



# CAREER VISION

## Taking the Work Out of Networking

You've probably never seen a bumper sticker that exclaims, "*I'd rather be networking!*" That's because few people associate networking with fun. Instead, we see it as one of those things we *have* to do for our careers.

Even the word "networking" sounds like a "work" thing, doesn't it? After all, "work" is right there — smack-dab in the middle of the term. But the reality is networking is *way bigger* than a "work" thing. It's a "life" thing.

Networking is all about *connecting with other people* — and each of us already does that every single day. Along with our need to eat, breathe, and run from danger to survive, we humans are hardwired to bond with others. So, when you view networking as an opportunity to connect with people, it becomes less about "work" and more about "life". Still not a believer? Ok...then consider this:

- At work today, did you ask a co-worker what they know about a recent change in regulations affecting your industry? If so, you were networking.
- As a college student looking to carpool, did you ask a classmate if she knows anyone who's driving to Springfield next weekend? Well, guess what? That's networking.

### Three Common Myths about Networking

Whether you're looking for a job, an internship, or a contact for an informational interview, networking is the key to accessing the information and resources needed for success. Therefore, learning how to build and engage your network effectively is a vital **Career Literacy™** skill. Once learned, networking becomes a way of "life" (rather than a "work" thing).

Yet, many people under-estimate the value of this skill. Worse yet, some dread *the very thought* of networking. Oftentimes this fear comes from misconceptions about the process. But, by separating fact from fiction and gaining a deeper understanding of what networking is (*and is not*), you can take the "work" out of networking.



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Here's a closer look at three common myths and the realities of networking:

- **Myth #1: The purpose of networking is to get a job.** No. Not true. By definition:

***Productive networking is the process of continually meeting new people in order to establish mutually-reciprocal, long-term relationships.***

So, while it's certainly true that effective networking can *ultimately* lead to a job offer (*and often does*), the offer is a by-product of networking. The primary goal of the process is to produce **mutually-beneficial relationships**. Simply put, networking is about *getting* and *giving* information.

- On the *getting* side, networking provides you with opportunities to increase your knowledge about the job market, careers, industry trends, and potential employers. Additionally, you can make others aware of your job / internship search and career focus. And, last but not least, networking can be a great way to uncover hidden job or internship opportunities.
- On the *giving* side, successful networkers put most of their focus on what they can give to the relationship (just as we all should). Research shows that the giving side of networking helps you shift your mindset from “*What’s in it for me?*” to “*How can I help?*”. From this vantage point, networking becomes less “self-promotional” and more “self-less”. In turn, networking isn’t “work”; it’s simply a normal part of “life”.

Whether interacting face-to-face or via social media, think broadly about what you can give when building your network. For example, a business lead or an email with a link to an article about an industry trend or a new business endeavor can go a long way in forging a long-lasting and mutually-beneficial professional relationship.

Networking is most effective when you:

- ✓ identify the ways in which your interests and goals align with those of the people you meet,
- ✓ actively listen to figure out what the others need,
- ✓ connect them with the people and / or information that can help them — *without any expectation of reciprocity*,



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- ✓ follow through on the commitments you've made to people in your network,
- ✓ and keep in touch.

(For more information: [Follow These Steps to Prepare for Your Next Networking Event.](#))

- **Myth #2: Networking is for extraverts.** If you're an extravert, perhaps you thrive on opportunities to interact with and meet new people. If you're an introvert, that's probably not on your top ten list of favorite things to do. No matter your personality type, though, it's important to realize that networking is more about listening than talking!

So, while it's good to set goals and have a plan when you attend formal networking events, don't lose too much sleep worrying about what you'll say to be *interesting*. It's just as important to be *interested*. As Dale Carnegie noted, "*You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years of trying to get people interested in you.*"

When networking, ask questions. Listen. Be present in the moment. If you show authentic interest in what others have to say about who they are and what they need, the people you meet will remember you; they will want to re-engage with you.

(For more information: [8 Career Networking Tips for Introverts.](#))

- **Myth #3: The only time you need to network is when you have to find a job.** Well, certainly you *should* network when you're looking for a job or internship (or exploring career options). In fact, *networking is the best way to find a job*. Mounds of research prove this. While survey results vary, it's estimated that up to 85% of all jobs are filled via networking.

Yet, keep in mind networking is the process of meeting new people and establishing reciprocal, long-term relationships. It's not a one-time event. As Ivan Misner, founder of business networking organization BNI, explains, "*Networking is more about farming than it is hunting.*" Rather than trying to hit your target with only one shot in the gun barrel, set your sights on cultivating relationships through the networking process instead. Think "long-term" and build your network *before* you need it!



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## The Unvarnished Truth

Truth be told, you're probably not going to run out and look for that "*I love networking*" bumper sticker any time soon (even after gaining a deeper appreciation for what networking is and is not). But, when you understand that the process *starts* with helping others and when you do your part to build and cultivate mutually-beneficial, long-lasting professional relationships, networking becomes less about "work" and more about "life".