



# Book Highly Effective Networking

## Meet the Right People and Get a Great Job

Orville Pierson  
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## Recommendation

Orville Pierson is the senior vice president of an international career services company, so he clearly knows about job hunting. He lucidly illustrates how job seekers can maximize the relationships within their circle of contacts to reach all-important “decision makers.” He also directs readers to unlikely networking sources they might not normally consider. Pierson explains that, when it comes to job hunting, the Internet is both a blessing and a curse. Although the Web may expose a job hunter to more opportunities, odds are that any given résumé – along with thousands of others – can get swallowed up in a bottomless pit. The prospects are nearly as grim with print or online classified ads – particularly when job competition is fierce. Networking, Pierson says, may offer the best opportunity to find work or career advancement. Many people have landed good jobs by initiating conversations with friends, casual acquaintances or former colleagues. *BooksInShort* praises Pierson’s systematic, strategic approach to networking. As he says, it doesn’t guarantee results – and it does require time and perseverance – but today’s job seekers need every available weapon.

## Take-Aways

- Successful networking involves meeting new people, collecting information and connecting with “decision makers” who have the power to hire you.
- If you’re job hunting, let people know. Your contacts may be able to find you work.
- Create contacts with people already working in your desired industry or company.
- You don’t need to rub shoulders with elite people to find work in a network.
- Once you get to know decision makers, stay in touch with them in case a new position becomes available.
- Create a comprehensive job-search plan with goals, a clear message and a targeted job market.
- Avoid being too aggressive as that will make your networking contacts feel uneasy.
- Successful networking should produce an increasing number of introductions.
- When approaching an organization for work, search for a “sponsor,” an insider who wants you to work there. This will give you an advantage over other job seekers.
- Take advantage of social networking Web sites, and don’t ignore any avenues, from networking groups to online employment listings.

## Summary

### Networking Is a Way of Life

Everyone networks. Whether you’re looking for an orthopedic surgeon, an electrician or an auto mechanic, you’re likely to ask your friends, neighbors and co-workers

for recommendations. When you approach networking as part of a job search, it requires a more structured, deliberate approach, but it ultimately boils down to talking with other people, expanding your circle of contacts, gathering information and hopefully connecting with “decision makers” who can hire you. Successful networking features these components:

## 1. Spread the Word

People can’t help you unless they know you’re looking for a job. Tell everyone that you’re job hunting – particularly if you’re unemployed. You may need to be a little more guarded if you’re already employed and looking for a better position. Either way, the idea is to make your intentions known.

## 2. Be Informed

If you’re considering a career change, you must understand the industry you’re targeting. Do opportunities currently exist? Is there growth potential? Can you make a decent living? Networking is often the best way to gather the information you need to make an intelligent decision. If you plan to remain in your field but think you’d like to join a specific organization, research the company.

## 3. Get the Inside Track

Make contact with people who already work for the company you’re targeting. The information you gather will be invaluable, particularly in preparing you for the next step: contacting someone who can make hiring decisions.

## 4. Touch Base With the Decision Makers

A quick phone conversation with a hiring manager gives you a huge advantage over applicants who merely send in résumés. A networking contact may even be able to arrange a personal introduction.

## Networking Fairy Tales

Listening to bad advice can be detrimental to your job search. Immediately disregard these common myths about networking:

- **The more, the merrier** – Cultivating a large network is advantageous if you’re a politician, salesperson or professional recruiter, but most people have smaller networks. A large network may give you an edge, but it’s not the most important factor. The pivotal factor is knowing how to maximize your existing contacts.
- **It’s the CEO or bust** – Some job seekers mistakenly believe that they won’t land a job unless they speak with a company’s president or some other top-floor executive. It’s not necessary to climb that high on the food chain. Networking success depends on reaching those who actually hire or directly influence hiring. Spend your time and energy trying to connect with relevant decision makers.
- **Schmooze with the crème de la crème** – Don’t believe the old notion that you must “hobnob” with the elite. Knowing prominent individuals doesn’t guarantee that you’ll get a good job. In fact, your best connections could be friends and acquaintances – not the insular power brokers who huddle in corners.
- **Make the sale** – Don’t confuse sales and networking. You’re not making cold calls or peddling a product, you’re simply exchanging information with other interested parties.
- **Conduct a fact-finding mission** – Young people considering a particular profession typically practice “information interviewing.” They spend time in a factory or office learning about a job. However, seeking too much information while networking will work against you. Don’t badger others or be a nuisance. Focus on informal chatting.
- **Join a group** – Job seekers have numerous opportunities to join networking groups, which often hold meetings in restaurants, religious facilities or community centers. However, attendance isn’t mandatory. Networking means touching base with people – and you don’t need a formal group setting for that.

## Go with the Flow

Networking involves gathering and exchanging information. The process should not make anyone feel pressured. The most effective networking occurs naturally, in an atmosphere of pleasant conversation. Sometimes you may not even realize it’s happening. For instance, you might casually speak to fellow exercisers at the gym about your work situation, only to find that they’re glad to give you the names and numbers of friends who may be able to help. Positive networking can occur at your bowling league, quilting class or charitable outreach project. Social events at your house of worship are excellent venues for interacting with people from diverse fields.

“When the economy is good, networking is important. In tough times or tough job markets, networking is essential.”

