

NETWORKING DECONSTRUCTED

Good networking is all about exchanging information, building trust, being seen and creating a positive foundation for future interactions. Networking can happen anywhere and can be most constructive when you least expect it; meeting friends' parents, at wedding receptions, when flying.

- Pay attention to people you meet. Listen to people as they talk about their life, work, volunteer activities, and current events. Often you can pick up clues about what they do or what they value from their conversations. If you pick up on a key word, find a way to bring that topic back into the conversation.
- Be able to articulate what you are looking for and how others may help you. Specific questions will provide more help than general ones. You can ask about their career field, how to break into a particular company, find professional contacts, or develop job or internship leads.
- Ask open-ended questions in networking conversations. This means questions where you ask who, what, where, when, and how as opposed to those that can be answered with a simple yes or no. This form of questioning opens up the conversation and shows listeners that you are interested in them.
- Don't just talk about yourself. Listening is the key to making strong connections; make a positive impression and they'll want to share information and their contacts with you.
- If you meet someone interesting, don't hesitate to ask him/her for a business card. Jot down notes on the business card to keep track of people you meet. If they don't have a card, ask if you can contact them on LinkedIn, or have them write down their name and email. Consider creating your own business card to share.
- Follow up with each person you connect with. Having a pile of business cards or a list of contact names doesn't do you or your job search a bit of good. You must follow up and make another connection, via LinkedIn or by email or phone. On your LinkedIn invitation or your email or phone message, remind your new contact where and how you met them. Include something about your conversation so they will be able to recall the conversation and you.
- Don't focus on your confusion or frustration about your job search. Avoid negativity. Say, "I'm exploring career options."
- It's estimated that fewer than 8% of jobs are secured through internet search only, while 64% are secured when the candidates utilize networking. Always remember to incorporate networking into your job search!

Starting/Entering a Conversation

- To begin a conversation with someone you don't know but whom you would like to know, start off with a question. Ask something about that person (nothing too personal) or a question pertaining to the situation.
- If you are starting the conversation, it's your responsibility to keep it going.
- In a social or formal networking situation, joining a conversation can be difficult. How to enter mid-conversation: say, "May I join you?", then listen for key words from the existing conversation and your opportunity to speak.
- How to exit a conversation: say, "Thank you for your (insights, thoughts, direction), I need to move on to another conversation." Offer to shake hands. Ask for a business card.