



Networking With Diplomacy

How not to make your professional contacts feel used.

“Skill is fine, and genius is splendid, but the right contacts are more valuable than either.”—Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *Author, Sherlock Holmes creator*

You’ve probably heard that networking is a vital part of the job search and is extremely helpful in finding work. However, knowing how to network without appearing meek or (worse) needy can be intimidating, especially if you’re seeking assistance. To network correctly, be considerate. Don’t waste your contact’s time. Respect their boundaries, and make it as easy as possible for them to help you.

WHO are you contacting?

First, consider your relationship with the contact. How well do you know this person, and in what capacity? Your relationship is going to determine how, when, and where you reach out to ask for assistance with your job search.

WHAT are you trying to accomplish?

Before you make contact, have a clear objective. Do you want the person to forward your résumé? Are you looking for a résumé review or seeking an internship? Perhaps you’d like a lead on a company or position. You need to accurately communicate your goal to your contact. This will save them time and make it easier for them to assist you.

WHEN to make contact, WHEN to back off

When networking, if someone gives you their business card, they expect you to use it, so consider that a green light to move forward. If you have just met the person, follow-up within one or two days, even if just to say hello. You’ll be fresh on their mind and it will be easy for them to remember you.

However, hold off from making further contact if you have not received a response after two attempts, or if your contact has clearly stated that they cannot help you. If you are cold-calling and keep reaching a “gatekeeper” like a secretary or receptionist, you can try more than twice, but use different contact methods. For example, call, then email, then try social media. If your contact responds, no matter how slowly, it’s an indication

to stay in touch. However, DO NOT expect contacts to get back to you immediately. Remember, you are requesting a favor. Use judgment and always respect boundaries; you do not want to badger someone you are asking to help you. Plus, your time and effort may be better spent elsewhere.

HOW to make contact

If you know the person informally, a phone call might work best. If the contact was referred and someone whom you have never met, consider sending a professional email first, complete with introduction, who referred you (assuming you have permission to share their name), and your purpose for reaching out. If your first attempt to connect is unsuccessful, try a different contact method.

WHERE are you meeting?

An in-person meeting is one of the most effective vehicles for building professional relationships. Pick a place to meet that is quiet, public, and *convenient* for your networking contact; coffee shops work well. It is much more important to make it easy for your contact to meet you than visa versa. If meeting in person, have your résumé and work samples ready. Allow your networking contact to set the tone for the conversation and be mentally prepared for either a very formal résumé review or a casual meet-and-greet over coffee.

Finally, *always* thank your contacts, regardless of how fruitful their input may or may not have been. Professional connections, like all relationships, need to be nurtured and require patience. Once you’ve established a rapport, stay in touch, share updates, offer helpful insights, and practice reciprocity. Don’t be a fair weather networker and reach out only when *you* need something. In the end, people tend to work with and assist people whom they like.



in a nutshell:

Always be respectful and don’t abuse your professional contacts:

- **Formulate a clear and reasonable request**
- **Be patient and respect your contact’s time and schedule**
- **Use different methods to reach out, but never be pushy or demanding**
- **Make the process as convenient and easy for your contact, as possible**
- **Thank your contact and offer to return the favor**

Networking is an essential part of your job search arsenal. To network effectively, value your contact’s time and make it easy and pleasant for them to want to help you!