Networking Basics

Networking is a frequently used, often misunderstood, part of the job search process. What does it mean to network? Perhaps the best way to define networking is to start with what it isn't.

Contrary to popular belief, networking is not calling up every person you know (or don't know, for that matter) and asking them for a job. Nor is networking simply "working a room" in an attempt to collect business cards and make contacts with people who can provide you with something of value. Instead, networking refers to a give and take process of connecting with people and building lasting relationships. It's about meeting new people, sharing information, and learning about potential opportunities and various career fields.

Research shows that as many as 90% of open positions are filled as a result of networking. The contacts you make, if cultivated and used wisely, can lead to future employment. Everyone has a network; it's just a matter of thinking broadly and creatively about who is in it. This includes friends, family, neighbors, teachers/faculty (past or present), employers/coworkers (past or present), members of professional societies, employers who come to campus, alumni, religious affiliations, etc. In addition, the ever-evolving world of social media has opened up countless new ways to network virtually with virtually anyone!

While some people seem naturally more comfortable and adept at approaching strangers, engaging in conversations, and building relationships, many others approach the task of networking with a good amount of uncertainty and apprehension. Keep in mind that networking is a skill, and like most things, can be learned, practiced, and improved over time.

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