

# NETWORKING

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## What is networking about?

Networking is a good way to stay up-to-date in your field and to find a new job. It is about connecting with and tapping the resources of other people, thus increasing your knowledge and opportunities.

Networking means that you connect to people that can help you in your work, career and personal life. But it is also about giving something back in return. Networking is a matter of give and take. So you also provide information and contacts to persons your network, and perhaps give that one tip that helps someone to find the job.

The basis of a good network is trust. The goal is to share knowledge, information and contacts. The biggest challenge is to know what you want to achieve, how to use your network, and to upkeep it and expand it.

Through networking you ask for advice and information about positions and organizations that you are interested in. You explain what your personal qualities and interests are and show that you are available for the labour market. You ask your contacts for referrals to other persons who might be helpful to you. These referrals are important: they allow you to 'jump' from one networking contact to the other. You will get into touch with people you haven't met yet and who can provide you with information about the position or company you are interested in. In addition, it's important that your contacts will remember you when an opportunity comes up.

### Networking is asking for:

- Information
- Tips
- Referrals

## What is networking *not* about?

Networking does not mean that you explicitly ask your contacts for a job! This puts you in a dependent position and it may abash your contacts.

**Samula Mescher (1974), management scientist (PhD). Now has her own career coaching company:**

“At a certain time my job applications had been rejected so many times that I didn’t have any energy left. Then I decided to do things that motivated me: theatre, sports, and a course in leading creative brainstorm sessions. This gave me my energy back.

I also started networking, while I was never good in those *small talks*: these just felt too smooth and pushy for me. When I attended to a networking event of the municipality I was asking myself: “what am I doing here?”

But then I was introduced to some people and I started to conduct conversations based on my interest in their experiences with working for the government, instead of *wanting* something from them. And soon I noticed that I am actually pretty good in networking and even enjoy it! More than 60% of the jobs are found through networking, so it’s important for young scientists to build up a networking by sharing their research or by just asking if they can do job shadowing with someone. Through networking I found a job as senior HR advisor at the Municipality of Ede.”

**Source: Welk Gras is Groener? Persoonlijke verhalen van gepromoveerden over hun loopbanen binnen en buiten de wetenschap, 2017. Authors: Van Der Weijden et al. [own translation]**

## Advantages of networking

- Networking allows you to take your job search into your own hands. You don’t have to wait for a vacancy to be published.
- Through referrals you might be able to open doors that otherwise remain closed, and you get into contact with persons who might play an important role in hiring staff.
- Networking is a great way to get to know positions and organizations from the inside.
- Networking increases your self-confidence and job application skills. You get the chance to present yourself and you can practice in a non-threatening environment.
- Through networking you show that you are active and professional, and you will be better able to address the questions or demands of an employer in a cover letter.
- Networking is not a matter of all or nothing. In contrast to formal job applications, networking always produces some positive results.
- Networking and formal job applications are complementary. With networking you approach the invisible labour market, and with job applications the visible one.

Actually there are no disadvantages to networking. But you do have to invest time and be patient and disciplined!

## Networking goals

Networking is easier if you know what your goals are, as they allow you to enter into conversation with someone. It is important that your goal is clear, focused and specific.

For instance, you can aim to 'find a nice bike'. This goal is however not clearly defined because: what kind of bike are you looking for? Vague goals lead to vague conversations and vague answers from the person you're talking to. But if you say 'I am looking for a black sports bike in Amsterdam,' then your goal becomes specific and the person you're talking to will have a better idea of what you want.

General networking goals could be:

- I want to practice in giving presentations or conducting conversations
- I want to sharpen my search profile
- I want to learn how to get in touch with new people
- I want to get a better idea of a certain sector
- I want to learn more about a specific company
- I want to talk to people who are currently doing the job that I would like to do

So, what are your networking goals? How can networking help you into a certain direction? And whom, where and why?

## How to build up a network

We can advise you to thoroughly map and structure the network that you already have. Every network consists of several fields. One field may be your previous workplace, your sports club, or people you know from university. We can identify formal and informal fields.

### Formal fields

- Conferences
- Professional contacts
- Contacts through job agents or intermediaries
- Professional contacts through LinkedIn

### Informal fields

- Family
- Friends and acquaintances
- Neighbourhood
- Volunteer organisations
- University
- Colleagues
- LinkedIn etc.

*Tip:* make a top-15 of your most relevant networking contacts: what kind of position do they have and at which company?

## Who should I reach out to first? A roadmap

The first persons you approach are people you know well and who are willing to help you and brainstorm with you. These people can refer you to their own contacts, who might know more about the position or organization you are interested in. Eventually, these people can introduce you to key figures from those organizations: people who are in charge of hiring new staff.

### First step: warm contacts

At first you use your own network: people you know and who are easy to approach. People that you expect to give useful information concerning your networking goal. But be aware: don't write off people too quickly! You might have people in your network who might not seem useful, but perhaps they have a friend or sibling that works at the company you're interested in!

These 'warm contacts' (or 'strong ties') are usually not able to offer you information about the positions and organizations you want to learn more about. But they are usually able to refer you to other people who can help you. Warm contacts can also provide you with feedback.

### Second step: referrers

Referrers are persons who can give you advice and information about job positions, organizations and the sectors you are interested in. These persons might be able to put you in touch with the decision-makers in the third and last category.

