Eight Networking Tips

While it would make the introverts, the meek, the shy, and the novices awfully happy if the newspaper classifieds contained all job openings, that's simply not the case. In fact, some of the best jobs aren't listed anywhere except in the mental catalogues of CEOs and managers.

So how do you apply for jobs that aren't advertised anywhere; that exist only in the seemingly inaccessible minds of working America's movers and shakers? You meet people who might have insight into your job search. You talk to people who know people who could help you out. You chat it up with strangers at parties. You cold-call people you've read about in the newspaper. You write cordial letters to prominent community leaders. You cultivate an arsenal of contacts. In short, you network. Think about networking as a game, as a sport, as a personal challenge. Below are some strategies for success.

1. Brainstorm for Contacts.
Think of everyone who could possibly serve as a contact. Don't limit yourself to people who could clearly help you out - friendly, accessible people in unrelated fields often have contacts they would be happy to share with you. Also, people who, through either work or volunteer activities, have contact with a diverse crowd can be extremely helpful. To get you started with your list, here are some suggestions:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family friends</th>
<th>Local politicians</th>
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<tr>
<td>Relatives</td>
<td>Journalists</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neighbors</td>
<td>Business executives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professors</td>
<td>Non-profit directors</td>
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<td>Alumni</td>
<td>Your physician</td>
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<td>Former employees</td>
<td>Your hair dresser</td>
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<tr>
<td>Former co-workers</td>
<td>Prominent community members</td>
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<td>Public relations officials</td>
<td>Members of professional organizations</td>
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<td>Religious leaders</td>
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2. Where the Contacts Are - Tried and True Places to Network

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Local alumni association</th>
<th>Conventions</th>
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<td>Class reunions</td>
<td>Club meetings</td>
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<td>Cocktail parties</td>
<td>Internet list-serves</td>
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<td>Fundraisers</td>
<td>Volunteer opportunities</td>
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<td>Business conferences</td>
<td>Continuing education classes</td>
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3. Be Prepared
Networking is a little like planning a political campaign. While it's essential that you are honest and relaxed, you should not wing it. Just as politicians think about what they tactically need to accomplish, convey, and gain when they make an appearance or give a speech, you should approach networking opportunities with a game plan. Before you confidently and charmingly sashay into a business conference room, a dinner party, or group event, do your homework. Find out who will be there, or do your best to list who you think will probably be present. Then decide who you would most like to meet. When you have your list of potential contacts, thoroughly research their work and their backgrounds and then make up some questions and conversational statements that reflect your research. And finally, think critically about what your goals are for your networking function. What information do you want to walk away with? What do you want to convey to the people you meet? But, as is always true, it's important to be flexible and to perceive opportunities you didn't plan to confront.

4. Networking Knows No Boundaries
Business conferences, informational interviews, college reunions, and cocktail parties are obvious networking opportunities - you expect to walk away with a few business cards and some recommendations for potential rolodex entries. But the reality is that invaluable contacts and enviable opportunities often surprise us. Good networkers are flexible people who approach connection-making as a fluid enterprise that extends far beyond hotel conference room walls. You never know who will step onto the adjacent elliptical trainer at the gym; who will be parked behind you in an interminable grocery store line; who will sit next to you on an airplane; or who will be under the hair dryer next to you at the beauty salon. Don't let these opportunities pass you by. While it may have been sheer luck that you bumped into an affable CEO, your savvy approach to networking can turn a banal exchange into a pivotal moment in your career path. Always be ready to make a contact and exchange business cards. And remember; don't hesitate to network someone who has no obvious connection to your ambitions: Your new contact may be able to give you relevant names of his or her friends and colleagues.

5. Follow Up
After you meet with a contact, it is absolutely essential to write a thank you note. Tell your contact how much he or she helped you, and refer to particularly helpful, specific advice. Everyone - even the most high-level executive - likes to feel appreciated. In addition to immediate follow-up after a meeting or conversation, keep in touch with your contacts. This way, they may think of you if an opportunity comes up, and they will also be forthcoming with new advice. It's important to stay on their radar screens without being imposing or invasive. And, of course, if you get that new job, be sure to tell them and thank them again for their help.

6. What Goes Around Comes Around
If you want to be treated with respect, treat others with respect. If you want your phone calls and emails returned, call and write back to the people who contact you. If you want big-wigs to make time for you, make yourself available to others whom you might be able to help out. It's that simple.
The higher up you climb in the professional world, the more you'll find that everyone knows everyone else. Thus, if you're impolite, curt, condescending, or disposed to burning bridges, you'll cultivate a reputation that will serve as a constant obstacle. Remember - the people who seem little now will one day be running companies and making decisions. If you treated them with kindness and respect when they were green, they'll remember and return the favor later.

7. Make It Easy For Your Contacts
When you call, meet with, or write to a potential contact, make it as easy as possible for them to help you. Explain what you specifically want, and ask detail-oriented questions.

