

3 Ways to Improve Your Networking

Adapted from Kevin Donlin, Star Tribune

1) Give to Get

“We understand networking intellectually, yet we don’t always do it. When you say ‘networking’ to most people, they think it’s what they do to find a job, but to the most effective networkers, it’s what they do every day,” says Dave Opton, Chairman & Founder of ExecuNet, a networking community for executives.

While many folks dread the thought of approaching others, hat-in-hand, to ask for job leads, this is backwards, according to Opton. “People should not feel as if it’s selfish to network. If you go through your day behaving like the person most of us would like to think we are—happy to help and not looking for something directly in return—the networking goes easily.”

So, what’s the best way to do it? “We have a phrase,” says Opton. “Information is the currency of effective networking.” That means, no matter who you are, you have knowledge or experience that other people don’t. Even your time can be valuable, if you volunteer to help someone with a project. Whatever it is, offer it to others. Then watch your networking efforts take off.

Tip: To network effectively, give first. The job leads will follow.

2) Try the Back Door

With the growth of social networking web sites, it’s never been easier to make contact with people on the inside of companies you want to work for.

And those contacts can give you an “inside” advantage when applying for jobs, according to Doug Berg, Founder and Chief Innovation Officer at Jpbs2Web.com.

One way to research a company is to visit Facebook and LinkedIn to find out who works there, make contact with those people, and ask them about the company and its culture,” says Berg.

About 30% of companies offer referral programs that can pay their employees \$1,000 or more to refer new hires, according to Berg. So, if you can forge a relationship with an employee at your target firm, they might help you get hired by referring you through the back door.

Tip: Try researching companies through Facebook, MySpace, or LinkedIn—you’re likely to find somebody somewhere who can help you. Then, to earn referrals to employers, repeat the process from 1) above: Give first your expertise, knowledge, and time. Success (and job interviews) will follow.

Make Wishes Come True

“Through job postings, online information and network connections, [you should] create a wish list of the companies where you would like to work,” suggests ExecuNet Vice President, Lauryn Franzoni.



Once you have specific employers in mind, your network can lead you to the people you need to meet. “The more you know about a company and the problems they face, the better positioned you are to demonstrate how you can help,” says Franzoni.

Tip: Help others help you. You absolutely need to know which 20 companies you want to work for. With this “wish list” in hand, it’s a simple matter of finding people you know—or, more likely, people they know—at your target companies, and getting referred to a hiring manager there.