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The Art of Networking

Tips for Success

If you search online about networking, you will discover statistics that demonstrate its importance in today's job search environment. A recurring theme is that at least 80% of all jobs are obtained through networking. And in this challenging economy, the job market is more competitive than ever. Networking has become even more crucial to the successful job search. Here are a few key insights and tips to remember when tackling the fine art of networking.

Start with people you know

In theory, the people you know will be more prone to want to help you in your job search than total strangers will. There are always exceptions, but for the most part, if you already have a rapport and relationship with someone, they will give you the time of day and put in the effort to lend a hand. Also, if networking does not come naturally to you, what better way to get warmed up and hone your skills than with the home team, people you already know? Lastly, when reaching out to contacts you do not know, it is quite helpful to have someone you know as a referral source. It is, in many cases, an instant credibility boost.

Do not limit yourself to people in your specific field

People know people. And you never know who those people know. Your networking contacts might do business with professionals more closely aligned to your field of interest, or members of your community might have potential leads through their own family, social, or professional circles. The old excuse of not getting started because you don't know anyone is really a false assumption.

Make good and smart use of social media

A colleague and friend of mine has a mantra of how to best take advantage of social media when networking. He says to find contacts on LinkedIn, engage with contacts on Twitter, and seal the deal over coffee (or your hot or cold beverage of choice, of course). There really is no reason not to tap into social media outlets for building your network. But make sure to use them wisely and do not forget about meeting in person. As with online dating, it takes both the high tech and the high touch to know the real deal about your connections.

Do more than just ask for help

For more experienced professionals, networking is certainly a two-way street. Be ready to offer something to your contacts as well. Steer clear of just asking for leads and advice, where you are the recipient of all the riches from your networking connection, leaving your contact with nothing gained other than a thank you note or a cup of joe. Bring your knowledge of the field, current trends, recent articles of interest, and more to the table, so a mutually beneficial dialog can occur.

Maintain your network

It is indeed wonderful to make a new connection and get advice and feedback in the moment. But to be effective with networking, the lines of communication with your contacts must stay open. "Out of sight, out of mind" is not just a saying. In networking, it is a reality. You will not often pop into someone's mind during their busy work and home life after just one meeting, especially as time passes. If you want to stay on people's radar, send the occasional follow-up question or interesting link to an article you read, offer holiday greetings, or just check in to see how they are doing in their world. At the same time, do not become a nuisance. A negative impression can be far more memorable than a positive one, and that is not the goal here at all.