

Employment and Career Matters - Neelam Thapar

In this article, I have looked at using networking for your career development.

WHAT IS NETWORKING

Networking is all about making contacts that may be able to help you as well as you being able to help them. All of us have already got informal networks that we call upon all the time in everyday life but may not have thought about how they can be used for career development or indeed how to create new networks.

Over 70% of recruitment vacancies are never advertised yet get filled - it is important to know how to create your own vacancies and for that you need to be able to network. You may also want to start working in an area that you do not have experience in - for this you need to know about the profession/industry before you start making any applications. Networking is asking for information and advice and allowing others to help you achieve your goals. Its **not** about telling people to give you a job but about creating knowledge for yourself to make informed choices and then targeted applications. People do not necessarily mind giving you half an hour of their time to give you the benefit of their experience.

Networking can be done at any age - whether you are still at school, college, University, starting out your career, in the middle of it or even coming to the end of it.

HOW DO YOU NETWORK

You need to think about what information you are looking to gain and then think about who you can ask. It is important that you develop a list of questions that you can ask them so that you do not feel awkward when contacting them. You may also want to have a CV handy, just in case!

You need to draw up a list of people you know. These could include friends, family, teachers/tutors if still in education, former/present colleagues, people you meet through everyday activities, people in your community. Think of what you are hoping to learn about. Each one of the people you know will also have their own contacts that they may not mind putting you in touch with.

REMEMBER WE ALL HAVE NETWORKS TO TAP INTO

Collect business cards of people especially if you go to conferences or exhibitions. You never know when they may be useful. Go through your long list and think who could possibly help you - keep the initial network list of people you will contact small as it becomes more manageable.

Initially, a good way of making contact to arrange a meeting is through telephone, letter or email. You may find that people may be busy but be quite happy to advise you over email, rather than meeting you face to face. Tell the "network contact" the name of the person who has recommended that you speak to them and at this stage give a little information about yourself and how the "network contact" could help you.

Even at this stage you want to create a good impression - you never know how this person could help you. If they are unable to help, ask them if they know anyone else that may be able to give you more information. Keep in contact with your networks.

Keep a detailed record of who you have talked to and what was said. Record what action you need to take next so that you can build up a plan to work towards. Help others as well as getting information for yourself. You will have lots of skills and experience that may be useful for someone else.

WHAT QUESTIONS CAN YOU ASK YOUR CONTACTS?

These are some examples of some questions that you could select from to ask someone:

About their Work Role:

- Please can you describe a typical working day
- What are your main responsibilities ?
- What skills are needed for your job/in the industry ?
- What do you enjoy the most/least ?
- Has it met your expectations ?

Getting in:

- How did you get in ?
- What do you think recruiters are looking for ?
- What would you recommend as a useful stepping stone eg voluntary work ?
- What do you think are the barriers to overcome? How did you do that ?
- Would you be able to look at my CV and give me the benefit of your opinion ?

About the Organisation:

- How is the job changing ?
- What kind of jobs do people move to ?
- What are the key factors in progressing with the organisation ?



Other questions:

- Can you suggest other people I should be talking to ?
- Can you suggest courses that would be useful ?
- Are there specialist publications I should be looking at?

Send a thank you letter to your contact after you have spoken - create that good impression. Remember people may not be able to help and you should not take that personally but instead think of other people that you could contact.