Stephanie, a former coworker, for a 20-minute meeting and she agrees to a meeting the next day at 3:30 PM. At the appointed time, Tom spends the first 10 minutes talking about "the good old days" and what former coworkers are doing now. Tom then spends the next eight minutes talking about his last job and what went wrong. Stephanie ends the meeting at 3:52 PM to head off to her 4 PM meeting. She tells Tom to send her his resume and that they have no current openings.

The fact that Tom did not control the meeting and does not give him the right to expect more time. It shows he was unprepared. Remember, you may have lots of available time, but you are often talking to someone who does not.

Planning a Powerful Networking Meeting

Consider the following logic for a powerful 20-minute meeting. The recommended book below will explain why 20-minutes is ideal and gives detailed instructions on executing one.

- Great **first impression** with chitchat and connection to person that referred you (2-3 minutes)
- General **overview** of your background (1 minute)
- Great **discussion** based on your powerful questions (12 minutes)
- **Wrap-up** with request for referrals, review of any action, and a "thank you." (3 minutes)

During the **general overview** portion, you can and must provide a crisp and memorable review of your work experience in one minute. Remember, this is NOT a job interview. It is a chance to gather information and gain a contact or two. You need to demonstrate that you are organized and focused.

During the **discussion** portion, NEVER ask a question where the answer was available on the internet as it shows you came unprepared. You want to ask questions that allow the contact to share his or her

insights on opportunities. The most powerful questions are often ones that related to their career choices as it shows you did real research and gives them a chance to talk about themselves. Do this and they will think you are brilliant.

Do not hesitate to ask for referrals. The contact likely knows that you will be asking for referrals and may even have some in mind before the meeting. Do not worry if they have none to give you. They might have a referral after you send them a thank-you email.

AFTER THE NETWORK MEETING

Keep track of everything and take prompt action after the meeting. It is amazing how often job seekers wait 2-3 weeks to contact a new referral. Some never make contact.

Report back to the referring person with the results of his or her referrals. It keeps you fresh in their minds and often inspires them to give you additional referrals. Find a record keeping tool that works for you. You can Google “excel spreadsheet for job search networking” and get many different free tools.

RECOMMENDED BOOK

Here is a highly recommended book: “The 20-Minute Networking Meeting” – Professional Edition by N. Perez and M. Ballinger. © 2016

This book will give you great insight on planning and executing a powerful networking meeting.

And Finally From article: “5 Ways 2020 Changed Job Searching Forever” By Satephanie Vozza 12/21/2020 Chicago Tribune

NETWORKING IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

Online application systems are flooded, and candidates should not wait for vacancies, says Stahl. Instead, network before there is a job opening. “Get ahead of applicant tracking systems,” she says. “Employers don’t want to use it; they give incentives to their employees to refer candidates so they can dodge the software. That makes networking more important than ever.”

With social distancing, you have to think of creative ways to network. In-person coffee may not be possible, so take virtual approaches, such as setting up Zoom chats. Eventbrite and Meetup host virtual events, and Stahl suggests joining professional groups on LinkedIn or Facebook or creating your own.

“It’s about engagement,” she says. “It’s not just posting articles to share. You need to add value and position yourself as someone who has a voice on topics. Position yourself as a resource.” Jen Morris, an executive career coach and job search strategist and founder of Career Inspo, calls this approach “social seeking.”

“The job seekers who stand out in today’s crowded online environment are the ones who are proactive and have mastered how to market themselves on social networks,” she says. “Networking has always been the

best way to land a job, however, today’s job search is one part networking—or social networking—and one part marketing campaign. With social networking, your online professional brand is more important than ever.”