

-Chapter 6: Networking-

“It’s not what you know. It’s who you know”

-Unknown

For many, networking is an unfamiliar or scary concept. Many students or job applicants don’t understand how to use the people they know to increase their chances of an interview. Most research shows that only a fraction of people intuitively know how to network.¹

So, I will start at the beginning for networking. Basically, a network is a group of personal and professional contacts. Networking is the deliberate process of exchanging information, resources, support and access in such a way as to create a mutually beneficial relationship for personal and professional success.² Most people shy away from networking because they think that it means they have to be extremely outgoing or they have to go do something to make this happen. Basically, good networking should be happening all the time. Making good connections with people you know – teachers, co-workers, classmates, supervisors, subordinates, interns, etc.

To keep it simple, ask yourself some questions about who you know.

Start with family, friends and neighbors. Then...

- Who do you know from school? (Current and previous)
- What teachers do you know?
- What people have you served on committees or in clubs with?
- Who was on your athletic team?
- Who have you worked with in internships?
- Who are members of service or professional organizations?
- Who has been your supervisor?
- Who have you supervised?
- Who have you been in class with?
- Who have you worked on a project with?
- Who do you know well enough to advocate on your behalf for a job or internship?

¹ Anne Baber and Lynne Waymon. *Make Your Contacts Count, 2nd Edition*. (New York: American Management Association, 2007), 17.

² Ibid.

Ah... technology. It truly is magical. LinkedIn, Google+, and other professional networking sites are a tremendous asset to you. You should use them regularly. These sites make it VERY easy to create, track and communicate with your network on a regular basis. You will even get prompts of people you may know. Technology is cheap and effective. Use it.

Events are a good way to add connections to your network. If you're not naturally outgoing, then I suggest, again, that you learn to get out of your comfort zone. Not everyone is naturally outgoing and wants to interact with other people at networking events, but sometimes it takes getting out of your comfort zone to get to know people who may help you in your career.

Networking Tips

There are a few keys to expanding your network successfully. You can have 500+ connections via LinkedIn, but if they don't know you and can't vouch for you, then you haven't really built a true network. You just have a bunch of people who see what you post on LinkedIn.

Tip 1: Be recommendable: As with everything, start with yourself. The people who find it easy to build a network aren't necessarily those that are the most outgoing, but those that connect with others. You have to first be the kind of person another person would recommend or the kind of person another person is willing to connect with a hiring manager. And you do that every day. You've probably heard the mantra "always be interviewing". Well, you should also "always be networking". If you make genuine connections with people and are the kind of person (trustworthy, hard worker, mature, professional, etc.) that others are willing to attach their name to – that's how you become recommendable.

Tip 2: Reach out to your network. It's an accepted practice to reach out to your network and ask for help. It's also acceptable to reach out to people that you might know in a marginal way if you have decent connections between you. But as you reach out, you must be professional. Don't just ask for the favor of a recommendation or introduction to a hiring professional. Make a connection first. Show them who you are and why they should take the time to help you out. Be professional. Following are some examples.

Example A:

Dear Professor:

I hear you used to work for a hockey team. I love hockey and really want to work for a hockey team. I am a friend of Bob Smith, who is a student in your class. I have attached my résumé. Please forward this to anyone you know in hockey. I really appreciate your help.

Thanks,
Mark Adams

This example is wrong on so many levels, but it is a sample of what I've seen and is similar to what other professionals receive. I have no real connection to the person, I don't know anything about their qualifications or work ethic, and I don't know why I should take the time to extend my business reputation for this person.

You need to make a real connection with your network, not just use it as a forwarding service for jobs.

Example B:

Dear Professor:

My name is Mark Adams. I am a good friend and ex-teammate of Bob Smith, a student in your class. I am a senior in College at XYZ University and will be graduating cum laude with a double major in Business and Sport Management. I've had two internships with sports teams doing a variety of jobs from ticket sales to game operations. I've worked really hard to maintain a high GPA and have gained some valuable experience from the internships I've had.

I understand that you used to work for a professional sports team and Bob said you have been able to help him as he applies for jobs in the sports industry. I have attached my résumé and would appreciate any feedback you might be able to give me as I apply for a job in the sport industry.

Thank you so much for your time.

Sincerely,

Mark Adams

Two key elements in the second example are: professional tone and content. It is written in a business-like manner and gives the reader some idea of why they should care (friend of someone they know) and that they are qualified for the positions they are seeking (GPA, experience). It doesn't assume the reader is going to jump at the chance of helping him out. It simply asks for some advice.

Example C: (A good example for when you are reaching out to someone you don't know or someone you marginally know)

Dear Mr. Mister:

My name is Mark Adams and I am a senior in College at XYZ University and will be graduating with a degree in Sport Management in May. I've had two internships with minor league sports teams, doing a variety of jobs from ticket sales to game operations. I've worked really hard to prepare my self for a career in the sport industry, but would be grateful for some advice from someone who has made a successful career in sports.

I really appreciate you taking the time to read this email and I am hopeful that you might be able to find a few minutes in the coming weeks for a quick call where I could ask you for some advice on where I'm headed after graduation. I'm glad to make whatever time work, if you just let me know what you might have available. I'll be glad to give you a call.

Thank you,

Mark Adams

One way to increase your chances at an interview is to use your network. Keep in mind that a person who applies for a job and has a

network connection to the company, human resources department or hiring manager has a much better shot at getting an interview than someone whose résumé is sitting in a stack (or virtual stack) of résumés. The best way to explain it is as follows. A recruiter or hiring manager typically has two piles of résumés, referred résumés and unknown applicants. If the referred résumé stack has 10 résumés in it, that stack will likely stay at 10 or close to that as the hiring manager goes through the applicant review process. However, the unknown pile that is maybe 100 résumés will be whittled down to 10-25, depending on the position. When a hiring manager hears from someone that they know and respect that an applicant is worth looking at, the hiring manager usually looks at them.

In Sports, more than any other industry, networking is key. In sports, people move from company to company or team to team on a regular basis, and it isn't frowned upon, generally. It's fairly standard. It's the odd situation that a person is with an organization for a lengthy period of time. "Why?" you ask. Well, in order to move up in sports, you often have to move out. Many teams, athletic departments, leagues and conferences have small departments and therefore when a person has been in a certain role for a certain period of time, they need to look out in order to move up. It's just the nature of the business and the structure of the team or athletic department. If a person wants to be an Athletic Director, they might take the path like this: Event Coordinator for ABC University Athletic Department (3 years), Ticket Office Manager XYZ University Athletic Department (2 years), Assistant Athletic Director at LMNO University Athletic Department (5 years) and Athletic Director DEF University Athletic Department. This is a pretty typical path. So, that person who has over ten years of experience will know people at four different universities and has several connections at each.

As I stated in the previous chapter, you have a much higher chance of landing an interview if someone knows someone who can vouch for you. Use your network contacts. It isn't a foreign practice; people do it all the time. Employers expect it and often welcome it. I know that I had a go-to executive for referrals. If he sent someone to us for an open position, I knew that the applicant would be professional, mature and would be well worth our time. I loved to get referrals from the executive because I knew it meant a solid candidate for the job. Good referrals make the recruiting process a lot easier on the hiring committee. When people have so many other responsibilities and things

to do, that is a welcome thing. Your goal should be to be the one being referred by the well-respected executive or manager who can help make a difference in your application process.

So, we started this chapter with the quote: “it’s not what you know but who you know.” **In sports, it’s what you know AND who you know.** You have to have basic education, experience and skills and be the right fit for the job. And it helps to have a great network.

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