

Networking

Quick Tips

Tips to make networking easier

Networking can mean different things to different people. Some people think it's all about asking for a job. Others are fearful that they don't know enough people to even begin networking.

This can be particularly challenging for international students, and more introverted people who find it difficult to strike up a conversation with people. Even the thought of networking can be nerve-wracking.

However, networking is a critical way to locate the right job for you. If you know how to do it, it is not as difficult as you might think.

If you are not engaging in networking, you potentially miss out on 80% of roles that are not advertised. You are then left to compete for the 20% of jobs that are advertised. That's not a good job search strategy.

So what exactly is networking as a job search strategy?

A good place to start is to begin with what networking is not:

- It is not about asking directly for a job
- It is not necessarily attending lots of parties and social functions
- It is not about having a huge number of friends and contacts.
- It is not about handing business cards out to everyone you meet
- It is not about begging someone to find you a job.

So what is networking? Networking can involve any number of the following activities:

Make a list of all the people you know including:

- Neighbours
- Friends
- Relatives
- Social or sporting clubs
- Professional Associations
- Hobbies where you meet other people
- People who work in the area you wish to work in

Networking works because it uses the principle of "six degrees of separation" – a principle that has as its underlying assumption that everybody is only a maximum of six connections away from everyone else.

Whilst unproven, it intuitively makes sense. How many times have you spoken to someone only to find out in the conversation that they know someone that you know?

The next thing to do is to arrange to meet one or more of your connections.

Networking in the digital age

LinkedIn and other social media can be a good way to make connections.

With your current connections, they can potentially introduce you to people they know, who can then establish contact with people they know. And on it goes.

With LinkedIn, you can also target people who work in the industry that you would like to be in. With additional premium subscriptions, you can directly contact key people you would like to meet.

However, the rules of networking will still apply. You must be able to convince someone that the meeting will be worthwhile for both of you.



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How can I prepare for a networking meeting?

Take the first step: Much like public speaking, most of the fear that drives us in uncomfortable situations is thinking the worst. *Will they judge me? What if I don't say the right thing?* The more you stop worrying, the more you will find how easy it is to talk to them about who they are, their business or their passion.

Identify the meeting purpose: The purpose of the meeting should always be about finding out more about the person or the business in which they are involved, rather than asking for a job, at least in the beginning. This is called an informational interview (refer to *Informational Interviews Quick Tips* on SwinEmploy swi.nu/swinemploy for more on this). Most busy managers will not have a job opening at the time you arrange the meeting, so don't expect an immediate job opening!

Write down the key things to discuss: Making some points on paper helps to get your thoughts in order. List the following:

- *What is your objective for this meeting?*
- *How will you know if it's successful?*
- *How will you present yourself?*
- *What is the length of the meeting?*
- *What will happen after the meeting is over?*

Prepare a business card: If you are arranging a meeting with a potential decision maker, it's a good idea to have a business card prepared. The business card should have your name, contact number and email, and also list your areas of specialty. Swapping cards at the meeting is acceptable social etiquette.

What do I do during the meeting?

Listen and ask questions: When beginning the meeting, ask the person about themselves. *How did they get to where they are? Did they plan their career? What led them into this role? What do they like and dislike about it?*

Build rapport with conversation starters that make it easier to establish a connection. Many managers will be busy and you must stick to the original meeting time frame. Often this will be no more than around 15 – 20 minutes.

Ask for referrals: The best part of networking, and often the part that leads to success, is to ask the question: *"Do you know of anyone else in your industry or field I can speak to about potential career paths or job openings?"* That way, the person feels they can help you without necessarily having a job ready for you. If you leave them with a positive impression, they will be more likely to recommend you as well.

How do I close the meeting?

Be polite at all times: Remember to thank the person for their time, and request whether they would like you to send through your resume. If they accept, write a short email back again thanking them for doing so and the time spent with you.

Keep in touch: Offer to stay in touch with the view to learning more about the changes occurring in the industry. Continual learning and development is what sets you apart. It shows that you are keenly interested in them and their work. Every employer will value someone who proactively stays up-to-date on industry developments.

What are the next steps?

Identify more networking opportunities: Consider joining a professional association as a student member so that you can attend workshops and seminars. These events are a good opportunity to meet people in your industry who can provide helpful contacts and advice.

Continually seek ways to make connections: Research on people with successful careers highlights the importance of networking, having a mentor and "happenstance" – a combination of being in the right place at the right time based on the premise that luck is the combination of right positioning and the right circumstances occurring at once.

This is an unpredictable pattern at times, but you have control over your part in creating those circumstances.

Go and do it: So make the first step and incorporate networking as an essential method into your career planning and goal setting.