



Education Guide Number **7**

Networking

Commonly Asked Questions about Networking

Most of us have heard the term “networking.” Many of us, however, don’t really know what it means or how to do it. We often hear the phrase, “It’s not what you know, it’s who you know,” suggesting the importance of knowing people who are in a position to help you in your job search. Although you may think you don’t know such people, you might be surprised how many people you do know (or could get to know) who would be willing to help.

People often ask:

- What is networking?
- Why should I network?
- What can I learn by networking?
- How do I network within the Civil Service system?
- How do I get started?
- Who should I talk to?
- What do I say when I get there?
- How do I follow up?

This guide will help you answer these and other questions you may have about networking.

What is Networking?

In its most simple terms, networking is talking to people to get information that you need. It’s something we all do on a regular basis and which we usually feel comfortable doing. For example, you might ask a friend to recommend a good mechanic when your car needs repair. You might call somebody at the Department of Motor Vehicles when you have questions about renewing your driver’s license. Both are examples of networking.

In the context of seeking employment, networking simply means talking to people who are likely to have information helpful to your job search. In addition to talking to them, you also want to build a relationship which will allow you to contact them in the future for additional information. As in any relationship, you might find that you also have information useful to them. Lasting relationships are built on this type of two-way exchange. In the process, you get to meet new people and expand your circle of contacts.

Why Should I Network?

Most of us will want or need to make a job change at some time during our careers. There are four basic job search strategies for learning about job openings and landing a new position:

- Networking
- Classified advertisements (newspapers, professional publications, Internet employment listings)
- Employment agencies and executive recruiters (including the NYS Job Services, www.statejobsny.com)
- Direct contact with potential employers (Civil Service www.cs.ny.gov apprenticeships, etc.).

A comprehensive job search should include all four strategies. Networking, however, tends to provide the most information and is used effectively by the most successful job seekers. One U.S. Department of Labor study covering 10.4 million workers who had found jobs reported that over 63% had found those jobs by networking. During a job search, you can gain a wide variety of information about jobs, job leads, and organizations through networking.

What Can I Learn By Networking?

Whether your goal is to change jobs within the Civil Service system, or to make an educational decision for the purpose of career change or advancement, you can obtain a wide variety of useful information from networking. This includes job leads, position descriptions, wage and salary information, and other information about the agencies, departments, or companies where you may be interested in working. If you are networking to gain information on which to base a decision about your education, you can learn about schools, programs of study, and the demand for particular degrees, certificates, or skills.

How Do I Network Within the Civil Service System?

If you are interested in making a job or career change, opportunities often exist within the Civil Service system. Networking is an effective way to find out about other agencies and departments and the types of positions they offer. The Career Mobility Office of NYS Department of Civil Service is a good place to get information on job titles, job descriptions, and the outlook for certain careers within state service. You can reach them at (518) 485-6199 or (800) 553-1322 www.careermobility.cs.ny.gov.

How Do I Get Started?

The first step in the networking process is simple. You must determine exactly what kind of help or information you need from each networking contact. In other words, you have to know what you want to know. Typically, job seekers want to know where there are job openings. However, you might also want to know about hiring plans for the future, current initiatives or projects of the organization/agency in which you are interested, anticipated changes in the future, specific information about jobs and responsibilities, and the names of other individuals who can provide you with still more information.

After deciding what you want to learn as a result of networking, you must also decide whether you should make contact with these people by telephone, mail, or an in-person meeting. Face-to-face meetings are the most effective and usually start with a telephone call asking someone if they might have a few minutes to answer some questions you have.

If you are going to begin with a telephone call, write a brief script before you make the call. Follow these four easy steps in preparing your script:

1. Introduce yourself
2. Mention who referred you to this person (or why you are contacting this person)
3. Briefly state the type of information you are looking for
4. Ask for a meeting

Your sample “script” may sound something like this:

My name is Brenda Jones and I’m an account clerk in the Department of Social Services. I’m a friend of Jim Johnson, who works in your office. Jim suggested I give you a call, since I’m interested in learning about accounting opportunities in the Department of Labor. I’d like to schedule a brief meeting with you to learn more about some of the accounting positions in the Department of Labor. Would you be able to meet with me briefly sometime next week?