Most people don’t recognize how vast their networks really are. Even individuals you speak with only once or twice a year can be part of your network. Anyone with whom you share a common bond is a potential contact. Writing a list of the people in your various networks is a helpful exercise. Your “total network” is likely to include these components:

- **“Employer networks”** – Former managers, executives, colleagues and employees may be willing to help you advance your career, particularly if you had a strong track record. Also consider outside contacts you may have established in a previous job. Did you deal with vendors, work with clients or customers, or collaborate with professionals in other fields? Be extra careful if you’re networking for employment outside of your current company. Word travels quickly and you can harm your reputation or jeopardize your job.
- **“Organizational networks”** – Carefully consider all your affiliations in professional, religious, social, sports, community and alumni groups.
- **“Personal business networks”** – Don’t overlook people with whom you conduct personal business. Your hair stylist or your dental hygienist, for instance, both interact with a broad range of people and may have contacts that can help you. Tell them about your job search and encourage them to get in touch with you if they have hot leads.
- **“Family and friends”** – Many job seekers mistakenly believe that asking for assistance creates a burden for others. In fact, relatives and friends are anxious to

help, particularly if your situation is dire. Adult children should ask their parents for contacts.

## Coming Up with a Game Plan

Networking alone won't land you a great job. You must develop a comprehensive job-search plan that focuses on the following areas:

- **“Professional objective”** – If you want to be a salesperson, try to focus on a particular area of interest, such as medical supplies, automobiles or life insurance. If writing is your passion, narrow your options to newspaper reporter, freelance author or public relations specialist, for instance. Defining your objective makes the job search easier.
- **“Target market”** – First, determine the geographical area where you'd like to work. It could be within a 20-mile radius of your home, or you may be willing to move. Then define the type of organization that interests you. For example, if you're an experienced, qualified teacher, do you want to work for an elementary school, a middle or high school, or a local college? Decide whether you're interested in a large or small organization. Armed with such information, you should be able to compile a “target list” of employers.
- **“Core message”** – Your résumé and networking efforts should be internally consistent in reflecting your qualifications and goals.

“Telling people about your job search is a very effective way of finding a new job.”

A comprehensive game plan enables you to network actively and spread the word about your availability and credentials. Help your network contacts feel at ease. Don't be too pushy or aggressive. Make it clear that you're not expecting miracles and you won't be disappointed if they can't arrange meetings or contacts for you. Express appreciation for any help they can offer.

“Family and friends are the two most important networks, and they are also the best place to begin job-search networking.”

Your strongest contacts may be willing to look over your list of targeted potential employers and offer valuable observations and advice. You can ask them to introduce you to other people. Some job hunters believe that networking consists of handing out résumés for contacts to forward to others, potentially including hiring managers and decision makers. There's nothing wrong with circulating your résumé, but it's even better if your contact can arrange an introduction for you.

## Step It Up a Notch

Some job hunters are fortunate to land great jobs just by networking with personal contacts. But usually it's necessary also to reach out to your professional contacts, such as co-workers, former co-workers or potential colleagues. Handle contacts in your professional network differently than those in your personal network. You can't be too casual or informal. Friends and acquaintances are more willing to make phone calls or arrange introductions on your behalf. Professional contacts – particularly people you don't know well – may not be willing to do you favors or go out of their way. Approach them cautiously.

“The person who says, ‘I'll take anything,’ usually ends up with just exactly that, just any old job – or worse, nothing. So starting out with a reasonable focus is important.”

Your ultimate goal, of course, is to meet decision makers. In rare cases, such individuals also will be members of your personal network. Most of the time, though, you'll have to maneuver yourself into position strategically. It certainly helps to have a “sponsor,” someone inside an organization who wants you to work there. A sponsor can provide valuable information and help steer you to influential people. His or her referral can vault you ahead of other candidates.

“Sometimes the best way to find a job is to forget about finding a job. Just talk with people.”

When you telephone professional contacts, particularly people you don't know well or personally, be direct but don't sound desperate – that's a turnoff. If possible, try to get together in their office or offer to take them to lunch. Your career could be at stake, so it's worth the investment. Personal meetings are much more effective than phone conversations – especially with strangers. Your goal is to make a strong impression and learn more about the organization's decision makers. If everything goes according to plan, you'll have laid the groundwork for contacting the decision maker. Remember that hiring managers and other decision makers are usually quite busy so acknowledge that their time is valuable. Try to get an appointment – then follow up with a thank you phone call or e-mail.

## Job-Hunting Tactics

Job seekers should create a “positive Internet presence” by joining social networks such as LinkedIn and Facebook. Employers and HR personnel inside a firm where you've submitted an application are likely to check you out on the Internet simply by searching for your name. You don't want them to land on erroneous or unflattering information, so make sure your profile is accurate and up-to-date. You can use social networking sites to conduct research of your own. You may spot familiar names on someone's profile and be reminded to contact them. Networking focuses on expanding your contact list, so don't be shy – drop a line to anyone you believe can potentially help. The best connections sometimes develop from the most unlikely sources. You can also answer ads on CareerBuilder, Monster and similar sites, although employers who are sifting through hundreds of responses will judge you strictly on a first glance at your résumé.

“Most people find that a networking search builds momentum as you get the hang of it.”

Many job seekers hesitate to explore networking groups. They don't want to spend time with other unemployed people who complain about the lack of opportunities in the market. But being friendly and initiating conversations could garner information about an organization or names of people who can help you. Have plenty of business cards to hand out so you can easily provide your phone number and e-mail address. While networking is the best way to find a job, you can't ignore other practices. High-salaried professionals sometimes find jobs through recruiters or headhunters. And, you might ask about openings at organizations on your target list by contacting their HR departments. Company Web sites may also list employment opportunities.

“Effective job hunters talk to most of their networking contacts more than once.”

Follow-up is particularly important in networking. Keep your contacts updated on your situation and stay in touch with decision makers once you've met them. Openings may not exist when you first meet relevant people, but you want them to remember you when they have positions to fill.

## About the Author

**Orville Pierson**, author of *The Unwritten Rules of the Highly Effective Job Search*, is senior vice president of Lee Hecht Harrison, an international career services company.

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