

Making the Connection – Network Your Way to Success



When it comes to advancing your career, networking is a no-brainer. Faced with increased competition in the labour market, having an effective networking strategy can help you stand out from the pack. A well-cultivated professional network can also provide guidance throughout your career journey, introduce you to like-minded professionals or mentors and assist you in refining your personal brand.

While many job hunters go through traditional channels to find work, there is a more effective way of marketing yourself through the hidden job market. Some experts say that the [hidden job market accounts for 70% to 80% of all jobs](#). Yet how do you access this seemingly elusive job market and capitalize on potential opportunities? You guessed it. Through networking.

Networking is essential to job hunting, but it's also helpful to use it if you're trying to promote yourself within your own company. Perhaps you're looking for a promotion or to switch departments. Without selling yourself and networking, how is anyone going to know what it is you want?

[80% of professionals say networking is critical to success and people who network are 72% more likely to be promoted. Yet one in four don't take the time to network.](#) Why? Networking takes time and effort and many people find the process to be exhausting. Many also don't know where or how to begin the conversation.

Here are 6 networking strategies to supercharge your career:

Define Your Networking Goals

Before attending any networking event, define your goals and what you hope to achieve. This will help you stay focused and prevent you from wasting time on irrelevant conversations. *Ask yourself a few questions:* What would you like to achieve at the event? What kind of opportunities are you looking for? How can you add value to the people you meet? Once your goals are set, create a plan to achieve them.

Build Genuine Relationships

Focus on quality, not quantity. Cultivate meaningful, long-term connections rather than collecting a slew of contacts. Attend industry specific events (CPA Canada and other financial organizations offer opportunities to connect throughout the year), conferences or virtual meetings with the goal of understanding people's challenges and goals – not just for personal gain. Authenticity counts! People respond to sincerity. Engage in conversations and aim to offer help rather than making it all about your career advancement.

Be Consistent

Make networking a habit rather than a one-time effort. Block out regular time in your schedule to reach out to people, attend events or participate in online discussions. Develop a strategy then execute your plan. Consistency also means crafting and delivering a consistent message. Experts know who they're targeting and cater their message to those people.

Add Value to Your Network

Offer help or advice before asking for favours. In the networking game, you don't want to be seen as a "taker." Whether it's sharing information, making an introduction or offering advice, being a "giver" builds goodwill and trust. Check in with your network regularly even when you don't need anything. Share useful articles or updates to keep relationships current. When meeting someone new, listen actively to determine their needs and interests. Establish yourself as a connector and make introductions to other contacts who might be able to help them.

Become a Thought Leader

Position yourself as a trusted resource by participating in professional communities and publishing online content. Start a blog or organize virtual meetups or webinars. Be a regular commentator on LinkedIn posts or publish posts of your own.

When writing or hosting, you create opportunities to engage with key people while demonstrating your knowledge and initiative. This positions you as an expert and you will be able to attract like-minded professionals. Once again, consistency is key!

Create a Personal Advisory Board

Find a small group of people from different sectors to serve as your informal board of advisors. They can be mentors, industry veterans or peers. Meet regularly (quarterly or bi-annually) to share insights, get feedback and help each other advance. People from different backgrounds can provide innovative solutions or connections that you may not have considered. They can act as a sounding board for career decisions and personal growth.

Sales training teaches people the ABC's of selling – Always Be Closing. When it comes to networking, the goal isn't all that different and leads to the same result. ABC = Always Be Connecting!

Opportunities to connect are plentiful whether through work or personal less formal events. While interacting with people - be curious, enthusiastic and authentic. Building and nurturing professional networks may at first seem difficult, but with the right attitude and strategy you'll be well on your way to landing your dream job!