



# NETWORKING AND POSITIONING YOURSELF TO GET HIRED

By definition, networking is the practice of building and maintaining relationships, especially with others whose friendship could bring advantages such as a new job or professional or business opportunities. The most common networking is conducted through personal encounters and online social media.

More than any other factor, having a strong personal and professional network is often the factor that allows individuals to remain nearly consistently employed and have access to the most desired opportunities.

## Build Your Network Before You Need It

The key to having a network is investing the effort to build one. Start networking today. Build your relationships now. Even if you are not currently looking for a new career opportunity, actively develop your network because if you don't, when the time comes and you are searching for a new job, it's too late. Think long term. Building long-term connections is like savings in a bank—if you stay actively connected, they will be there for you for years to come.

So take the initiative and communicate with your connections. Jump into online forums and discussions; offer your professional insight and expertise. Be engaged and proactive by building your network relationships in advance so when you are ready to make a career move you will have a strong network in place to help you land that new opportunity.

## Personal Networking—the Gold Standard

The strongest, most valuable networking method is one-on-one because it's based on personal communication and relationships between you and others who share an interest in each other and your businesses. These relationships can easily be developed by actively participating in professional activities, especially through professional associations such as APA. Get active in the local and state chapters, and attend meetings regularly. Take on leadership roles and volunteer for committees and other activities. It's good for the organization, but will also bring you into more regular contact with your peers.

Getting to know others and spending time with them is the most valuable networking you can do. In an age when planning projects, organization, and efforts are so team-based, you can never have enough friends. You need to work at developing contacts and relationships.

## Develop Your Pitch

Be prepared to tell those you are meeting for the first time something special about yourself. Consider an abbreviated "elevator pitch" of 30 seconds or less. With a warm smile and firm handshake, introduce yourself, explain your title and role with your firm, and perhaps add a passing comment about the sort of projects you work on; then turn the table and ask questions about them.

Friendship, even in professional settings, is a two-way street. The more genuine interest you show in the other person the greater the odds you will be developing a new friend and colleague. And more than ever these days, the planning field is dependent on communication. To thrive in it, you must work to master the art of conversation.

At every professional gathering, take the initiative and introduce yourself to others. Make a point to meet new people at every meeting and sit with those you don't know so you can make new acquaintances. Exchange business cards, but remember that simply exchanging cards is not networking. After meeting a new person for the first time, follow up in a day or two by sending an e-mail, making a quick phone call, or even extending an invitation for coffee or lunch.

## Nurture Relationships

To establish a strong, thriving network you must nurture it. You must take the initiative to reach out and maintain regular contact. Don't just make professional acquaintances. Make friends. Get interested in others; actively engage them and learn what they do, how they do it, what their plans are, and what they are interested in or what drives them.

If you learn they are looking for something—a new job, assistance on a project, or a resource of some kind—offer them your time, assistance, or a referral. Get involved with their lives. Get to know your connections well enough to be able to share items that would be of interest to them. Squandering your network and resources are not what establishing those connections is all about. Using your network to help others will pay dividends tenfold for you in the future.

And, do what you say you will do. Keep your word and your commitments. Set an example of how you want others to see you and to treat you. Treat everyone with personal attention, dignity, and respect. Be grateful for assistance and referrals given to you, and be sure to personally thank the individual who helped you.

## Social Media Networking

Most of us use LinkedIn, Facebook, and perhaps other social and networking sites. But did you know that companies and recruiters are increasingly using these too? It's part of a growing trend. More firms are reaching out to "passive candidates" through social media, so your online presence is valuable to your future career opportunities and endeavors. The use of "passive talent acquisition" by organizations means building a broad online network is valuable to your career undertakings. LinkedIn is a gold mine for recruiters and candidates alike. Even if you are not currently looking, others are potentially looking at you. So don't neglect your presence online and make sure you're an active participant on LinkedIn.

Reach out and connect with everyone you know professionally, from friends, colleagues, and associates to clients, vendors, suppliers, and others you may have in your list of contacts in your phone and

computer. Pay attention to updates and send congratulatory notes or other messages when it's appropriate.

Go ahead and connect with a former colleague, classmate, or client; these days social media makes such connections commonplace. It's important to your career to maintain a strong network even if it seems a bit awkward. Consider their viewpoint, too. Why wouldn't they want to connect with you again if you could be valuable to their future opportunities? Consider sending them a "get back in touch" message that explains how you came across their profile, what you might still have in common, and provides a bit of information about what you're doing. When they reply with an acceptance, it's a perfect opportunity to suggest getting together or a follow up about your career plans. Keep the dialogue going. Stay in touch and try to be of assistance and of value to them.

Another way to stay connected with others is to share information they might be interested in or enjoy, or comment on a discussion you've seen or an update they have posted. LinkedIn's cofounder calls this doing "small goods," and it's one of the best uses of the site. And don't forget to post your own updates so others can stay connected with you. It may seem that all of this online networking is time-consuming, but it really doesn't take a lot of time and effort to stay connected. Keep in touch a couple of times a year. Reach out and send a note. As long as it touches points that are genuine and sincere you will be maintaining a valuable network of friends. Promotions, new jobs, birthdays, and anniversaries are all natural invitations for doing this "small good." Just be authentic and generous in all of your networking efforts.

It's not about growing the largest list of connections or giving everyone a weekly update on your job search; it's about building and maintaining mutually beneficial, long-term relationships that you and your network genuinely appreciate.

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