Who Should I Talk To?

Networking should begin with people you know. Start by making a list of friends, family, co-workers, former co-workers, and acquaintances. Remember, everyone’s time is valuable and networking can be very time consuming. Therefore, it’s important for you to give considerable thought to what specific information you want to learn from networking in order to determine who among this group of people is most likely to have the information you need.

A second group of contacts includes people you don’t know, but who are likely to have information helpful to your job search. Although you may not realize it, you often network with people you don’t know. For example, you need a babysitter. To locate one, you call the local high school and ask to speak to one of the guidance counselors (who you do not know) to ask if they know of a responsible student interested in this type of work. Although there are many potential contacts in this second group, choose carefully. Be sure the people that you spend time talking with have information that can be of help in your job search.

A third group of people you might want to talk to are those paid to provide information and help. We often overlook networking with this group. This group includes your agency’s human resources director, the human resources directors of other agencies, the NYS & CSEA Partnership for Education and Training www.nyscseapartnership.org, your union representative, the NYS Department of Labor www.labor.ny.gov, admissions counselors at any BOCES, trade or business school, college, or university, or the Career Mobility Office www.careermobility.cs.ny.gov.

What Do I Say When I Get There?

In many ways a networking meeting is similar to other meetings you attend, except in this case you are the chairperson. This means you are responsible for setting and controlling the meeting agenda. There are five important components to any networking meeting agenda:

1. ***Establishing rapport*** - Stating the reason why you wish to talk to this person and the type of information you wish to gain.
2. ***Presenting yourself*** - Giving a *brief* description of your background and experience as well as a description of your career interests.
3. ***Asking questions*** - Asking questions about current projects and initiatives, projected future trends, job responsibilities, and necessary background and experience.
4. ***Asking for referrals*** - Asking for the names of additional people that could be of help to you.
5. ***Expressing appreciation*** - Expressing a warm “thank you” and a statement letting the person know you’ll keep them informed of your progress.

How Do I Follow Up?

Start by sending a thank you letter within 48 hours of your meeting. In addition to expressing your appreciation for the person’s time and assistance, you should briefly recap some of the major points of your conversation. If you’ve taken any action based on the person’s suggestions, be sure to mention that as well.

Relationships are built by staying in touch. A contact who does not have information or a job lead today may have them in the future. As you follow up on suggestions or make progress in your job search, let your networking contact know. If you see a newspaper or magazine article of interest, send it along with a short note. And when you land a new position, be sure to spread the news.

People like to feel that their time and efforts matter. Your networking contacts will want to know that the information and assistance they have provided has achieved results!

Pitfalls to Avoid

If you follow the information in this handout, you’re well on your way to successful networking. By now you’re no doubt eager to get started. But before you plunge in, be aware of some common pitfalls that networkers often experience:

1. ***Contacting people who aren’t likely to be helpful or informative*** - Everyone’s time is valuable. Before you contact anyone, be clear about what specific help or information you wish to gain.

2. **Lack of preparation** - You wouldn't do a presentation for your current boss or co-workers without some advance preparation. Similarly, you need to prepare for each networking telephone call and meeting. Your contacts will be eager to help someone who has clear objectives and an organized approach.
3. **Asking for a job** - Don't make the common mistake of asking for a job during your networking meeting. Asking this type of question puts your contact on the spot. It's far more effective to ask for help and information. Your contact understands that you are looking for a job and will provide you with available job information if you appear to be a good candidate.
4. **Not being clear about what you want** - Most people will want to help you, but many won't know just how they can assist. Be prepared to hear the question "*how can I be of help to you?*" and have a clear, ready answer.
5. **No follow up** - Following up as described above is the best way to build relationships and secure additional contacts. One of those contacts may have a job assignment that is the perfect fit for you.

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