

Seven Rules for Networking Success: ORIGINAL

By Barbara Safani
C/o TheLadder.com

Think networking means breaking out the address book and calling everyone you know to beg them for a job? You're not alone. This is why job seekers often associate networking with being pushy, overbearing, and an overall pest. But research shows that 70-80% of all jobs are filled through networking. How can this be so if networkers are such an annoying, self-serving lot? Well, because they aren't!

Successful networkers show a sincere interest in their networking contacts. They're constantly developing relationships, establishing their credibility, and sharing information. They follow the rules of the game where everyone has something to gain. Like the lottery, you have to be in it to win it. Below are seven rules to follow for successful networking.

1. Ask for Information, Not a Job.

Networking is not about asking everyone you know for a job. As a matter of fact, when you network you should never ask someone for a job. Instead, you ask them for information that will help you in your search. Your goal is to build a relationship and establish rapport so that if a potential opportunity becomes available in the future, you'll be the first person they want to refer.

Let's compare two scenarios where you, as a job seeker, attempt to network your way into a new position.

Scenario One

You say, "Joe, I've been out of work for six months, and I'm really strapped for cash. Do you know of any open positions in your department?"

In this approach, you've put Joe in a very difficult position. Sure, he can sympathize with your situation, but he may not be able to offer you a job. Perhaps he's not in a position to refer you, or there's a hiring freeze, or there aren't any openings right now. Whatever the reason -- and he doesn't necessarily have to give you one -- it's bound to be disappointing.

So to redeem himself, Joe says, "I don't know of any open positions, but why don't you give me your resume, and I'll send it to my HR department." Great, right? Wrong. Unless your skills match a specific opening in the company at that point in time, it's bound to never be looked at. Joe will feel that he's done what he can for you, but you'll be no better off.

Scenario Two

You say, "Joe, as you know, I most recently worked for a medical device company in their marketing group. I know that you've been in pharmaceutical sales for the past 15 years, and I'm very interested in learning more about marketing roles within your industry. If you have the chance, I'd love the opportunity to briefly speak with you to learn more about your organization and the pharmaceutical sales industry in general."

Because the pressure is low and expectations are reasonable, most likely Joe won't mind spending a few minutes to share his knowledge with you. Does he know you're looking for a job? Probably, especially if you've been consistently keeping up your relationship over the years. But you're not asking him for a job, just for some advice and insight, so the pressure is off, creating a comfortable environment for you both.

2. Be Considerate of Other's Time.

Any time you have a networking meeting, be sure to have an agenda written up before hand and stick to it. It's hard to ask someone to cram yet another meeting into their already jam packed day, so promise a specific time and don't go over it, even if you haven't covered everything you wanted to.

Contrast these two meeting situations:

Scenario One

You met with Mary after a mutual friend agreed to set up a brief, 20-minute meeting between the two of you. You were busy at work this day and neglected to prepare for the meeting, so you ended up rambling and got off topic. Before you know it, an hour had passed.

You've abused Mary's time and you haven't gotten to the critical questions you'd hoped to ask during the meeting, so you've ended up wasting your own time as well. Unfortunately, you may have ruined this networking contact for good.

Scenario Two

You walk into the meeting with a prepared mental agenda that includes:

- A reminder of who referred you and perhaps some brief talking points about that mutual acquaintance.
- A planned statement that you're not asking Mary to offer you a position and a reiteration of why Mary's information is of interest to you.
- An explanation of your agenda and what you'd hope to accomplish like hearing Mary's perspective on the future of your industry. Remember to discuss your skills and accomplishments and show how you can add value to an organization.

When you plan out your meeting ahead of time, you establish your professionalism, gain credibility, and cover all critical agenda items. A successful encounter for you both - hopefully the first of many!

3. Listen First. Then, Ask Questions.

Now that you've successfully landed the meeting, it's time to listen and learn. Since you're asking another person for advice, make sure they have the opportunity to offer it rather than you dominating the entire conversation. To keep the conversation going and to follow your meeting agenda, have a list of strong, open-ended questions prepared.

Here are some sample questions you might ask to keep your exchange balanced and to establish rapport.

- How long have you been with this company/field, and how have you seen it change throughout the years?
- What do you like/dislike about your job?
- What type of training do you need for positions such as yours?
- What is the culture of this company and what are its guiding principles?

4. Expand Your Network.

The main goal of networking? To network! Think about it, each person you meet knows 200 or more people. If you can gain contact or introductions to some of them, you quickly increase your own network and therefore your chances of finding the right connection, which is what networking is all about!

