



Networking: What Are You Doing Wrong?

As unemployment numbers continue to rise, job seekers need to find alternative ways to get the attention of hiring managers and business owners. The old process of searching job boards, emailing resumes, crossing your fingers and waiting is not a successful method any longer. Thousands of people are losing their jobs, and in order to get noticed, getting out of their houses to build relationships is key. Here are the top 5 tips on how job seekers can network effectively:

1. **Find your target.** If you want to get in front of potential employers in a specific industry, find out where they network. Go to their website and find out which local associations they belong to. Contact the association and find out when they meet, if they're allowing new members, cost of membership, time requirements, educational opportunities, and time dedicated to networking. Continue this same process with other industries you may be interested in.
2. **Create your brand.** Once you have a list of events & meetings to attend, figure out how you want to present yourself. What will you tell people about you? You need to figure out what your 30 second elevator speech will sound like, and what your brand is. How do your friends, family, past co-workers describe you? What are you known for? What kind of value can you bring to an organization? Build your elevator speech around these themes and make it catchy. You only have one chance to make a first impression!
3. **Do your homework.** Before the event, look for a member list online or request one from them. They are not always public, but it doesn't hurt to ask. Scan the list for companies you are especially interested in. Find out who from the organization is a member and learn as much as you can about this person. Make it a goal to find this person at the event and introduce yourself. Use your research as a way to engage him/her and show that you have done your homework. Come up with compelling questions that are specific to this person or their industry. Keep it interesting and engaging!
4. **Leave your mark.** Make business cards for yourself. You don't need to be employed to have one! Go to a local Staples or online and get 250 made. It will cost less than \$20 to have something professional and hand out to potential employers. Include your contact information, a sentence from your elevator speech (or brand), and an eye catching graphic or design. Make it unique and don't be afraid to get creative with it. Just remember who your audience is and what will catch their eye.
5. **Go the extra mile.** The most important part of networking is keeping in touch with your new contacts, yet this is the part that is most often missed! Send a thank you card within 24 hours of meeting your new contact. Note something specific you talked about during your conversation and make sure you ask if there is anything you can help them with. Most important part: Mail it. Don't email

it. Spend the extra time and show them how important they are. Ask for a follow up meeting or informational interview. Offer to take them out for coffee. Just don't lose the connection and find ways to stay in touch.

Networking is time and energy consuming, requires a lot of research and planning, and doesn't come easily. However, it may be the only effective way to find a job as opportunities are more and more limited every day.

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