

February 1st, 2010 - Networking

Have you ever heard of the phrase, "It's not what you know, it's who you know," while searching for a job? While this may not always be the case, it does hold some truth. Networking can be defined as the ability to make and maintain meaningful connections and relationships with others. Why is this important? Finding a job is more competitive than ever. So, when you submit your resume and it contains similar skill sets as the other applicants, knowing someone in that organization can be a big plus.

There are different types of networks, ranging from online social networking to face-to-face networking at career fairs. On the internet, there are a variety of popular social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as professional networks, like LinkedIn. These are great tools for connecting and keeping in touch with others around you. However, as technology and science give us more ways to reach out and communicate with others electronically (i.e. e-mail, text messages, chain letter e-mails, etc.), our opportunities for exchanging words with each other face to face become less and less. Although it seems that *everything* in our society is riding the technological wave, do not underestimate the value of networking in person. These impressions, socially and professionally, can last a lifetime.

Now that we've given you the breakdown on the types and importance of networking, you may be wondering where to start. Keep in mind that everyone you know knows somebody else. Although it is a good place to begin, professional networks don't have to start in the workplace. Join a professional association (or two) in fields of interest to you and attend their meetings/lunches. Not only will you learn a great deal about what is going on in that field now, you will have the opportunity to talk to others already working in that type of business. Internships are another great way to connect with others even if the internship is unpaid. Volunteer opportunities can expose you to more people as well. Don't forget your professors and colleagues in school. Other good places to begin are at events such as conventions or career fairs. Even if you're not a "people person", step outside of your comfort zone and make a new contact. The result can be very rewarding.

Established networks are no good if they are not maintained. As with most things in life, your network will suffer if you neglect it. Take a few minutes here and there to give your contacts a call or send a quick e-mail. Did you read something in the news or hear about something that may be of interest to one of your contacts? Let them know! Has someone done something for you that you were grateful for which made you want to return the favor? Your concern for others can score huge points. I know this sounds like a lot of work and is bad news for those who want a quick networking solution, but these require your attention and effort in order to sustain a strong connection. It is a good strategy to keep others in the loop. Just keep in mind that your hard work and consideration will pay off in the end.

Good connections are a win-win situation for you and everyone in your network. We'll leave you with one final, popular saying, "Don't burn your bridges." Make a meaningful impression on everyone you meet and don't forget to keep in touch. Good luck!