

Professional Networking Tips

Written by Avesta Alani

When thinking about the term “networking,” it is first important for us to understand what we mean when we refer to our networks. Your networks are anyone and everyone with whom you associate — this could be family, peers, friends, colleagues, instructors, and others within your community. It is important to understand that your networks can be both in-person and online.

It is important to understand that networking can be both formal and informal. For those who are shy, formal networking is probably the more intimidating of the two. This type of networking means involvement in industry events and gatherings. This may seem daunting, but with some planning can be less stressful – and will certainly prove useful. For example, if you are looking to secure a job in education, you may want to become a member of educational associations. Attend meetings and social events hosted by these groups so that you can connect with people in your field, share stories and uncover job leads.

Keep in touch with former colleagues at all times. Even if it is just to send a quick “hello” or update e-mail, you want to keep those connects and be remembered by former colleagues. After all, if your former network continues to be aware of your career goal and the sorts of positions you are seeking, they will be likely to contact you if they are aware of a lead. Your former colleagues and supervisors will be vital in your job search, as they may be aware of job leads either within their organization or in similar organizations.

You can also find additional networking contacts through various other affiliations such as your alumni association, local volunteering groups and academic and professional conferences. These are all prime locations to reach out to professionals in your field. Another good approach is to connect with your network online. Join networking forums like [LinkedIn](#). These forums are useful platforms for tapping into topics of interest, and companies. There is no harm in contacting someone you do not know through a professional networking site and ask for advice or assistance. If you do, be as specific as possible in your request.

Informal networking is something that you are doing every day without realizing it. These are the associations you develop with family, friends, and neighbours, and at dinner and cocktail parties you attend each week. These relationships can be useful if you are looking for a job. It’s appropriate to tell as many people as possible about your job search goals. In some cases, you will get a tip about a job opening or connect with someone that may be able to lend a hand. Remember, try to focus on the skills you are developing while job searching. For example, rather than saying “I am unemployed” perhaps state, “I am currently seeking work, but I am volunteering with X organization and am developing X skill set.” Focus on how constructively you are using this time in-between jobs. Get in touch with former colleagues or classmates and ask them if they are aware of any job openings, or can connect you with people at companies that are of

interest.

Striking up conversations with people in your daily life can bear fruit when it comes to your job search. It is quite acceptable to mention that you are looking for a job during casual conversations.

People within your network should be dealt with courtesy, even after you've found a job. Send thank you notes to those that provide assistance. Offer your personal help when people in your network reach out to you. Cultivate a helpful reputation that will assist you in finding a job now as well as for future career success.

Networking with a Disability

You may have reviewed the above information and wondered how your specific disability will impact (if at all) your networking experience. If you have questions or concerns regarding how to disclose your disability whilst networking, please see the "[Disclosure and Accommodations](#)" section of the portal for suggestions on how and when to disclose your disability. Whether you elect to disclose your disability on social media is entirely up to you. Some individuals do opt to disclose their disability as a part of their "personal brand" and use a strengths-based approach to disclose online. For more on this approach, please visit the "[Social Media and Personal Branding](#)" section of the portal.

Networking is not that different from interviews, except that you are seeking valuable connections rather than a job. It may be helpful to seek out networks of individuals with and without disabilities in your chosen field; seeking these networks will allow you to cultivate a rich and diverse network.