

Job Search and Networking

Networking Basics



Introduction



A willingness to **network** and **build connections** will be the single most useful tool in your job search. Networking is considered to be the most effective way to find a job, but every person will need to build his or her own network differently.

In this module, you'll learn about the **basics** of networking and how it can be helpful to your job search. We'll also talk about different **networking strategies** that will help you gain meaningful connections as you develop your network, such as how to ask **purposeful questions** and craft your **elevator pitch**.

What is networking?

Networking is simply the process of building positive, advantageous relationships, either by making a **connection** with someone in person or online. While some people have an easier time making new connections than others, it's important to remember that everyone is capable of networking.

You probably already have networking experience, even if you don't think of it in those terms. Any time you meet someone or make a new friend, you're engaged in a form of networking. Making good use of your connections can make finding a job that much easier.



Watch this video from AARP to learn more about the basics of networking.

Why network?

Networking is considered to be the single most effective way to find a job. A majority of job seekers found their most recent position by networking, either through **referrals** or **direct contact** with a hiring manager.

Let's imagine you are responsible for hiring a person to work at your company. Would you rather hire someone you've never met or someone you already know and trust? It is estimated that as much as 80 percent of available positions are never even advertised. Networking with different people can allow you to find opportunities in this **hidden job market**.

Getting started

Making the decision to start networking can feel a little overwhelming, but it's important to remember that no one



builds a network **from scratch**. Your family and friends already make up a powerful network of different **connections**.

Reaching out to your existing network is a great way start practicing your **networking skills**. Over time, you'll feel more comfortable expanding your network and building new connections. Take some time to organize your **existing connections** and identify **networking opportunities** you can pursue.

Opportunities for Networking:

- Even if you've never thought about networking before, you already have a large network in your **friends** and **family members**. Use this primary network to help you expand your connections. Ask if they know of **anyone** you should meet as you begin to grow your network.
- People that you meet from different **social organizations**, such as church or recreational sports teams, often come from a variety of different **backgrounds**. Be careful not to overlook these connections simply because you don't know them in a professional setting. If they work in a **related field**, they might be able to share **information** and **contacts** that could help you in your job search.
- Many industries have **professional** and **trade organizations**. These organizations can be valuable resources for making **connections** and learning about the latest industry **trends**. You can find different industry organizations by using the **US Index of Trade Associations**. You can also reach out to current and former **co-workers**, **professors**, and **alumni groups**.
- Over the last few years, more people have been using social media websites like **LinkedIn**, **Facebook**, **Meetup**, and **Twitter** to help expand their networks. Making a connection on LinkedIn or sending a tweet to a possible employer could be the start of a new career. We'll talk more about using social media to network in our lesson on the **Job Hunt with Social Media**.

Effective networking strategies

Once you have a firm grasp on your existing connections, you may be ready to **grow your network** and **develop new relationships**. While there is no single way to create a network, there are several strategies you can use to make the most of your time.

Review the following techniques to learn how to expand your network and build meaningful connections:

Broaden your scope

Be careful not to **exclude** anyone from your network as you begin seeking out new connections. Remember that a majority of job referrals are made through **friends of friends**. Anyone might turn out to be a valuable networking contact, even if they don't work directly in your career field.

The more people who know about your job search, the better. By expanding your network, you'll have a greater chance of finding a new position.

Network often

The most successful networkers are **constantly** meeting new people and expanding their networks, even when they're not actively searching for a job. As you work to build new connections, it's important to remember that networking is a **two-way street**—there must be some **mutual benefits** for both parties involved.

Show an interest in what other people have to say instead of focusing exclusively on your needs. A relationship founded on mutual trust and respect will be the most likely to **benefit** you in the long term.

Have a positive attitude

How you present yourself can have a significant impact on the kind of impression you make. While it's easy to become discouraged in the middle of a long job search, it's important to remain **positive** and **optimistic** when introducing yourself to others.

Broadcasting your frustrations will only make it more difficult to gain new connections. Even if you're coming out of a tough situation, be sure to project **confidence**.

Ask questions

Asking a series of purposeful **questions** can help you engage someone you're meeting for the first time. Most people

generally like talking about themselves, so don't shy away from asking about someone's career and interests. At this point, you should be focused on getting to know your new contact and how this person might fit in to your network. You're **not asking for a job**, just **more information**.

Consider asking some of the following questions when you're meeting someone for the first time:

- How did you get started in your current career?
- What do you like most about your job? What are the biggest challenges you face?
- Would you choose the same career path if you had to do it all over again?

Craft your elevator pitch

In busy social settings, you may only have a few moments to capture someone's attention or make an impression. One of the most effective ways to get your message across is to develop a personal **elevator pitch**. An elevator pitch is a **clear, succinct**, and **specific** statement that describes you and your strengths in less than 30 seconds. Preparing your speech in advance can also help you feel more comfortable introducing yourself to new people.

Your elevator pitch should explain **who you are, what you're seeking, and what you can offer**. Review some examples of different elevator pitches below.

Sample elevator pitches

For an experienced web designer:

“I help people create modern, clean, and professional websites that will increase their business. I love finding creative ways to customize designs and meet my clients' needs. What can you tell me about your current website?”

For a mid-level loan officer:

“I'm a seasoned mortgage lender with a lot of experience helping clients feel more comfortable about their financial future. I'm looking to transition from my current position at a large bank to a more personal firm handling small business loans and mortgages.”

For an entry-level medical assistant:

“I recently completed a certification program and I'm currently seeking a position as a medical assistant. I love helping people, so I'm looking forward to a position at a small practice where I can interact directly with patients.”

After you've composed your pitch, be sure to practice it by yourself and with friends until it sounds **natural**. Don't be afraid to **modify** your speech over time, or **adapt** it for certain situations. Remember, your elevator pitch should leave someone wanting to know more about you. An introduction has the potential to become a more lengthy conversation or even a screening interview, so **be prepared** to talk about your **experience** and what you could **contribute**.

Build relationships

How you conclude your first meeting with a new contact is vital to building an effective relationship. Even if your encounter is brief, make sure you leave it with a request **to keep in touch**, either by meeting again **in person** or connecting **online** through email or social media.

Remember, networking is a long-term investment that requires **time** and **persistence**. Most of the connections you make will not have anything to offer you initially. By politely **following up** with your contacts, you'll be able to develop a relationship over time. The stronger your relationships, the more likely it is that your connections will think of you when **opportunities** arise.



We'll talk more about online networking in our module, **Job Hunt with Social Media**.

Networking resources

Business cards

Believe or not, paper business cards are still a great way to share your contact information quickly and easily. Your business card should be simple, with your **basic contact information** and a concise personal statement, such as a shorter version of your **elevator pitch** (no more than a few sentences). If you feel comfortable using

new technologies, you might consider using a mobile app like **CardMunch** instead, which allows you to share a digital version of your business card and take a picture of other people's cards for later reference.

Networking log

You'll need to make sure you have an organized system for maintaining and tracking your connections so you can effectively **follow up** and **maintain contact**. You can create your own networking log or use a free online tool like **JibberJobber**, which allows you to save information about different **networking contacts** and stay organized as you build your network.

TRY THIS!

Take some time to reflect on the following questions as you begin building your network:

- Who is in your current network?
- How can you expand your network? Can you join social or professional organizations for networking?
- How will you introduce yourself to new people? What is your elevator pitch?
- What can you offer new connections to build a mutually beneficial relationship?
- What tools will you use to keep up with your connections?

◀ **Previous: Find a Job Online**

Next: Job Hunt with Social Media ▶