



# Up Your Network

*Developing your skills in this critical success factor*

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**T**ECHNICAL PROFESSIONALS LIKE TO HAVE a formula for everything. Wouldn't it be nice if there were some easy-to-use protocol to job-finding, one that you could simply pick up, follow and use to land a new job? Unfortunately, it doesn't work that way. Getting on the phone to develop job leads is not conducive to formulas. While I can give you a list of all the things you need to consider, you just never know how suitable they will be in your own situation.

This column (one of those "clip-and-save" specials if you aren't in the market right now) should be a good resource for gearing up a networking campaign by mail, phone and E-mail. While the actual process of communicating with your network may not flow in the neat manner of a formula, if you stay flexible (and above all stay upbeat) you will get some great benefits from networking. Networking is likely to be a key part of your transition no matter what kind of job search you conduct—these are skills that will be used regularly throughout your career, and not only in emergency ("I need a job now!") situations.

There are two types of networking calls that you can make. Here are my comments about each:

**Networking Call To An Acquaintance:** These calls are easy to make. You know this person, and he or she knows you and your work. Without asking this person for a job (ugh!—what a great way to ruin a friendship!) you are calling in order to determine what recommended contacts he or she has that will lead you closer to your goal. Talk about a weird contradiction . . . Yes, you need to find a job but, in most cases, the moment you ask for one you get the dreaded "H/R shuffle."

**Networking Call To A Stranger:** Here's the \$64,000 question: Do you have the guts to call a complete stranger and talk about yourself, asking advice? Or, will you (like thousands of others before you) fold your cards after making one or two of these, when you have found that they are very difficult? The point I would like to emphasize is that this type of contact is a moment of truth for you. How you manage these calls and whether you can persist beyond the uncomfortable stage is the question that you must ask yourself.

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## A "To Do" List for the Job-Seeking Networker

1) Understand your goals. When making networking calls, you must be highly focused and careful not to waste their time (or yours). While the first calls you make will be to acquaintances, you'll still want to watch the clock and remember your predetermined goal. Initially, your goal is not to find a job. It is to gather up a list of people to talk to from those who already know and like you. You must keep your goals set on something manageable at the onset of your project (like the number of contacts on your networking Rolodex). Get two or three names from everyone you call and you will be doing great!

2) Make the first networking calls to your friends and acquaintances. These will be people who will recognize your name immediately. They might be in any area of the country and in any type of position. Don't filter out contacts because you "wouldn't want to move to Denver," or "he's not in my field of research." This is a broad sweep across lots of people who know you already, and you are asking to gather names of suggested contacts, and to let your friends know of your situation.

3) Who are the top 20-30 people in your field? These people are the first contacts made by recruiters or hiring managers when a need exists. Maybe they are ex-FDA consultants, or perhaps professors. Regardless of whether you write or call with an introduction, make sure they know you and have your résumé. Many keep a file for such contacts, and pull out that info whenever they are contacted with a "whom do you know?" question from a manager or recruiter.

4) Here's where it gets tough. Start making those difficult contacts with strangers. Many times, there will be someone who referred you whom you can use as a brief introduction: "Dr. Smith, Fred Finnegan suggested that I ought to call you with a brief question on a project of mine. Can you take a moment for that or am I catching you at a bad time?" In other cases, you will have to go it alone, without the aid of a referring third party. Ask them for a moment of time and don't take much more than that—three minutes if you aren't getting a good feeling. Go five to 10 minutes if it is flowing nicely. Then, follow up with a nice "thanks for the time" E-mail and attach a résumé if the conversation merited it.

5) Gather names that you get in print and online job ads. It doesn't hurt to add them to your contact list. These will be the coldest leads of them all, but you should add a few to every round of networking calls. You'll be stronger because of it, and you may just find yourself with a few winners.

6) When you cannot get past the secretary for a key contact,

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calling that person later and asking for the boss's E-mail address will often pose no problem for them. This allows you to generate the same kind of networking contact, via E-mail, and it works about half of the time. Although nothing replaces the phone or in-person networking, E-mail is handy because many senior level managers actually read their own E-mail each morning.

### Tips and Techniques

- Never, ever interject any editorial opinion about geographical location, type of contact you'd prefer, etc. when requesting names and ideas from your networking contacts. Your goal is to continually build the database. Let people give you their recommendations free of any extraneous information. The worst thing that can happen is that you get a name that you never call.

- Develop a response to "Tell me about yourself," and have one ready to go at a moment's notice. Although you are not going to launch into even a two-

minute version of this without permission, you can expect that in some small percentage of your networking calls you will actually find an open position. You might be asked to "spontaneously" tell them why you are a fit!

- If you have an H/R contact, pursue it just like any other referral. It will be one more chance to sharpen your saw, and at the same time you may just discover the person in a company who can get things done!

- You will, no doubt, encounter a certain number of rude people and secretaries who will not allow you to speak to their boss. Don't worry about the occasional slammed door . . . You will find, soon enough, that networking is a numbers game and that the more contacts you make, the better. Those rude people you run into along the way are best forgotten.

- Don't get sidetracked by time-wasters. These might include worrying about rude people or exclusive reliance upon headhunters (the best recruiters will find you, and/or you will hear from them after sending information). The

worst time-waster of them all: Falling back into the age-old trap of conducting a résumé-mailing campaign.

One of my favorite inspirational books that I re-read whenever times get tough is *As A Man Thinketh*, written almost 200 years ago by James Allen. It holds a great quote that I believe relates to the networking process:

"A particular train of thought or action persisted in, be it good or bad, cannot fail to produce its results on one's circumstances. A man [or woman] cannot directly choose his circumstances, but he can choose his thoughts and actions which so indirectly, yet surely, shape his circumstances."

My question to you at this important stage of your life: Are you directing your thoughts and actions to create the circumstances that you desire in your life? Perhaps networking will be one key part of creating the next productive stage of your career. ■