

Networking—A Job Seeker’s Arsenal

“The best jobs are never advertised.”

Sometimes clichés say it best.

It is said that as many as 50% of job openings are filled by candidates who were referred by an employee of the hiring company. What ingredient do these successful candidates possess that others do not? How did they gain access to this “hidden” job market? What is the secret to gaining such a crucial edge in an increasingly competitive job market? It can be summed up in one word: *networking*.

The simple tactic of forming and maintaining professional relationships can lead to countless opportunities in the job market. Not just for top executives, networking is more than a way to climb the corporate ladder; who you know often determines whether you set foot on the ladder at all. Higher level jobs may never be advertised at all, so the importance of cultivating a healthy network cannot be overstated.

Networking often has an unforeseen domino effect that can begin long before the formal job search even begins. It can begin with a casual remark to a neighbor that you are in the job market. This remark may lead to your neighbor mentioning you to a friend who currently works at a top logistics company. This friend may, in turn, ask you to meet his director. Always keep in mind that companies usually prefer to hire from within their organizations rather than spend money and resources on advertising. Typically, a company will take the trusted word of an employee over a stranger’s résumé.

Start the networking cycle by creating a *Career Network*. Consider family, friends, neighbors, current and former co-workers and bosses, customers, vendors, mentors, colleagues, alumni, teachers, members of your church, mosque, synagogue, or volunteer groups, and even professional chat rooms. Try getting involved in the community by volunteering, joining various local organizations, or going to an affiliated conference. Make sure to use these contacts to your advantage; tell them you are in the market for a job and be as specific as possible. Allow them to spread the word so that your network’s reach goes as far as possible.

Another good way to initiate your network is to set up an *informational interview*. Find someone in the field in which you wish to work and ask him or her for a brief 30 to 45 minute session where you can ask him questions about his job. Remember, the purpose of an informational interview is to gain perspective and knowledge, not necessarily a job, so leave your résumé at home or in the car. The primary focus is to build your network.

Networking doesn’t end when you accept a job. Always maintain your network by keeping in touch with your contacts. Make sure to keep them informed and thank them for their assistance; this will breed goodwill and demonstrate courtesy and professionalism.

When someone has taken his time to assist you in any way, send him a thank you letter. Your appreciation will be remembered and will greatly increase the time and effort your contact will put toward helping you in the future. Remember, even if you are employed, retention is the name of the game. Let your contacts know that you have started a new job and that you are grateful for their efforts. Also, networking is a two-way street; be sure to be as helpful as possible when you are called upon to return the favor.

In the end, networking may be the most powerful tool in the job seeker's arsenal. A healthy network can jumpstart your career by building professional relationships. Give yourself a name in the hidden job market and begin your *Career Network* today!

Don't forget to join CSCMP on **Facebook**, **LinkedIn**, and **Twitter**. These are other great ways to network!

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