

Networking

Here is an excerpt from a report I prepared as an expert witness (entitled *Overview of a Successful Job Search Campaign*) in a case in the E.D. of Virginia.

I have always recommended a multi-pronged, comprehensive approach to job seekers. The first step is to map out a job search plan. This requires the job seeker to identify the types of employers that appear to hold the most promise for a satisfying and successful new job. Here the candidate should reflect on which employers have, over the years, seemed like good places to work. This information can be self-gathered, come from friends and colleagues, news reports— really, from a wide variety of sources.

Next, the candidate will turn to the many research tools such as LinkedIn, Google or other search engines, and many directories available that list legal employers. A candidate should then start identifying those potential conduits of information on specific employers who would most likely have jobs they might want. The goal here is identifying those contacts, “warm” or “cold,” that could be in position to hire or likely possess knowledge of the types of jobs interesting and perhaps available to the job seeker.

Integral to a successful campaign is consistent and detailed documentation of all contacts made or employment opportunities pursued from day one of the process. This method of monitoring progress requires creation of a database or some type of tracking methodology. All significant contact exchanges should be recorded along with basic contact information, thereby making it easier to follow up with contacts as needed. An active daily campaign of phone calls, personal meetings, e mails and other communications in a two to four-hour period each day would end with a candidate summary of each interaction. This step is to document contact steps and avoid re-contacting those who seemed to offer no benefit and keep track of those with promise.

This methodology enables candidates to manage the ever-increasing number of contacts and not lose important information that might provide a link to the candidate’s next job. Once the process gets underway, the candidate should then have set up a tickler system to re-connect with those “warm” leads on a regular basis. People actually like to help others and this follow up is a thank you to those in the process who have given the candidate time and frequently useful information. This proven technique can extend the outreach effort to those that could end up identifying or offering a prospective new job(s).

Taking these connections or building on those made throughout one’s career is loosely called “networking.” I recommend that more than two third of all time spent job searching be put into this—whether in person, over the phone or through other types of communication. The essence is person-to-person contact with those who might hire or give information leading to that next job. As the job search plan unfolds and contacts in the network increase, building on these “networking” interactions is important.

The networking gold standard is collecting as much useful information (frequently through direct informational interviews) as possible. An informational interview is more of a low stress (by definition, because rarely would any job opportunity be on the line)

method to gain information that might lead to that new job. I recommend that candidates use this technique to search both specifically and broadly because it's impossible to know what steps will lead to satisfactory new employment. If you attend a talk or program, stay after and try to engage those speakers who brought out points you'd like to pursue. All speakers are interested in hearing how you liked what they said. Even if they have to leave quickly after their talk, get their business card and ask if you can follow up later. Most, if not all, will say yes.

I have conclusively found that networking is what every successful lawyer I have ever worked with or placed has done well. I have recommended this approach to many attorneys in my 25+ years in the legal search business and have been fortunate to frequently learn that a significant share have found their next job or subsequent jobs through this networking process. Other "prongs" in a well-rounded job search process include using recruiters, applying to job advertisements over the internet or in various publications and joining or becoming more active in relevant trade organizations. While the type of networking I describe above takes the most work; far and away, it also yields the most consistent results, frequently within a 6-12-month time frame.

I add below further comments from a consummate networker, Tom Ball, Senior Manager, Global Alliances & Resale Counsel at Accenture in Arlington, Virginia.

"I think by far the key concept (you mentioned) is the need for a commitment to regularly... follow up leads. Too many job seekers go to the extensive effort of attending attorney/counsel/company networking events (and by the way, the most productive tend to be those industry- or market focused functions with more business professionals than attorneys in attendance), getting outside their natural comfort zone and meeting new contacts, sharing their background, collecting business cards, and then ... doing nothing. The follow-up is critical!"

Equally important is identifying the "warmest" leads and focusing efforts and precious time on crafting a mutually-productive follow-up approach. For example, as an experienced corporate counsel, I never hesitate to offer my assistance (legal insights, advice, new-business introductions) to both revenue/salespeople and outside law firm counsel I meet. I've found that any sincere offer of assistance makes the contact "sticky" — in that it has immense potential to circle back as a "win-win" down the road, perhaps when least expected. In another sense, liken it to "sowing seeds" of future leads along the extended networking path.

Of course by the same token, the candidate — even in putting her or himself out there and offering to assist potential leads — must always be crystal-clear what he/she actually wants from those leads. That is, one's "elevator speech," the personal "brand" pitch, must always be polished and fresh; because one never knows when that lead will turn from "warm" to "hot." And this also is where, as you discuss, the candidate's upfront efforts to evaluate former positions in the context of current goals and desirable new jobs, companies and opportunities in the marketplace pays off. Otherwise, without this self-clarity and market awareness (ie., where I see myself as fitting within my target

market), it's all just networking for "networking's sake," without an endgame (and which can extend the 6-12-month process needlessly into years-long casting about).

On just two final notes, I'd also mention the importance of (i) actively researching and cultivating one's college and law school alumni networks; and (ii) seeking professional (including business) speaking and writing opportunities — as I've found these efforts to be invaluable resources to me throughout the years.