

NETWORK FOR YOUR JOB SEARCH

NETWORKING COULD BE WHAT HELPS YOU LAND A JOB.

If you take part in social networking sites, you probably have a pretty good idea of how networking can enhance your personal life. But, if you're like many new college graduates, you're probably not as comfortable about incorporating networking into your job search.

In spite of your discomfort, you need to incorporate networking into your job search: Especially in a competitive job market, networking could be what helps you land a job. In fact, many jobs are filled before they are even advertised—filled by people who learned about the opportunity before it was formally announced.

What is networking when it comes to the job search? It's not about using people. Just as you look to build personal relationships through social networks, you want to build relationships to foster your professional life. These relationships can help you not only in your current job search but down the road as you build your career.

Networking is not one-sided: It works both ways. You offer assistance to others just as they offer assistance to you. Perhaps the easiest way to think about networking is to see it as an extension of being friendly, outgoing, and active.

Here are some tips for building and maintaining a healthy network:

1. Make a list of everyone you know—and people they know—and identify how they could help you gather career information or experience.
Who do you know at school? Professors, friends, and even friends' parents can all be helpful contacts. Did you hold a part-time job? Volunteer? Serve an internship? Think about the people you came into contact with there.
2. Sign up for an alumni mentoring program.
Many colleges offer such programs, and they are a great way to build relationships in your field.
3. Join the campus chapter of a professional society that relates to your career choice.
In many ways, a professional society is an instant network: You'll be with others who have the same general career interest. Plus, you may be able to learn more about your field from them. For example, you may be able to learn about the field and potential employers from others who share their internship experiences.
4. Volunteer at a local museum, theater, homeless shelter—anywhere that even remotely relates to your field of study.

By volunteering, you'll not only learn about your chosen field firsthand, you'll also be able to connect with people who are in the field.

5. Speak to company representatives at career fairs, even if you're not ready to look for a job. Be up front that you're not currently in the job market and don't take a lot of the representative's time, but touching base with a potential employer now can help you down the road when you are ready.
6. Attend company information sessions at your college and talk one-on-one to the recruiters who run them.
7. Schedule informational interviews with people who can tell you about their careers. It's best to ask to meet in person or by phone for a short interview, and don't immediately start asking "How can you help me?" Plan your questions ahead of time, focusing on how the company works and how the person shaped his or her career path.
8. Add your profile to LinkedIn. It's free. And then, work your profile. Add work history (including internships!), skills, and keywords. Make connections to people you've worked with or met through networking. Ask for "recommendations" from people who have worked with you. You'll find LinkedIn is a good source of suggestions for people in your field to contact for informational interviews.
9. Remember to be courteous and tactful in all your conversations, to send thank-you notes to people who help you, and to find ways to help others as well. Don't drop your network once you've gotten a job. Nurture the relationships you've built and look for opportunities to build new connections throughout your career. Getting started might be uncomfortable, but with time and practice, networking will be second nature.

Courtesy of the National Association of Colleges and Employers.