

Networking Your Way to Success

By Elizabeth Davis, The Clarity Group, 2007

For many job seekers looking to secure that next career step, networking can be a useful activity. It accesses a large part of the job market – the hidden job market – which it is estimated to represent up to 80% of available job opportunities at any given time. Networking can put you at the right place at the right time. It is also a useful means of gaining information and insight to help in your career decision making or to research a particular field to give you the edge on the competition at the job interview stage.

The value of networking was highlighted in a recent career coaching session. After enjoying a long and successful career in film production, this client had decided it was time to embrace a career change and was looking towards entering the Human Resources field. While having managed people on numerous projects, he was aware that he needed to gain broader experience in this field in order to be competitive in the job market. We discussed the value of networking to get that initial “foot in the door” in his new career while working towards finalising his tertiary qualifications. Networking was well suited to this client’s strong interpersonal skills. Together we explored the following guidelines:

- Remember: Networking is a proactive process and involves self promotion.
- Plan ahead. Think about your objectives, how to achieve them and a realistic timeframe.
- Write a Networking list. You may be surprised to find there are a number of people who you can contact. This may include business colleagues, acquaintances, members of associations, family and friends.
- Be organised – track the companies contacted and people spoken to. Keep information about dates, contact details and actions.
- Prepare by developing a short and concise summary which aims to articulate the job and career you are seeking. To enable people to help you they need to be clear about what you are after. Aim to impress – you are promoting an important product – you! This rehearsed summary is useful when making contact over the phone or when asked to “tell me about yourself”.
- Networking works due to the fact the people know people, who know people. Don’t be discouraged if you do not get instant results. It will require the investment of a considerable amount of time but it should form an integral part of your long term career strategy.
- When you are successful in securing a meeting with someone – prepare before hand. The objective is to gather information so think about the questions you want to ask. Be prepared to talk about your skills which are relevant. This is also an opportunity to present you as a solution to businesses needs.
- Never directly ask for a job. You are asking for help, not a commitment.
- Treat every potential employer with courtesy. Even if they cannot offer you a job, they may refer you to someone who can.

We also discussed the value of volunteer work as a means to moving into a new career path. If you have the time to make an ongoing commitment, volunteering your services to not for profit organisation can be a useful networking exercise while providing the opportunity to gain experience, skills and knowledge. For volunteering to really add value to your career you need to put some thought into this venture before hand. Consider the values of the organisation – are they consistent with your own? What experience and skills do you would wish to develop – can the organisation accommodate this? If you wish to gain customer service experience, you will add little value to your career goals if you are in a back office role.

Be clear about what value you can offer the organisation as well as what experience you wish to receive so that expectations are met for all concerned. While gaining relevant experience towards your career goals, you may discover further networking opportunities.

Implementing some of these guidelines proved beneficial to my client. After volunteering and developing his networks he was successful in securing a contract within his chosen area.