

Ten Principles of Networking

By: Andrew Rakestraw¹

Good networking isn't difficult. It doesn't require slick schmoozing, speed mentoring exercises, or 2,000 connections on LinkedIn. It simply requires common sense actions, a lot of organization, a healthy amount of ambition, and a whole bunch of conversations with interesting folks whose job you want. Use these ten principles to guide your search and you'll stand out from the pack.

1. **People want to help.** No one will meet with you unless they're willing to help you, and it is often amazing how people you've met with once or twice are willing to send an email, pick up the phone, or otherwise help you land a job. Your job during an informational interview is to figure out how the other person can help you. Don't treat the informational interview as your only ticket to get the job. Instead, it's the way you build a relationship and find out where they fit into your job hunt. There are five key ways info interviewers can help:
 - i. *Meeting other people to talk to.* After every interview ask, "Given my interests, who else do you recommend I talk to?" You should seek 2-3 new contacts from each conversation, and follow up with them immediately.
 - ii. *Finding out about jobs you didn't know existed.* Most jobs, especially in government, are first circulated informally to cull the list of candidates into something manageable. Often, by the time the job is posted, the office already has someone in mind for the job. Be that person. Say, "Let me know if you hear of anything that sounds like it would fit my interests and keep me in mind." Respond when you get leads, even if they're not exactly what you're looking for.
 - iii. *Getting an interview in the first place.* Overworked staffers regularly get hundreds of resumes for a position and they end up looking the same. Having someone they know (or even someone they don't know) send an email immediately puts your resume on top. Ask, "I just sent in an application for a position I'm really excited about. If you feel comfortable, could you send an email flagging my application?"
 - iv. *Once you get an interview, get advice.* As soon as you secure an interview, send an email to everyone connected to that field in your network asking them if they know the person interviewing you and if they have any advice about how to land the position. The larger your network, the more likely someone can help. Ask, "Do you happen to know the person I'm interviewing with? Any advice you have on how to prep would be very much appreciated."
 - v. *After an interview, have them reach out with an unsolicited recommendation.* Use this type of request for someone with whom you've hit it off or know well. It can make a huge difference in landing the position. Ask, "I just had an interview and I think it went very well. Would you feel comfortable reaching out to my interviewer to put in a good word?"
2. **Go to the top.** Meeting with senior level officials in an organization is essential. An email from a general counsel of an agency or another senior level person is likely to land you an interview and impress the interviewer that you have this person rooting for you. The catch though is that the higher ups often have less time than the staff level folks, so make sure your asks are concise and

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3. **Turn the info interview into a brainstorming exercise.** The most helpful info interviews are those where you lay out who you are and your pitch, then ask, “if you were in my shoes, what would you be doing?”
4. **Guide the conversation and be an active listener.** Treat the info interview as a cross between an informal conversation and a formal interview. Prepare a mental outline for the conversation. Don’t expect the person you’re meeting with to guide the conversation. That’s your job. Reflect on what they’re saying and emphasize how you’ll take their advice and translate it into action. Also, going into the informational interviewer, remember that it’s almost more awkward for the person meeting with you. They’re unsure of how they can help you and are worried that the conversation will be awkward. Research the person and their organization ahead of time and come into the info interview with 3-5 questions on hand so that as soon as the conversation lulls you can redirect it with one of your questions. Finally, bring a resume to every informational interview.
5. **Follow up regularly.** People often forget names and faces very quickly. You need to find a way to remain on someone’s radar. It’s hard to keep in touch, but you can do it in the following ways: (1) Sending along info/news articles/whatever is relevant to what you discussed during the info interview. Shows you’re engaged and following the industry. (2) The general update email. Just a general update on the status of your job hunt. Should be concise. (3) The follow up thank you email. Do this for every info interview. Also, if you meet with someone your info interviewer connects you with, send them a thank you for the introduction and explain what you gained/learned. (4) Specific requests. See principle #1 regarding reaching out if you want them to do something. (5) Letting them know that you got an interview and are seeking advice.
6. **Be aggressive, but smart about it.** Most people are leery of appearing annoying or pushy when networking and so don’t ask the folks in their network for assistance. Don’t be afraid of reaching out to someone and asking them for assistance. Best case scenario, they’re immensely helpful in landing you a job. Worst case scenario, they don’t respond to your email, and no feelings are hurt.
7. **Follow up.** Follow up, follow up, follow up. If someone doesn’t respond to your initial request to meet, wait two weeks and then follow up with them. I always found it helpful to put “Connecting through ___” in the subject line. That way they’ll see the name of a friend and know to open the email.
8. **Be organized and persistent - with yourself.** Create an Excel spreadsheet that includes names, contact info, where they work, how you met, and the last time you contacted them. This system will help immensely in keeping you organized and knowing when you need to reach out to someone. Set aside a little bit of time each day to update the Excel sheet and plan next steps.
9. **Keep in touch even after you’ve landed that dream job.** Send folks in your network an update email every year or so letting them know how you’re doing. People love to hear about others they’ve helped out, and this kind of contact will often lead to your next job. After update emails, folks will often want to get together for lunch or coffee to catch up.
10. **No one’s doing this.** Very, very few people are approaching networking in any sort of coordinated, organized manner. If you do it right, you’ll impress others, look ambitious, and stand out from the rest.