Create an effective resume and job search strategy

Practice Quiz: Hands-on Activity: Adding Skills and Experience to your Resume
3 questions

Reading: Tailoring your Resume for IT Support
10 min

Reading: Finding your Path and Perfect Role
10 min

Practice Quiz: Self Review - Build a Job Search Project Plan
1 question

Reading: Personal Branding
10 min

Reading: Recruiters, Headhunters and Staffing Agencies
10 min

Reading: Write a Cover Letter
10 min

Reading: Getting Started with LinkedIn
10 min

Reading: How to get Interviews
10 min

Interview for IT support jobs

Career development

Inclusive workplaces

How to get Interviews

HOW TO GET INTERVIEWS

This guide is designed to help job seekers get more interviews. If you're eager to increase the number of interviews you're currently getting, we have some tips and strategies for you that can make a big difference in your results and help you overcome some of the challenges associated with job boards, such as out-of-date listings and heavy application volumes that can make it hard to stand out.

This guide will help you address the challenges of job boards through networking. Because the idea of networking can seem daunting for many, this guide will focus on four actionable steps you can take to make the most of your networking efforts. You'll learn everything from how to find people to connect with and how to schedule and prepare for important conversations, to what to talk about and how to follow up. If some of these strategies and actions feel challenging at first, don't worry; they get easier over time. Plus, you'll be getting more interviews, so it will all be worth it!

The Importance of Networking

Learning how to network effectively is a really valuable skill with a wide range of benefits. It's something you'll want to continue to focus on, and the connections you make and maintain through strategic networking can have long-lasting positive effects on your career advancement.

For our purposes here, we want to focus specifically on how strategic networking can help you overcome some of the challenges associated with online job applications. Benefits include:

- **Getting accurate information about job availability.** The fact that a role is posted online doesn't mean that the hiring team is actively reviewing applications. There is often a delay between the time a role is open and the time it's posted online, as well as the time it is filled and taken down from online job boards. At the same time, there are often open positions that are not (yet) posted online for a variety of reasons. Networking can help you ensure you've got up-to-date information.
- **Learning more details about the role**. Job descriptions are not always precise. As a result, you might end up applying for roles that you think are a good fit but are, in fact not. Or, you might fail to properly tailor your application to meet the needs of the hiring team. Insider information via networking can help you understand what the team is really looking for.
- **Standing out amid the competition.** Once a job is posted to a job board, there are often tens or even hundreds of people applying to it, so it can be difficult to stand out. Networking can help you get an early jump on a new opportunity before it's posted.

The networking process described in this guide can help you address all these challenges.

Through a short and focused conversation with someone at your target company—who has insider knowledge of relevant opportunities—you will be able to:

- Understand the requirements for your target role at that specific company. Jobs with the same title can vary greatly from company to company, and the actual requirements are not always obvious from job descriptions.
- Gain insight into the company's organizational structure and team culture to learn what's required for success, and understand how best to position yourself in your application materials and interviews.
- Learn about ways to monitor and apply for opportunities at that specific company, so you can know exactly what's available and how to float your application to the top of the pile. You might even be able to get a referral.
- Establish a relationship with a professional who might be able to help you in your current job search and be a part of your professional network moving forward.

Networking for Your Job Search: The Process

How to connect with the right people

The process of networking for your job search begins with identifying the right people to network with. Because you are looking for insider information on the role and its application process—as well as other relevant opportunities—you need to connect with insiders.

People you are going to network with must work in, or close to, your target role at a company you are interested in working for. These people will have the information you need, beyond what's publicly posted online. They will understand the exact skills and qualities the hiring team is looking for. They'll know the status of currently open roles and upcoming openings, and they might even be able to connect you directly to the hiring team.

If you are already connected to the right people, you can jump straight to Step 2 below. If you don't currently know such people, begin with finding and connecting with them as described in Step 1.

Step 1: Finding the right people

To begin, put together a list of the companies you're interested in. The more companies you have on your list, the more people you will be able to reach out to, and the more opportunities that will be available to you. Don't be surprised if your company list grows to 50 or more companies. It might sound like a lot, but remember that not every company will have the right role available when you need it.

If you are not sure how to identify target companies for your job search, consider the following ideas:

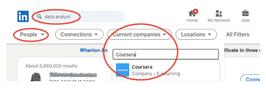
- **Search job boards for openings.** If a company has ever posted a relevant role, it's worth exploring further.
- **Go through your existing contacts and research the companies where they work.** Even if you don't know anyone in your target role, your personal and professional contacts might be able to introduce you to their relevant coworkers.
- **Identify a target industry** (e.g., online education, medical supplies, entertainment). If you know one company within that industry, you can perform a search for its competitors to expand your list.
- **Map out companies located in your area** (or companies with a remote workforce, if you are looking to work remotely). You want to make sure you can definitely be considered for any opportunity you uncover.

Remember, your target companies do not need to have open jobs posted—you will find out exactly what is currently available there through your networking conversations.

Step 2: Connecting via LinkedIn

Once you know the companies you are interested in, you can start connecting with relevant people. The method described here uses LinkedIn because it is accessible to most people. You can also ask for introductions from mutual connections, attend professional events to meet people, post in networking communities online, or use any other way you prefer.

To find people through LinkedIn, begin with performing a LinkedIn People Search using your target job title as the search string, and setting a filter for "Current Companies." See below for an example searching for a Data Analyst at Coursera.



Review the profiles that come up to identify people you want to reach out to. Focus on people you'd like to learn from and that you think you can build a rapport with based on their background, interests, and even their tone of communication. Keep in mind that people with well-developed LinkedIn profiles—that include profile photos, summaries, and other details—are more likely to reply to you than those who have very basic profiles, because they are likely to be more active LinkedIn users.

Once you identify a person you might be interested in speaking to, send them a connection request with a note explaining why you are reaching out.

Here is a sample LinkedIn outreach message:

Hi <name>, I discovered your profile because of the interesting work you do as a <role> at <company>. I'd appreciate an opportunity to ask you a few questions to learn more about what you do and what it is like to work at <company>. Thank you in advance for connecting with me!

Note that some of your connection requests may go unanswered. Don't get discouraged or take it personally. Many people are too busy or simply don't monitor their LinkedIn messages. The great thing is that LinkedIn provides you with access to a large number of professionals, and it's a great idea to reach out to a lot of people.

Step 3: Schedule and prepare for the conversation

Once you've established the connection, you can ask your new contact for a time to speak. It is important to be open to communicating via the connection's preferred approach (in-person, video, phone, in writing, etc.), but ideally, you want to schedule a live conversation. It's generally a more effective way to build a relationship, and can often make it easier to get your specific questions answered.

Make scheduling easy by suggesting a specific time to speak, offering to work around their calendar, and sending out a calendar invitation with information on how you will connect (phone, video conferencing, etc.).

Here is a sample meeting request message:

Thank you for accepting my connection request! As I mentioned, I reached out because I'm researching <industry/company> and would really appreciate an opportunity to ask you a few questions about your experience in <role, company>. Would you be open to scheduling a 15-minute video or phone call on <date, time>? I'm also happy to adjust to your schedule if you prefer another time.

Note that some people find it easier to provide information in writing. If you don't get a response to your original request for a conversation, you can follow up by asking whether it would be easier for them to answer a few questions over email. Remember, everyone is different and it's important to gauge and adjust to the style of the person you are reaching out to!

Don't be discouraged if someone does not reply to you immediately. People are busy. Since you have already established a connection, it's a good idea to follow up after a few days, and then again a week later to give them a chance to reply.

If you still don't hear back after a couple of follow-ups, you can assume this person is too busy at this time to speak with you and move on to other potential contacts. Remember that while this is a process of developing personal connections, it's also a numbers game, and you should plan to reach out to a lot of people!.

Before moving on, acknowledge your decision to your new contact—a quick note will help ensure there is no awkwardness so you can easily reconnect in the future.

Here is a sample moving-on note:

I'm sorry we haven't been able to connect. I definitely don't want to flood your inbox with requests, so I just wanted to thank you again for connecting with me, and if you do end up having some time to chat, please let me know.

Preparation

Once the conversation is on the calendar, it's time to prepare. Remember, your focus should be on learning about your target role at the company and determining the best ways to connect to new opportunities. Things you'll want to focus on include:

- What is the day-to-day like in the role? What is the team structure, how are priorities decided, what do they like about their work, and what do they struggle with?
- What skills and experiences do the hiring team look for? What is essential, and what is nice-to-have?
- Do they think your skills and background are a good fit for the role, or are there ways you can improve your candidacy through education or experience?
- What is the best way to monitor and apply for opportunities? Is there anything coming up that is not yet posted on the careers page?
- Are there any other people they can recommend that you speak with?

To inform your questions, you'll want to conduct thorough research on the person you are speaking with, the company they work at, and your target role. Consider the following sources of information:

- **Your contact's LinkedIn profile, and any information it links to**. Look for information to inform your questions as well as anything that can help you build rapport, such as shared volunteering interests, hobbies, school experience, etc.
- **Job descriptions for your target role at the company** (if available). During the conversation, you'll have an opportunity to clarify requirements and responsibilities.
- **LinkedIn profiles of people working in your target role at the company**. You want to understand their skill sets and backgrounds to get additional insights into what it takes to succeed in this role.
- **Company website**. You should have a good understanding of the company's mission, business, and anything else they chose to highlight to the public.
- **Company reviews on platforms such as Glassdoor**. It's a great idea to see what people are saying about the company, so you can ask more specific questions about the culture.
- **News about the company**. Just in case there is something significant happening at the company, you want to be aware of it.
- **Company careers page**. Make sure you know which roles are currently posted so that you can ask about the status, and about applying to them directly.

Step 4: Speak with your new contact

Speaking with strangers does not come naturally to many people. If you are feeling uncomfortable before or during your first few conversations, that's completely normal! It will get easier with time as you develop the invaluable skill of networking.

Remember that the other person is also going into a conversation with a stranger (you) and might not know what to expect. To make both of you comfortable and to help build rapport, be ready to set the structure for the conversation.

- **Remind them about who you are, why you reached out, and what your goals are for the conversation**. By this point, you will have done extensive research in preparation for the conversation, but your new contact might not have had the time to look at your profile and doesn't know why exactly you reached out. Help them out by starting with a brief overview of your background and the reasons for the conversation.
- **Monitor time**. Conversations like this generally last 15–30 minutes. Make sure you respect the other person's time by keeping the meeting to the length you had originally agreed upon, unless the other person wants to continue talking.
- **Make it about them**. While you are there to learn, the person you are speaking to is being generous with their time, and it's your responsibility to make them feel valued and appreciated. Explain why you wanted to talk to them and show the research you've done. Honest praise and genuine engagement go a long way.
- **Listen more than talk**. Since you are there to learn about their experience and company, the primary focus of the conversation should be on the other person. Some people might be more talkative, while others may need more input from you in order to engage. Ideally, they should be speaking for 50% to 80% of the conversation. Don't be afraid of short pauses, and be respectful and patient if they need time to gather their thoughts.
- **Take note of action items as you go along**. There are many action items that can come out of a conversation like this: you might need to send the other person your resume, they might offer to connect you with someone else, either one of you might want to share articles or resources that comes up in the conversation, etc. It's your responsibility to keep a record of these action items, so you can follow up on your promises and make it easy for the other person to remember theirs.
- **Close the conversation by clarifying what's next**. Thank them for their time, summarize what you have learned, and go over any action items from the conversation. The goal is to make the other person feel useful and appreciated—after all, they've been generous with their time.

Asking for a referral

Getting a referral is an ideal outcome for a networking conversation. However, not every conversation will end in a referral—sometimes there will be no role available, and sometimes the person might not be open to referring you for a variety of reasons. Make sure not to take this personally or push too hard—their reasons may have nothing to do with you specifically. It's important to respect their boundaries and comfort levels. It is also important to go into the conversation without the expectation of a referral. Focusing on learning about the role and getting advice from your new connection will take the pressure off you and them.

If, during the course of the conversation, you confirm that there is a role available that you are qualified for, do consider asking for a referral. You should be able to sense from the conversation whether the person thinks you could be a valuable addition to their team and therefore open to referring to you. If you have any doubts about that, provide an easy way for them to say "no" to you to avoid an awkward situation. For example, you can ask, "Would you be able to refer me to this role, or do you recommend I apply online?"

If your contact agrees to refer you, make sure you understand exactly what's required from you. Depending on the company's system, you might need to apply through a special referral link, have your contact submit your resume internally on your behalf, or apply online and then have your contact reach out to the relevant member of the hiring team.

Step 5: Follow up

Congratulations on completing the conversation!

Send a thank-you email

Always send a thank-you email within a day or two to the person who has been generous enough to share their time and expertise with you. Go beyond the basic "thank you" and reinforce the connection you've made by:

- Reiterating what you have learned
- Following up on your action items from the conversation. Include any materials you had promised to share and list out what else you are going to do based on the conversation (make sure to follow up on those as well when the time comes!)
- Gently reminding then about any action items the other person had volunteered for
- Offering to repay the favor by sharing any information that might be valuable to the person, or offering to connect them with people in your network

Here is a sample thank-you note:

Hi <name>,

It was great to catch up with you today and hear about the incredible work you are doing at <company>, and I was excited to learn about our shared interest in <x>. Here is a link to the article I had mentioned on <topic> that I thought you might enjoy.

Thanks again for sharing about the <role> opening with me and sharing my resume with the hiring manager! My resume is attached. Please let me know if you have any questions or need anything else from me.

Again, it was great to speak with you. Thank you for your time and willingness to share your experience with me! Please let me know if I can ever be of any help. I have a pretty extensive network in <industry> and would be happy to introduce you to any of my connections.

Maintain the connection

Some conversations naturally lead to ongoing relationships where people find a lot in common and naturally stay in touch, while others don't create enough rapport to solidify the connection. Even if your conversation falls into the second category, as long as you feel that you'd like to keep this person in your active network, there are actions you can take to develop the connection over time. The key to developing your new connection is finding natural touchpoints moving forward. For example:

- **Share updates on your job search**. Follow up on any advice from the conversation once you have a chance to act on it. Your connection will appreciate that you valued their guidance and will be glad to know if it helped. Also, remember to update and thank them once your job search is complete.
- **Send interesting information as it comes up**. If you come across an article or information that reminds you of the person, it is a great reason to send them a quick note.
- **Engage on LinkedIn**. If your new connection is active on LinkedIn, commenting on their posts and updates is a great way to continue the conversation.
- **Add them to your celebrations calendar**. Add them to your holiday mailing list. In addition, if any important dates, such as a birthday, come up in the conversation, make sure to mark your calendar and send your congratulations.

Do be mindful about your rate and volume of outreach, as you don't want to overdo it. Make sure to establish a pace that feels right for the relationship.

Continue Growing Your Network

You now know how to find, reach out to, and develop relationships with people who can help your job search through insider information. Not every conversation you have will result in an immediate job lead, but many will. Networking is the most reliable way to get interviews, and it's available to everyone with a LinkedIn account, effective strategies and some grit.

Don't be discouraged if you don't feel great about your first few conversations, or if they don't result in referrals. It is normal to feel uneasy about speaking with strangers, particularly at first. It's a skill you need to practice. Each conversation you have with an industry professional is a win. You are building one of your most valuable professional assets—your network—one person at a time!

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