### Third step: decision-makers

Decision-makers are persons who are involved in hiring procedures in a company or organization. Sometimes you can apply directly through them. But be careful! These people are often very experienced in selection procedures and often view a networking conversation as a job interview. It is thus wise to start with people from the first and second category.

#### Tips

1. Join a professional organization, LinkedIn-group, sign up for a relevant mailing-list in your field. If you are active it is easier to get to know new people, who will also get to know you.
2. Be generous and also put other people in contact with persons that are useful for them.
3. If you receive a useful suggestion, then inform the provider whether the suggestion was helpful for you and if it led to any concrete results.
4. Secretaries and receptionists know everybody. Stay close to them and keep them happy.
5. Be prepared when visiting a lecture or conference. Know which persons you would like to talk to.
6. Stay in touch with your contacts, but don't hang around them too long. Invest 5 minutes in every person you know. More time is often not necessary, less is impolite.
7. Write on the back of business cards you received where you met the person and what you talked about. This makes it easier during a future meeting to pick up where you left off.
8. Don't miss any opportunities. If you aren't able to RSVP to an event, then send a short message or email. This way you show that you appreciate the invitation. If you were able to attend, thank the organizer for the invitation if you leave the event, or send a thank you note the next day.
9. Stay positive. Don't give off on others if that makes you look better. Maybe the person you are talking to laughs about it, but (s)he will remember you say negative things about others behind their back. Plus: you never know if you might need that person in the future.
10. Evaluate your networking contacts once or twice per year. You don't need to hold on to business cards all your life. Don't only pay attention to what a person has done for you, but also who is in his or her network. One great way to order your contacts is through LinkedIn.

### Tips for during the networking conversation

- Show that you're interested. People like to talk about themselves and their work; they are often flattered by the attention!
- Try to connect the conversation to your networking goal
- Explain what your networking goal is
- Try to get the other person to think along with you in terms of advice and referrals
- Try to get at least 1 referral out of every conversation, so your network pool doesn't "dry up"

### Examples of good questions to ask

- Can you describe an average working day to me?
- What are the fun parts about this job? What are the dis-advantages?
- What are future opportunities for this kind of job?
- What skills and knowledge should you have to be able to perform well?
- What type of person is most fit for this job?
- Is my CV a good match to the type of jobs within your organization?
- Do you have any suggestions to improve my CV?
- What can I do at this point to increase my chances?

### Other things to be aware of

1. Try to build up a network with people that you get along with. This also leads to mutual understanding concerning the things you need. Moreover, a good networking relation is based on mutual trust. So be open and sincere towards the other.
2. If you know what you want and you share it with others, (s)he will automatically come up with useful information and contacts.
3. Keep in mind that networking is a mutual effort. Networking often starts with thinking along with the other person. So: you usually start with giving before you take.
4. Make sure that you have a good reputation and that you keep it. If you have doubts about the motives of people, don't refer them to your own contacts.
5. Be aware that networking is a long-term effort. Maybe your contact cannot help you at strike up a conversation with the person next to you in line, introduce yourself to other this point, but after six months you might have a question that (s)he can help you with.
6. Show your gratitude if someone gives you an advice or suggestion, even it is not very useful for you. Maybe you can pass the information on to someone else. Also share this with the one who provided the suggestion: "it did not match my experience, but I think a friend of mine would be a perfect fit. Is it ok if I pass on this information to him/her?"
7. Do you have a good relation with someone? Then send a card for their birthday and also contact them if you do not immediately "need" them for something.

## Approaching someone for a networking conversation

Depending on the type of contact, you can approach someone by phone, email or LinkedIn. The most direct way of approaching someone is through telephone: you will have immediate personal contact and you don't have to wait long for an answer. In case you don't have someone's phone number, or if you are not comfortable with calling someone, then you can also send an email or a message through LinkedIn.

### General tips

- First mention how you the person and whom you got his/her contacts from.
- Be personal: why did you approach exactly him or her? What makes them special?
- Be specific about your goal: what do you want to know? And why can only (s)he give that information?
- Indicate how much time you need for a conversation (f.ex. 45 minutes or an hour)
- Let the other person propose a time, date and location. Try to adapt yourself: you are asking the other person a favour.
- Express your gratitude that (s)he is willing to make time for you.

### Example of an email

*Dear [Chris],*

*I received your contacts through [Mary] and she told me that you have a lot of experience in [teaching at the university, and that you even won the teacher award last year!]*

*Currently I am trying to get an image of how it is to work as [a university lecturer] and I would love to know more about this type of job and whether it would suit me. I would therefore really like to meet you and ask you some questions about your work!*

*Do you perhaps have time in the coming weeks to meet up? I will also try to call you this week to set an appointment.*

*Thanks so much in advance!*  
*[Claire Beaufort]*

## **Networking via LinkedIn**

LinkedIn is a great tool to get in touch with people who are currently doing the work that you would like to do. The good thing is that you can also approach people that you previously haven't met face-to-face.

One way to find people that are useful for you is to join professional groups where people share a lot of information, updates and vacancies within a certain field or sector. Make sure you also regularly share interesting updates yourself: this is a good way to show your expertise in the area and it can lead to interesting contacts.

You can also browse through personal profiles by searching for a specific job title. If you have found a profile of a person that might be interesting for you, then invite them to connect and always send a personal message along with your request. If someone gives you a positive reply, then you can invite him or her for a networking conversation.