

Career networking should be an ongoing part of your professional routine. If it is not already, the good news is you can always start! Networking, when done correctly, creates a relationship of mutual support. It is a positive relationship for both parties. When done incorrectly, it leads to one party feeling used and can leave you with a bad name.

When networking, keep a few tips in mind to maintain the positive relationship that you are seeking.

Network with Many People

Too often people limit their options when networking. It is easy to think that the corporate vice president that you know is a much better contact than the office manager. However, all types of people have all types of contacts. You never know who may have some "inside" information. If you discount people simply because of their titles, you do yourself and them a disservice. It is often the person whom you think will not have information who has the inside link to a job opportunity.

Stay in Contact

Even if you land your ideal position, stay in contact with your network members. For one, this demonstrates that you are interested in the relationship, and not simply using them for information when you need it. Secondly, you never know when you may be unexpectedly laid off or facing another unforeseen situation leading to a job search. Finally, this keeps you available to them. You need to provide information and help to your contacts just as you hope they do the same for you.

Be Prepared

When in the midst of a job search or other situation where you need the help of your network, be prepared. Someone may offer assistance, and you need to be able to articulate clearly what you do, what you need, and what you're looking for. Also be sure to keep an updated resume on file for unexpected situations.

Be Courteous

Always treat your network contacts with respect and professionalism. If you know that someone is facing a difficult personal situation, for example, do not call and ask that person for a job lead or inside tip. Also be sure to offer as much help to your contacts as you possibly can. If you do not maintain a mutual relationship, you defeat the purpose of networking. You also give it a bad name, which makes it difficult for others to network.

Follow Up

If you get a job, promotion, or other benefit from a tip from a network contact, be sure to let him or her know! Most people like to know when their help has resulted in a positive outcome. People also like to feel

appreciated, and taking the time to thank your contacts for their information is the polite and respectful thing to do.