

Networking Mistakes

Networking is the preferred way of building professional relationships for mutually sharing information and ideas with contemporaries in your field, building mentor-mentee relationships, cultivating business prospects, and uncovering career opportunities. Networking is extremely powerful, but in their anxiousness to get leads, job hunters often misuse the paradigm of networking, and as a result fail to realize the benefits of this relationship tool at a critical time in their career.

Aside from the commonly-known mistakes like not asking for business cards so you are sure to get the correct spelling of the person's name and title, there are other mistakes that job hunters often make when using this powerful relationship-building tool.

Failing to Reciprocate

Probably one of the biggest mistakes is that they overlook one key word in the definition - "mutual." Job hunters become so obsessed in walking away with leads on possible employment opportunities and additional contacts that they often do one-way networking. Approaching a networking session strictly with the expectation of "getting" without "giving" limits the value that you can gain from the exchange, and in many cases you will walk away with no value.

Offering something in return is not only fundamental to networking, it stimulates the conversation: *"I met with Richard Syron last week and he told me that Freddie Mac will continue to buy riskier mortgage loans for the next few years. Do you think this might create additional risk management opportunities at Freddie Mac if they go ahead with these loan acquisitions?"*

You've now given them information and asked for their opinion in such a way that you steered the direction of the conversation into one of job opportunities.

Neglecting to Keep Your Network Warm

Job hunters are notorious for reaching out to old acquaintances, but pressing elapsed relationships is often met with the attitude, *"Oh, I haven't heard from you in five years and now you need me."*

Not only does this come across as self-seeking, but even if these old acquaintances wanted to help you, how do you expect them to do so when you haven't bothered to keep them abreast of what you have been doing? Depending on how long it's been, they may remember you as a junior loan analyst when in fact you have been running the mortgage department at a local bank for the past five years.

Name Dropping

Name dropping can be perceived as pompous so use care with names that you allude to during your conversation. Everyone has met senior-level people in their field at one time or another, but bragging about all the important people you know during your networking meeting can win you the label of Mr. Arrogant. *"So Mr. High and Mighty, if you are so close with these big shots, why do you need me?"*

Scheduling a Meeting the Moment You Become Acquainted

Whether you met someone at an event or your friend introduced you to a buddy on the train, resist pulling out your Blackberry and asking for a meeting. Engage in conversation and as you are parting, get their business card and ask for permission to call them to set up an appointment to continue the dialogue.

Asking for a Job

Networkers know you are job hunting, but coming right out and asking for a job or asking for names of people they know who might have a job opportunity will shut down the conversation immediately. *“I’m a desktop application trainer. Do you have a job for me?” “No.” Meeting over.*

You are there to get information, contacts, and advice so approach the conversation from that angle - *“I help companies train employees in the use of desktop applications to increase productivity and reduce dependence on costly outside training services. Just a few months ago I trained over 100 employees at the Smith Corporation and saved them \$50,000 in outside training expense. Who do you know that can benefit from having improved desktop skills or spends a lot of money on outside vendors for this type of training?”*

This approach invites conversation; asking for a job directly does not.

Being Critical of a Former Employer

No matter what you think of your former employers, never openly criticize them; you will be viewed as petty and unprofessional. Plus, it is a small world. Your networking connection may have ties to your former employers and may find your remarks offensive.

Hounding

People network all the time, but understand that these same people have jobs to do, families to go home to, friends to meet with, hobbies to enjoy, and a whole lot of other demands on their time. Time passes slowly for the job hunter; understandably you want to meet with your network “yesterday,” but they have other priorities. This is especially true for newly-made networking connections and elapsed relationships. They will meet with you, but your priority is not their priority. Be too pushy, and you risk losing the network connection.

Not Respecting Their Time

Start preparing the moment you decide to ask this person for a meeting. Know what you are going to say and ask. If the meeting is over a meal, you know you will have at least an hour, but you may not be able to predict how long you will have for meetings in their office or over the phone.

Also practice your parting remarks ahead of time. When your network connection says things like, *“Well, it’s been nice chatting with you,”* or *“If I think of something else, I will call you,”* that’s an indication that the meeting is over. Don’t overstay your welcome; respect their decision to end the conversation and reply with words like, *“Thank you. Will it be okay if I give you a call in two weeks just to follow up and also to let you know what I have learned from others?”*

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