

You hear it talked about, you see it advertised, and you know that somehow, networking should play a part in your job search. But what is it exactly and how can it benefit you? Networking is really very simple, though it may take on complex configurations. The basic idea is meeting people, talking to them, and learning from them. As you move through your job search, you may find that there are some fields that do not advertise job openings as often as others. You may find that some people always seem to be in the know. This is where networking comes in.

If you are having trouble finding a job using online searches, newspaper advertisements, or headhunting organizations, you may be overlooking a very important tool. Networking is actually the most frequent means of finding a job. Most people hear about openings through word of mouth rather than a job posting. This means that you have to get out there and talk to people. You have to have a conversation with people who know about your industry and the movement among it. You can't hear word of mouth comments if you are glued to your computer alone.

The first step in networking is developing a list of contacts. You know a lot more people than you think you do. Think of all the folks you have met through school, social functions, and other jobs. You may not have become friends with them all, but if you were given an introduction, you know them. Make a list of your family, friends, and neighbours first and then expand outward from there. Ask them who they know in your industry or who they know that could give you some advice on your job search. They may be able to introduce you to someone new to add to your list.

Contact the people on your list and let them know that you are in the job market, what you are looking for, and that you respect their opinion. See if they can refer you to anyone. You never know who has valuable information about an opening that is not yet advertised.

Also talk to co-workers and other colleagues in your field. See if they have any advice or knowledge of other firms. Check with former bosses and even teachers that you had in school. And of course, talk to people you meet at trade shows, job fairs, and conferences. These people are active in the industry circles and will have access to a wealth of information and contacts.

The important thing about networking is that you continue to expand your list. Keep it organized and set goals for yourself so that you continue to add to it. With an increasing network of contacts, you are sure to make the right one that will lead to the perfect job.