

Are You an Active Networker?

by Debra Feldman

In today's economy, it is more prudent than ever to reconnect if you have not been an active networker. You never know when you may need your contacts, and it is better to offer them assistance now before you need help yourself. Here are some ideas for jump-starting your network's development and making more and better connections purposefully.

1. Expand beyond your comfort zone and reach out to those you don't already know. If the individuals you keep in touch with regularly are not producing enough high quality referrals, do not wait for things to change. This is your signal that it is time to stretch your connections.

2. Choose your connections for their affiliations, reputations and position. Prepare an introduction that can be passed along detailing how you can resolve challenges and ask your contact to forward your request for an introduction. Brand yourself clearly as a go-to person so that whenever anyone requests a referral matching your credentials, you are the first person who pops into their mind.

3. Rely on third-party referrals to bypass gatekeepers, increase your credibility and build trust. Research who you want to know and ask your contacts about using their connections to get you introduced. A personal recommendation is usually better received than an unsolicited letter, e-mail or phone call.

4. Talk with decision makers, not HR, at target employers. To unearth unadvertised jobs, position yourself on the right person's radar for when something appropriate becomes available. Making an outstanding first impression not only puts your name in play now, but hiring managers are also networked and can connect you to their colleagues elsewhere.

5. Choose and nurture your target contacts purposefully for their potential value to your job search and your career's future. While you may tend to focus on establishing connections that will yield the new job you need now, any new, well-placed contact is likely to eventually deliver. Even if someone is unhelpful, send a gracious and prompt thank you. You want to maintain an unblemished reputation for being polite and professional. When you have a positive rapport, keep in touch. You made the effort to network purposefully, don't sacrifice your investment after you happily land a new job.



6. Increase your online visibility. It is easier than ever to create a Web presence, support your positioning and get in front of recruiters and hiring managers by publishing your bio on one of the online business networks such as LinkedIn or ZoomInfo. Niche career sites and professional associations' databases are more likely than general job boards to generate interest and new connections you can leverage in the future. Invest in your own professionally designed Web site and let it boast about you. Post your resume on the corporate databases of your target employers.

7. Promote yourself as an expert. Join professional associations, attend local chapter events, and assume a leadership role. Volunteer to present at professional meetings or to be part of a panel discussion or virtual workshop. Publish a white paper on your Web site or elsewhere. Submit an original manuscript to a reputable firm, online or traditional media. Post comments selectively and follow online networking group e-lists, chats, etc. to keep on top of industry happenings, demonstrate your knowledge, and invite inquiries and recognition. Write letters to editors and send comments to authors.

8. Keep in touch and give more help than you ask for. E-mail your contacts to update them on industry news or a mutual colleague's achievement, send them your articles and announcements, share thoughts of common interest or a link, and celebrate special occasions.

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