

**MAKING NETWORKING EASIER FOR JOB SEEKERS: A GUIDE**

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**INTRODUCTION**

Networking is considered the most effective way to find quality employment. Studies conducted by Dean Brake Morin (2004) on career choices and challenges of people in transition consistently showed that over 60% of job seekers find new jobs through networking. However, not everyone is skilled at networking. There are a variety of reasons why people don't network effectively.

Even though networking is the number one way to find a job, it is something that people are often uncomfortable doing. Reasons why people feel uncomfortable networking include fear of the unknown, cultural issues, family concerns about safety, and barriers related to disability—to name a few. This brief is designed to address the common reasons why people may not be comfortable networking and provide some possible solutions. It is geared toward anyone—including job developers, case managers, teachers, career counselors, and even friends and family—who is helping someone they know to find a job.

**NETWORKING: THE REAL DEFINITION**

Most individuals have people in their lives that they use as a resource. Sometimes these are people we already know, and sometimes these are people we meet along the way. Nevertheless, all people make connections at one time or another to find jobs and grow in their careers.

People network in different ways. In some cultures, networking with immediate community members such as friends, family, and neighbors comes naturally. In others, it is more appropriate to reach out to a more formal network involving professional organizations and business contacts.

**BARRIERS****The Fear Factor**

Many people find the process of networking awkward. They may not be sure how to start, they may be afraid of asking the wrong questions, or they may not be comfortable with the people they want to talk to.

**Solution:** The best way to get started is to help the job seekers you work with come up with a networking plan.

- **Step One:** Generate a list of people to network with. This list could include people in formal or informal networks. If a job seeker is very nervous about speaking to someone they don't know well, make it easier by having them start with someone they already know. Remind them that people are often willing to help, if they can, by talking about their jobs, how they got into their field of work, and suggestions they might have.
- **Step Two:** Once the job seeker has created a list of the people they are going to contact, help them write down what to say. Start by creating an introduction script. Have job seekers write down some positive things about themselves, what type of jobs they are interested in, and why they would like to speak to that particular person. Then create a list of possible questions to ask. These questions could include things like:

*“Tell me the best part of your job.”*

*“Do you have any suggestions for me about the best ways to look for a job?”*

*“Would you mind reading my resume and giving me some feedback?”*

- **Step Three:** To help job seekers get comfortable with networking, do a roleplay. Have the job seeker practice asking their networking questions with you or someone they know well and feel at ease with.

By creating a plan, writing a list of questions down, and practicing, job seekers can feel more confident about networking techniques.

## Lack of Knowledge of the Job Search Process

It can be difficult to find a job, and the process may require many steps. A person just starting out may not know all the steps involved in finding a job. Individuals with disabilities in particular may not have been in control of their own job search efforts. A job developer may have set them up with interviews in the past, or they may not have any prior work experience. Because networking often involves speaking to many different people, not all job seekers can see how it will help them find a job.

**Solution:** Empower job seekers to take control of the process. Help them come up with a list of people in their own networks to speak to about their job search. Then break the outreach into small steps, and help them identify how each person they speak to might be able to connect them to a job. Even people who may not be hiring can still be a positive connection. A network can be used in a variety of ways, such as reviewing resumes, practicing interview questions, and help with career exploration. Each person job seekers connect with brings them one step closer to a job.

## Lack of Confidence Speaking to People

In order to network effectively, job seekers must be able to speak positively about themselves and have a good idea of what they can offer to an employer. Some people with limited work histories may have concerns about discussing their skills. They may not know that the skills they have developed at home or at school can be useful in the workplace. Culture can sometimes play into this discomfort as well: People from a variety of diverse cultures may be afraid of seeming “boastful” or showing too much pride. Even people who have worked for years are sometimes shy. In short, for many reasons, some people do not know how to speak positively about themselves.

**Solution:** Help job seekers understand the difference between “bragging” and putting their best foot forward. Suggest that the job seeker think of networking as making a commercial for themselves. They are getting the word out about what a valuable employee they would be. Encourage them to think of themselves as having something special to offer employers. The only way the employer will know this information is to tell them.

Every person has particular traits or skills that help them stand out. Have the job seeker ask people who know them well to help identify what those hidden talents might be and come up with a list of positive things they can tell an employer. Traits such as punctuality, being a good team player, and having a strong work ethic can be demonstrated in a variety of ways. A person does not need to have a work history to be able to demonstrate success. Where have they done well? Have they excelled in school, on a team, or in a volunteer position?

Once the job seeker has a list of positive traits and skills, have them list specific examples to back the list up. For instance:

*“I am a people person... I helped my classmates raise money for our school trip by selling chocolate bars door to door.”*

*“I am a fast learner... I learned word processing software by using the tutorial.”*

By hearing positive things from people around them and knowing specific examples of things they do well, job seekers will gain confidence in their skills. As they network, they will become more comfortable speaking positively about themselves.

## Family Concerns

Family members can be very helpful in the networking and job search process. Many people find jobs through family connections. For some job seekers who have disabilities, however, family members can at times be a barrier. The family may want to protect the person with the disability, have concerns about work in general, or be worried about their family member speaking to new people.

**Solution:** Involve the family in the job search. Meet with them for an informal brainstorming session. During this session, allow family members to voice their concerns while keeping the focus on the career goals of the job seeker. Come up with strategies that will work for that particular job seeker. If family members seem overprotective, for instance, encourage them to come up with a list of people in their own networks that they know and feel comfortable with. This gives the job seeker more connections to positive people they can network with. Again, be sensitive to cultural differences.

## Cultural Issues

In some cultures unemployment and/or disability is perceived as a source of shame. It might not be seen as appropriate to network in the family circle.

**Solution:** Use formal networking strategies such as visiting a One-Stop Career Center, going to job fairs, and relying on professional contacts such as job developers, caseworkers, therapists, former co-workers, and the like. By using a more formal approach to networking, the family will be less involved, but the process may also be viewed as more professional.

## Lack of a Network

Some people naturally have a broader network than others. A recent immigrant or someone new to the area may need to build their network. This is also true for people who may have had negative people in their lives due to addiction or recovery issues. Some job seekers may need help to establish new connections.

**Solution:** A great way to network, learn about a career, and make connections with employers is to go on informational interviews. An informational interview gives job seekers the chance to speak with someone who works in a field that interests the job seeker. