

Networking during Your Job Search

By Emily Sanderson

Perhaps your firm is downsizing; perhaps you have some ethical concerns regarding company activity; perhaps you are moving to a new city for personal reasons, such as your spouse accepting a new position or your child enrolling in a private school. Are you prepared to make a change in your career?

You've had Attorney Resume prepare you a winning resume, and you've signed up with LawCrossing.com in order to access thousands of legal job announcements from all over the country and beyond, but you are still looking for just the right position that will work with your circumstances, such as your location and the specific type of work in which you are interested. Your next step is to network.

Who do you know in your field? Have you maintained contact with former classmates, friends from your hometown, or former coworkers? If you will be moving, do you know anyone in your new town who may be able to assist you in your job search?

Even if you are a legal marketing professional, marketing yourself is a different ball game. Some of us received job-search instruction in college, but if you are over 30, most likely you did not.

However, learning how to market yourself is your best security in an increasingly insecure job market and world. Are you confident? Would you listen to *yourself* if you were on the other end of the phone line? Do you believe that you have something to offer?

Don't despair if you come up empty-handed after one or two, or even three or four, conversations with people like your father's racquetball buddy, your uncle's business partner, or your pastor's tax accountant. You probably know many people through your family, church, civic group, or health club, but you are most likely to get a lead about two people removed from your first tier of contacts.

Under no circumstances do you ever want to remove the monkey from your back. Your job search is your burden, even though you won't present it that way. Keep discussions with contacts light, friendly, and conversational. Offer to get them a cup of coffee or a Coke at a nearby, classy restaurant where you can continue your discussion. Your funds may be thin, but always offer to pay the tab; contacts will be more likely to assist you when they consider you their equal. Remember that they don't owe you anything; however, a lot of people will assist you if they can because it was through networking that *they* were able to get their own foot in the door, and probably not too long before you.

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More jobs are found through networking than any other job-search method. Utilizing job-search methods including online searches, sending out mass mailings of your resume (Legal Authority can help you with that), and working with a recruiter is phenomenally more successful when you add networking to the mix for a number of reasons.

I think the number-one reason networking works, beyond any contacts your immediate friends can refer you to, is something very simple. When you speak to your peers about your job search, you are more likely to do it with as much dignity as you can muster, and people who take a positive and empowering stance in their job searches are more likely to be successful. Even close friends will be reluctant to hire you if you come begging (given they have access to a job opening). In addition, when speaking to peers, you want to have a clear game plan for your job search that you can explain to them in a sincere and convincing way. Having a clear game plan is critical to a successful job placement.

By networking with people you know, you are more likely to find a real place to build your career within your own community, among people with whom you already have something in common. And remember: communities today are not limited by geography.

Remember that you are your worst critic, so if you can convince yourself of your game plan, it will happen, even if it takes a few failed attempts before success comes your way. I really believe that if you have a genuine desire to provide for yourself and your family, if you have career goals that you are passionate about, and if you are willing to explore, things will work out one way or another.