



# Building Your Network

All of us need to develop a network of business colleagues and friends we can count on and trust and with whom we can share information and experiences.

Following the recent deep recession and the severe job losses that accompanied it, many publications featured articles about unsuccessful job searches. These articles told stories about how job seekers sent out many résumés and how, in most cases, the number of résumés sent was high while the number of return phone calls was almost nonexistent. The articles then stressed the importance of “working your network” to find a new position.

Highlighting the significance of an individual’s network is sound advice, but what I find missing in these articles is how to *develop* a network. Networks are built by making contacts. You can’t have a network without contacts, and, ultimately, you want a good network of great contacts.

A good network isn’t simply a list of names to pull out as an employment tool. Instead, it’s a source of rich friendships and business relationships that will make your work more enjoyable and rewarding. And if you maintain these business relationships,

you’ll tap into the combined networks of your contacts.

Adopting a networking lifestyle—connecting and helping others when they ask (and even when they don’t)—is a worthwhile and satisfying activity. People do business primarily with people they know and like, so good contacts are good for business. This fact is magnified further in a job search. Résumés

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and cover letters alone are one-dimensional; they’re just too impersonal to convince employers to hire you. In most cases, you have a better shot at a position if someone in the company knows you.

You begin your network by developing contacts. In many respects, this is like making friends, only these are business friends. Like your personal friendships, business friendships start by get-

ting to know someone, learning about them, and discovering their interests and other unique bits of information. Just as you do with personal friendships, you need to nurture these business friendships. Both personal and business friendships take time to develop and require you to make some effort. Most of us are well aware of which of our friends make an effort and which don’t.

During my career, I found doing business was much more enjoyable when I dealt with interesting people, so I always wanted to get to know them better. When I did so, it was easier to deal with them. I didn’t expect these people to be contacts useful to my employment—I just found them interesting. When I needed something, they were happy to accommodate my needs if they could. As it turns out, when you’re connected with people, you’re also connected to what and whom they know.

Here are some points for developing great contacts for your business network:

- ◆ Adopt a networking lifestyle—be open to constantly connecting with and helping others. Most people enjoy being help-

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## Perspectives

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- ful. Not surprisingly, when you help them, they want to help you.
- ◆ Get involved in organizations and activities where you can meet and interact with new people. Volunteer to take on more responsibility, and join the leadership if you have the opportunity and can do it. IMA® is a great place to start this process.
  - ◆ Make as many new contacts as you can. Train yourself to walk up to new people, introduce yourself, and begin conversations. Most people will be happy to tell you about themselves. You, too, must be willing to share information about yourself. Again, IMA offers the opportunity to become comfortable doing this.
  - ◆ Seek out people you find compelling, and discover where you share a common interest or value.
  - ◆ Don't be shy about approaching more senior people—they like to meet and get to know new people, too.
  - ◆ Be alert for those things your contacts value, such as business articles, sports teams, or new restaurants.
  - ◆ When you can, arrange to meet for breakfast, lunch, or dinner with your best contacts.
  - ◆ There's a reason why Outlook and other e-mail applications have information spaces for phone number, e-mail address, birthday, anniversary, spouse's name, assistant's name, and the like. The more you know about

someone, the more you'll be able to connect with them.

- ◆ Make phone calls, send e-mails or notes, or try something else for birthdays, anniversaries, sad occasions, and when you come across something about a contact that's worth noting. You need to care about people for them to care about you.

It has been my experience that a good network is a source of rich business and personal relationships. It's satisfying and worth the effort. A good network may also be the tool for your next opportunity.

I welcome your comments at [wknese@imanet.org](mailto:wknese@imanet.org). **SF**