For example, "I'm looking for jobs in arts administration. Do you know anyone who works at the Arts Council? May I have their names and phone numbers? May I use your name when I introduce myself to them?" Another entrée into a productive conversation is to solicit career tips and advice from your contact. Most people love to talk about themselves. By asking for your contact to offer valuable insight from his or her personal experiences and successes, he or she will feel important and respected. Who doesn't like to feel like an expert?

Be sure to avoid making general demands, such as, "Do you know of any jobs that would be good for me?" This sort of question is overwhelming and it puts an undue burden on your contact.

8. Stay Organized
Keep a record of your networking. Whether you do this in a Rolodex, in a notebook, or in a database file on your computer, it's important to keep track of your contacts. Make sure your system has plenty of room for contacts' names, addresses, phone numbers, companies, job titles, how you met them, and subsequent conversations you've had with them.

Networking Beyond the Basics

It's not just about contacts. It's about relationships. And one way to solidify relationships is with consideration. Remember, it's often the little things that count such as cards, gifts, a phone call, an interesting article clipped from the paper. Here are some hints on inexpensive ways to keep yourself in their minds.

**Meet for drinks and appetizers.** This is an easy way to say hello and spend a few minutes with a casual contact. Invite a contact to lunch. If there's someone she knows who you want to know too, ask her to bring that person along, you're treating. Tell her why, of course. Nobody likes to feel like they're being used without their permission.

**Make a sports date.** This is a classic stay in touch ploy in the world of men. It's time we adopted it too. There are so many avenues to pursue-golf, tennis, jogging, walking, a Pilates class, aerobics, kickboxing. You'll be doing your heart a favor as you work on your networking too!
**Have a networking party.** Like a Tupperware party, but you’re selling yourself, not plastics. Invite a group you think would be congenial for brunch or wine and cheese. No need to do any kind of presentation, you’re just inviting folks to get together socially, but your hostess skills and your enthusiasm will leave them with a positive impression. Make it a tradition. Make your get-togethers so great people will be clamoring to get in. Remember reading about the grand salons in Paris? They were THE place to see and be seen.

**Get in for free.** Call the Chamber of Commerce and other major business organizations in your city to get a calendar of local events where you might make good contacts. Volunteer to help prepare, set-up, clean-up or perform any other service that will get you into the event at no charge. Women For Hire’s favorite trick is to volunteer to work at the check-in desk where the nametags are displayed. This way you’ll be able to meet and greet every attendee, then schmooze them later when you’re off duty.

**Use the power of technology.** Design a website about yourself and promote it to everyone in your address book. One woman we know got a job by writing a very clever email about herself and sending it to everyone on her address list. She requested her email buddies to forward her information to five friends. She received two job offers within three weeks.

**Get published.** Promote yourself as an expert to association newsletters, local newspapers, community websites and other publications. Smaller pubs are eager for good content and happy to consider a well-written article or even a short tidbit. Getting published means getting your name out in public (in front of eyes who may be hiring) and a published article is always a good resume item or notable achievement to mention in an interview. If you’ve designed your own website, be sure to link to your articles.

**Reach out and touch someone important.** Next time you see a newspaper or magazine article about a successful woman in your industry, drop her a note of congratulations and ask if she has any advice to offer a peer in her field. Most women will be flattered that you read about them and happy to share some nuggets of wisdom. Why not ask to interview the most admired woman in your field-tell her it’s for an article you’re writing for an association newsletter. If the article is published, the featured woman will not only read the article, she’ll share it with her friends and colleagues.

**Learn your rights.** If your spouse was relocated, check with your partner’s company to see if spousal support is offered for job placement. Many human resource offices of companies offer career assistance helping a spouse find a job.

**Networking Follow-Up**

So you made some great new contacts at last night’s networking party. Follow up, already! If you want to receive calls or emails, then you have to send some.
Secure follow-up instructions right away. When you first meet a contact or apply for a position, mention when you will contact them next. Write in your cover letter when you will call. Tell people you have just met when they can expect to hear from you. Ask interviewers when you can reach them.

Take any leads a networking contact gives you. Say your friend gives you a lead for a job you're overqualified for that doesn't pay enough. Call the job lead anyway. Your friend might find out if you didn't and think you don't appreciate her help. She may think you're not taking her leads seriously, or that you are no longer job searching—which could result in her not giving you leads anymore. Just because you aren't impressed with one job lead doesn’t mean you won't be impressed with the next. Make sure you get the next one.

Contact anyone who serves as a reference for you. Whether you are offered the position or not, if you want to use them as a reference again you need to keep them informed of your job search status.

The sooner the better. If someone emails or calls, respond to the message the same day. When you meet someone new, call the next day. If you went to an interview, send a thank-you letter within 24 hours, and include instructions as to when you will follow up on the phone.

References:
