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the connection that counts

“What exactly is networking and when should I start?” If you’ve ever asked yourself this question, read through the following information carefully. At Kelly®, we’ve spent nearly 60 years working closely with employers *and* employees, watching the networking trends rise and fall. Remember, whatever networking means to you, it will be a very important component during every stage of your career.

Some would argue that networking involves joining every professional association in the area. Or is nothing more than an occasional cup of coffee with a friend. Some say that your network should be built during a job change. Still others would argue that it must be built over the life span of your entire career.

The most important question to ask yourself about networking is “which style of networking will achieve my career objectives?” If you had the choice to be actively involved in a few major industry associations or to have one lunch with the president of a *Fortune 500* firm, which would you choose?

WHAT IS A PROFESSIONAL CAREER NETWORK?

For those who believe networking isn’t a worthwhile activity, here’s a telling fact. A Wall Street Journal article a few years ago reported that 94% of successful job seekers credited their professional network as helping secure the right career opportunity.

STARTING YOUR PROFESSIONAL NETWORK

Many times, these contacts are the best places to start:

Professional

- bosses
- customers
- associations
- peers
- consultants
- competitors
- subordinates
- vendors
- peers in other companies
- co-workers
- recruiters
- former co-workers

Personal

- former teachers/professors
- attorneys
- clubs/associations
- bankers
- accountants
- politicians
- stockbrokers
- classmates
- relatives
- realtors
- dentists/doctors
- clergy

FOLLOW THE RULES OF EFFECTIVE NETWORKING

Always be prepared

The opportunity can arise any time or any place. Always carry business cards and learn important names. You may be casually speaking to someone who mentions the name of a significant business friend. Recognizing the name of the friend and what it could mean to your career creates the possibility to ask for an introduction.

Have a plan of action

Time is valuable, so don’t waste your professional and personal contacts’ time. If you are serious about a career change, let your contacts know your intentions. Telling them you are thinking about a change won’t give them the motivation to introduce you to a friend if they don’t feel you are serious enough.

Don’t limit your contacts

Once you are comfortable speaking with those closer to you, be bold and speak to contacts you don’t yet know. For every person you contact, ask for a minimum of two additional referrals.

Be genuine

Beginning every conversation by mentioning who referred you to them will put your contacts at ease. Take interest in their backgrounds and what they have to tell you. Rushing through the conversation to just get what you’re looking for will be easily identifiable and lessen their willingness to help you.

career networking

Ask for information—not a job

The purpose of your call should explain what you are attempting to do and ask for their best advice on who to talk to and how. If your contact brings up any job opportunities then that’s great, but the purpose of your call should not be to ask for a job.

Focus your conversations on career goals

Have a 60-second sound bite prepared on your career objectives, your major strengths and accomplishments and then quickly ask for input and advice.

Reciprocate

For example, you might be directed to a college professor who consults for companies in your target industry. Having told this professor a little about yourself, he or she may want you to share the latest industry trends with college students. If asked for help, make the time to do so even before the professor helps you.

Follow-up

On many occasions, those seeking career advice decide not to act upon it. Remember that the responsibility is always on you to follow-up on leads. One of the biggest mistakes people make is to neglect sending a thank-you note to contacts after landing a new job. Sending a brief note is not only the professional thing to do but may help you in your new position down the road.

SHARPEN YOUR TELEMARKETING SKILLS

Professional networking usually begins with a phone call, and your phone skills will often determine whether a face-to-face meeting will be arranged. You must understand that you are selling yourself and your capabilities. How you are perceived verbally will be the primary reason you “make the sale” and jumpstart your career!

TO PREPARE FOR NETWORKING:

- Establish the call objective before dialing.
- Develop a script of what you want to say.
- Role-play your call with a friend.
- Research, research, research—know your contact’s background and that of the company he or she works for.
- Always mention the name of the person referring you to the contact.
- Always make sure your contact has time to talk.
- Use a conversational, professional tone. Professional telemarketers are trained to mimic the speed, tone and inflections of those they speak with.
- Be prepared to answer career questions.
- Be enthusiastic. If you’re not excited about your career change, why should your contact be?
- Be persistent. Telemarketers rarely connect on the first few calls so keep trying.
- Follow up. If your contact asks you for something, always follow through and send a thank-you note.