

Career Resources

Making most of your networks

Friends, family, former colleagues – you never know who will have a job lead
Job search networking is about making connections with people who can either give you information about potential job openings, or introduce you to others who have this information.

Networking should not be limited to casual conversations with people you meet. It should be an active and strategic campaign to contact people for ideas, suggestions and information.

Don't be afraid to ask for help. People are usually happy and flattered to help others if they can.

You have nothing to lose by phoning or meeting with your contacts. If you don't make the connection, you won't know if there is good information or a job lead. If you do speak with them, you may be successful. At the very worst you'll feel a bit uncomfortable. But being prepared will make the discussions easier.

Use your existing network

Talk to everyone you know, including people such as:

- family
- friends
- neighbours
- acquaintances
- previous employers and colleagues
- people you play sport with
- local business people
- the family solicitor or accountant.

It doesn't matter if you don't know many people. The people that you know might know other people who might know of a job opening. They don't need to be friends or even acquaintances, you just need to have a common link with them to help start a conversation.

If you can pick up the phone and call them for any reason, they are potential networking contacts.

How to find new contacts

- Think laterally about where to find network contacts. You can find people to add to your network almost anywhere.
- Get involved with a civic, social, religious or sporting organisation. As you meet new people in the organisation you can network with them.
- Join a professional organisation related to your field. The meetings or other events are good opportunities for you to network.

- Consider conducting employers directly and setting up interviews, as this is a very effective technique in networking. You can get more information about the type of company you want to work for, and may also get job leads.

What to tell your contacts

- Tell them you're looking for work or interested in exploring new job opportunities.
- Prepare a brief statement about what you're looking for and the kind of help you'd like.
- Describe the position you are seeking and give a brief review of your background, qualifications or companies that interest you.
- Be specific about what you're after. For example, say "I'm looking for a role in training and development within the public sector or a not-for-profit organisation".
- If they don't know of any jobs at the moment, ask them to keep you in mind. Most importantly, ask them if they know two or three other people you can contact.
- Follow up with your contacts. Often people will tell you "I'll see what I can do/find out" and leave it at that. Ring them back to find out how they got on (which might remind them to do it).
- Follow up leads. After your initial networking efforts and research you will probably have a long list of new connections. You may need to meet with them in person to introduce yourself and get more information or job leads.

Tips for making new contacts and maintaining your network

- Whenever you meet someone new, exchange business cards, or at least get one from your new contact, so you can send them your details.
- Be prepared. You never know when you may run into someone who knows someone with a job vacancy. Always project a positive attitude and have pen, paper or business cards on hand.
- Record and organise your network contacts. You can use a spreadsheet, index cards or a job leads form. Write down the results of meetings and any follow-up needed. This will help you organise your time and monitor your progress.
- Show your appreciation for the help you receive by sending thank you notes or by telling contacts the results of information they gave you.

Keep networking even after you've found a job. You never know when you might need your network contacts again.