

Networking with your Network

We hear a lot about “networking”, or “working your network” to find a new job or connect with clients. Many of us have contacted our network over the years to keep up with our friends’ career moves and to stay in touch. When we are asked to help someone in our network, we’re glad to do it. Similarly, when we need a boost or assistance, we go to our network for help.

Now that we are facing double digit unemployment and thousands of people are looking for work, counselors and coaches are advising job seekers to attend networking events and “use their network” to find a job.

Many are wondering how to use networking to find work. Use social media techniques like Twitter? Facebook? Use LinkedIn for professional connections? Will this kind of networking land the job?

Well yes and no. Landing a job still happens the way it always has. Someone you know knows someone in the company you’re targeting and introduces you. Without that personal introduction it’s difficult to get your resume in front of the manager who posted the job.

The question is, how can you get to the person who will introduce you to the hiring manager? As the coaches declare, you need to use your network.

How to Use your Network

A former colleague thought that using your network meant calling everyone she knew regardless of past history. When she called me I was surprised. We hadn’t talked or seen each other in many years. When she rattled on about how she was supposed to contact everyone she knew to “network”, I thought, why in the world is she calling me?

Even so, if she had told me what she needed, I might have helped her out. But she never said why she was calling me other than dialing all the names on her list. She clearly did not know how to use her network. The conversation came to a swift close.

What she did is not what we mean by “using your network”.

You can’t use a “network” you don’t have. A network is more than the number of names on your Facebook page. It’s not all the names in your old rolodex or card cases either.

As one career coach notes, “networking is about being genuine..., building trust and relationships. It’s about helping others.”¹

A network is something you build over time based on business and personal associations. The network consists of colleagues with whom you’ve worked on projects either inside companies, in a vendor/client relationship or as a consultant. The network is based on mutual experiences with individuals you respect and trust.

Perhaps the most important ingredient for that “network” is nurturing relationships. People who have a solid network have nurtured relationships over the years by staying in contact.

The former colleague who called me years after we had worked together had not cultivated a relationship. She might have made an effort to restore it when she called me, but even then, she looked to me to solve her problem without offering anything in return.

Giving Something in Return

A sure means to secure a solid “network” is to give something in return. When someone helps you out or does something for you, return the favor. The best networkers do this almost subconsciously. They use reciprocity to further their career goals and remember to help others along the way.

What’s the moral here? The moral is, be a nurturer, build relationships. Reciprocate when someone helps you. Nine times out of 10 you will find that whoever you helped will remember the favor and will be there for you when you ask for their help.

Twitter?

Okay, twitter. Should you use it?

Sure, if that’s how your colleague likes to communicate. Email? LinkedIn? Even a live phone call? All of them? Learn how *they* like to communicate. Use the media of *their* choice.

Networking with your Network

Networking is all about staying in touch with colleagues and lending a hand when they need your help. Remember when you reach out to your network to be clear about what you want. People can only help you if they understand what you need from them.

¹ Stephanie Spiesman, “99 Tips for Successful Business Networking”, www.strategiesforchange.com