Each time you meet with someone, it's vital that you ask if he or she can recommend a professional organization or the names of some other people you should be talking to. If you say you're going to follow up, do so promptly. There's no faster way to burn a bridge than to abuse someone else's connections.

5. Follow up.

The key to becoming a great networker is simple: establish a relationship. So, ask the person you're meeting with if you may keep them informed of your search progress. Then, find ways to follow up. For example, if you read an article that pertains to a discussion you had at a networking meeting cut it out and send it to them with a brief note. Try to find at least two to three opportunities per year to reconnect with members of your network.

6. Reciprocate.

Building a network is about creating genuine, caring relationships. Most of the time, politeness and courtesy are all it takes. Thank your contact for meeting with you and mention the specific information they've shared. Then, ask if you can help them in some way.

Maybe your contact is interested in living in an area that you are familiar with. Or maybe he or she has a child interested in attending the same school you graduated from. Share your knowledge! Keep notes on what you learn about your contacts so that future correspondence can have a personalized touch like "How was Jane's first year of school?"

7. Send a Thank You Letter.

Always, always, always thank your contacts in person and also follow up with a letter. If your handwriting is legible, the personalized touch of a handwritten note is always appreciated, though an email works just as well.

Remember, networking is an ongoing process. It requires persistence, attention, and organization. Incorporate the art of networking into your job search campaign now and you'll be surprised by the opportunities and life-long relationships you'll gain.

Barbara Safani, owner of Career Solvers, has over ten years of experience in career management, recruiting, executive coaching, and organizational development. She is a triple certified resume writer and frequent contributor to numerous career-related publications.

Seven Rules for Networking Success: REVISED

By Barbara Safani
C/o TheLadder.com

Revised by Rebecca St. Martin (WebSitesThatFly.com for Business Owners & Sales Professionals. Changes in Red).

Successful networkers show a **sincere interest** in their networking contacts. They're constantly **developing relationships**, establishing their **credibility**, and **sharing** information. They follow the rules of the game where everyone has something to gain. Like the lottery, you have to be in it to win it. Below are seven rules to follow for successful networking.

1. Ask for Information, Not a Sale.

Networking is not about asking everyone you know for a **sale**. As a matter of fact, when you network you should never ask someone **for anything (unless you've been invited or are in a formal networking environment that encourages this.)**. Instead, you ask them for information that will help you in your search. Your goal is to build a relationship and establish rapport so that if a potential lead becomes available in the future, you'll be the first person they want to refer.

Let's compare two scenarios where you, **in a sales role**, attempt to network your way into a **sale**.

Scenario One

You say, "Joe, I've been **dead in the water** for six months, and I'm really strapped for cash. **Do you need [insert your offering here]?**"

In this approach, you've put Joe in a very difficult position. Sure, he can sympathize with your situation, but he may not be able **to buy what you have to offer**. Perhaps he's not even in a position to refer you, or there's a freeze **on bringing in additional or new vendors / consultants**, or **he doesn't see any opportunities for you** right now. Whatever the reason -- and he doesn't necessarily have to give you one -- it's bound to be disappointing.

So to redeem himself, Joe says, "I'm afraid **I don't need [your offering]**, but why don't you give me your **card / brochure**, and **I'll keep it on file**."

Great, right? Wrong. Unless your offering matches a specific **opportunity** at that point in time, it's bound to never be looked at **again**. Joe will feel that he's done what he can for you, but you'll be no better off.

Scenario Two

You say, "Joe, as you know, I most recently **sold [my offering]** to a medical device company in their marketing group. I know that you've been in pharmaceutical sales for the past 15 years, and I'm very interested in learning more about marketing roles within your industry. If you have the chance, I'd love the opportunity to briefly speak with you to learn more about **you / your organization** and the pharmaceutical sales industry in general."

Because the pressure is low and expectations are reasonable, most likely Joe won't mind spending a few minutes to share his knowledge with you. Does he know you're looking for a **sale**? Probably, especially if you've been consistently keeping up your relationship over the years. But you're not asking him for a **sale – or even a lead**, just for some advice and insight, so the pressure is off, creating a comfortable environment for you both.

2. Be Considerate of Other's Time.

Any time you have a networking meeting, be sure to have an agenda written up before hand and stick to it. It's hard to ask someone to cram yet another meeting into their already jam packed day, so promise a specific time and don't go over it, even if you haven't covered everything you wanted to.

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Scenario Two

You walk into the meeting with a prepared mental agenda that includes:

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- How long have you been with this company/field, and how have you seen it change throughout the years?
- What do you like/dislike about your **work**?
- What type of **background** / training do you need for positions such as yours?
- What is the culture of **the business** and what are its guiding principles?

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