**ENGAGE YOUR NETWORK**

Networking is overwhelmingly the best job search strategy for finding a great new job in a competitive job market, but most people avoid this critical activity and rely upon passive job search strategies that lead to longer than necessary job search strategies.

Perhaps by reframing the objective of networking, you may find this a more welcoming task. Instead of looking at networking contacts as a group of people that will get you a job, view them as a helpful resource. In this perspective, you are not asking your friends, neighbors or colleagues to get you a job. Rather you are simply asking for information. If you take this approach, you will find that most people will be very happy to help you, especially if you convey a positive attitude and appropriately follow up during your contacts.

The most important step in the networking process is to be able to clearly articulate your objective to some one who may not understand your function or industry. In addition, by offering the names of your targeted companies you will help your networking contacts better know how they can help.

There are two ways to network. Direct networking entails physical meetings, telephone conversations, or email exchanges with individuals or groups of people that share your common goals or areas of expertise, or are centers of influence with a wealth of contacts. Online networking utilizes social media platforms to quickly build and expand your networking circle and engage with others in your targeted career space.

 **Direct Networking:**

Networking is not asking for a job, it is sharing information -- a simple exchange in which people help one another. You will find your job search to be much more productive and satisfying if you incorporate a large portion of your time in direct networking efforts. Did you know having lunch with a good friend or a former colleague is networking? Make a point to get out of your home office and away from your desk and engage with others. It will amplify your search success and provide a much healthier you in the job search process.

When you begin your direct networking efforts, start with those that know you best. Set up informal meetings or phone calls with family, friends, and supportive current or former colleagues. During these meetings be clear about your objective and share the list of your targeted companies. It is often very helpful to provide a copy of your resume. These same networking contacts may also serve as a reference during your job search.

Direct networking also includes joining professional groups such as local job hunting support groups or functionally specific networking groups that cater to your target objective. Typically churches support job hunter groups that are open to non-members. There may also be a large job hunter support group facilitated by your city or the local employment security commission. Check the local business section in your newspaper to find other professional groups and meeting information.

**Online Networking:**

Social media platforms such as LinkedIn have dynamically changed the way professionals network for business and for job searching. LinkedIn makes networking fun and easy. It allows you to quickly set up a professional profile and start connecting to people in your career space. Once you have established a profile and a good size list of connections, you will want to join LinkedIn groups that are relevant to your functional area of expertise or common goals.

After you join a group, you will need to visit the group discussions often. Take every opportunity to ask or answer a question within the group discussion platform to showcase your subject matter expertise. By doing so, your activities display to others in the group, which may include a hiring manager or a recruiter monitoring the discussions in a search for a qualified candidate. In addition, your activity will show up as an update on the home page of all of your networking contacts as an organic way to stay in front of your connections on a regular basis.