

The Broken Record Called Networking

A tough hiring market means that, especially when it comes to networking, it's time to change your tune. BY TERESA DALY AND MARY KLOEHN

A CLIENT OF ours saw a job posting he liked. Instead of succumbing to the black hole of online resume submission, he did something smart: Our client tapped his network for personal contacts within the organization before going after the open job. The result? He connected with an executive at the company through a mutual contact, secured an interview and was hired a short time later. This is a great example of strategic networking.

There's no doubt the biggest broken record of advice job seekers get is, "Go out and network with everyone you know. It's a numbers game, and the more people you network with, the better chance you will have of finding the right job."



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focus your networking in and around these sweet spots. If you are out meeting with people who are outside your focus areas, you are just drinking coffee, and not likely to get any focused traction.

Your traction will come from the "buzz" that you generate when you network in this more focused way. What do you want your buzz to be? Do you want your buzz to say that you have no focus and just don't know what you want and what sets you apart from the crowd? Or do you want your buzz to say, here is a person who knows exactly who they are, what they are looking for and why they are uniquely able to make a significant contribution in that type of role or job? You must take the time to develop a clear message so that your buzz will help you stand out and make you memorable. When the job opportunities come, your name will rise to the top of the list for those referrals.

Last, a word about social media as it pertains to networking. Tools such as Facebook and LinkedIn have established us all as no more than three degrees of separation from each other. It is now no longer difficult to identify and get to key decision makers and connectors in your sweet spots. But let's be very clear about the purpose and benefits that you gain from using these tools. When you invite someone to join your network, you are not "networking," you are "connecting"—don't confuse the two! You can use social media to connect, but networking is about face-to-face meetings to build your buzz, get your message out and be memorable.

Don't tune out the old advice about the importance of networking. It continues to ring true for job seekers today as it has in the past, but the tune has changed dramatically! Job seekers who listen to those subtle changes are the ones who will benefit going forward. 🎧

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Today, in this tight and competitive job market, the advice continues to play, and rightly so. The statistics show that 70 to 80 percent of jobs are still found through networking, 40 percent of those through direct referral. But the tune has changed significantly and job seekers who want to gain traction from their networking efforts today need to listen to it.

Networking is no longer a game of numbers and informational interviewing. Effective networking is a game of strategic focus and differentiating yourself. Before you head out to meet with people, you need to be very clear about who you are, what you are looking for, and what you will ask for from each and every person you meet with. You need to develop a marketing plan that will identify the areas of focus that are your "sweet spots." These are the areas where your unique set of capabilities, skills and interests will make you really stand out. They should be identified as broad areas of expertise such as "emerging technologies," "education" or "consumer products," not as a list of target companies, industries and search firms. Tightly

NETWORKING TIPS

STRATEGIC NETWORKING SUCCESS STORIES

» Bypass the Black Hole

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» Opportunity Everywhere

A client was attending a wedding. During cocktail hour, she found herself in a conversation about careers, and shared with clarity her transition focus and goal. She was so specific about her goal that someone chimed in with a contact and an organization that fit the bill. By staying on message and being clear about her intention, she turned a social scenario into a professional advantage.

» Secrets of Smart Networking

- Market and promote yourself every day. Yes, every day. You want to be top of mind when it's time to hire.
- Stay on strategy and stay on your message. Continuously changing and altering these will confuse the marketplace.
- Use social media as a tool to get and stay connected, never as a replacement for face-to-face meetings.
- Regularly update your network about your status. You are responsible for building your own buzz.