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**TOOLING UP CAREER ADVICE**



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**Companies are asking their employees for leads on potential new employees, and sometimes they're even paying them for the trouble!**

## Three Networking Scenarios, Part Two

19 SEPTEMBER 2003

In the [first part of this networking series](#), we followed the progress of Janice, a postdoc, as she made her way through a difficult networking phone call. That phone call was a "Peer +2" call--Janice contacted someone who was just a couple of steps ahead of her on the career ladder--which is one of the easiest types of networking contacts to make. In this month's column, Janice graduates from the pee-wee league and digs into a more difficult process. But first a word about the effectiveness of Peer +2. Here's what one scientist told me recently:

"I went to the Drug Discovery meeting in Boston and spoke to a number of HR people, and also a scientist or two who work for small biotech companies in the Northeast. They spoke of the need to handle much of the hiring process themselves instead of more expensive methods such as using recruiters. I was really surprised at this--here are companies aggressively hiring, even in what is supposedly a "down" economy, and asking their employees for leads! It occurred to me that the process of contacting peer-level staff as opposed to managers makes very good sense," he said.

That's right--companies are asking their employees for leads on potential new employees ... and sometimes they're even paying them for the trouble!

Indeed, about 70% of industrial employers pay an "employee hiring bonus," and this approach is rising steadily in popularity. What does this mean to you? It means there is a reward in place for your networking contacts who take the time to champion your job-seeking quest with their company. So, although you may feel that you're causing them an inconvenience by calling them, you might actually be making them money! These rewards are substantial, usually in the \$500 to \$2000 range. Networking phone calls don't always fall on deaf ears.

## Scenario #2: The Call to a Senior Manager

In this scenario Janice, our postdoc, makes the brave decision to call a senior person in the target company. She had been reviewing the attendance list of a recent meeting and uncovered this woman's name and an abstract from one of her presentations. She remembered the speech, as its subject is one Janice finds interesting. Janice regrets not introducing herself at the meeting; she's determined to make up for that mistake, so she braves a cold call to Dr. Susan Finnegan, director of research at XYZ BioPharma.

**Janice:** Dr. Finnegan, this is Janice Feldman in the Smith Lab at UNV. Do you have a moment for a question, or am I catching you at a bad time?

**Dr. Susan Finnegan:** Please, go ahead. We can take a few minutes. What is it about?

**Janice:** I'm a postdoc here. Dr. Finnegan, and I attended the presentation you gave on your RNAi work in *C. elegans*. My reason for calling is that I work with green fluorescent proteins and have sorted out *C. elegans* cell types at a very early stage of development. I've found that these green fluorescent constructs made in *C. elegans* can be very useful in studies like yours and I'd love the opportunity to present my work to your team. I am in the job-seeking mode right now.

**Dr. Susan Finnegan:** Doing a bit of networking, I see. Well, actually, your best contact around here is most likely the HR department, as they are supposed to process these applications. Joy Chang can be reached at extension 230--mention to her that we had a talk. But before you go, tell me a bit more about the work you are doing at the Smith lab. I knew you were a *C. elegans* group, but didn't realize that you had been using those green fluorescent protein constructs.

**Janice:** Thanks for the HR contact, Dr. Finnegan. Dr. Smith has been looking specifically at neuronal cell development in *C. elegans*, but I brought in the idea of using the green fluorescent protein. When it lights up, it tells us that the gene we are looking at has been switched "on" and we can then learn something about its importance. It's been a lot of fun. I love working with this system. That's why I called you--I feel that I am doing important work and that it may have applications inside XYZ BioPharma.

**Dr. Susan Finnegan:** Janice, I'm a bit more intrigued. Why don't you forward me a copy of your CV and I'll see about setting up a time for you to give a seminar? While I really don't have any open positions, it would be nice to meet you and talk about how your work could benefit our efforts. My e-mail address is ...

**Dave's notes on the above:** The above all went more smoothly than a real phone call is likely to. I have limited space in this column and it's more important to make a point than it is to be realistic. That point is this: Don't hesitate to let your passion do the selling for you. When making a contact with a senior person, your time is short. The two things you need to do in that little bit of time are to connect your work with the company's needs and to show that you love what you do. This will open doors.

## Scenario #3: The Call to a Third Party

In this situation, Janice is reviewing her business card file and she sees a familiar name. It is the sales representative from a major reagents company, someone who is in her lab frequently. She decides that there may be some value in letting that person in on her job-seeking mission.

**Janice:** Bill, this is Janice Feldman over at the Smith lab. Can you take a moment?

**Bill Sanderson:** Sure, Janice. Do you need to place an order? We've got a special this month on that fluorescent protein you use!

**Janice:** No, orders will come through Nicole, the lab manager. I'm sure Nicole will be interested in hearing about any specials. The reason for my call was to ask you for some advice. I'm in job-seeking mode right now, and I thought that you might know of some labs in industry that could use a gene-jockey with my expertise.

**Bill Sanderson:** Gee, I don't know Janice. I really don't follow the help-wanted ads of these companies. I'd love to help you in any way that I can, however. What can I do to help?

**Janice:** What I'm interested in are some names of contacts that I can use in my networking. You know how difficult it is to get names when you call a company's receptionist. Just a half-dozen names could keep me busy and productive on my job search for a week!

**Bill Sanderson:** Sure, but I'd feel funny if these customers started getting calls that they felt should be directed to their HR departments. I'll go through my rolodex with you, Janice, if you'll promise not to use my name in any way as your referral source?

**Janice:** That's a given. No way would I use your name. I'm just trying to get information that you can't often get from the company when you call them. Thanks, Bill. I'd love to have a few of those names from the rolodex of a top sales guy. ...

**Bill Sanderson:** Got a pencil?

**Dave's comments on the above:** Most people forget the lowly salesperson is a walking, talking source of names. Don't hesitate to buy a sales person's lunch, or pull her aside for a confidential talk.

### **In Closing: Slammed Phones, Rude Secretaries, and Other Oddities of the Networking Call**

Although the Peer +2 call may be the easiest one to make, any cold-call contact with a stranger can be intimidating. Just wait until someone slams the phone down, or some snotty receptionist gives you the buzz-off with a referral to the "jobline" number. Things can get rough out there.

I suggest you plan on a few bad phone calls, the better to be ready to move on when they come your way. Of course, the worst feeling comes when you've had a few days of empty contacts ... phone calls to people who, nice as they might be, just don't have a lot of suggestions for you and the process seems likely to go on forever. Never fear. This happens to everyone.

As stated many times in this "Tooling Up" series, the process of finding a job is a numbers game. The more people you contact, the more CV requests you'll get. The more CV's you send out to networking contacts, the more phone interviews you'll earn. The more phone interviews you score, the more onsite interviews you'll be invited to, etc. All that activity is building up to getting job offers, for it has been proven that the more contacts you make, the more job offers you'll get!

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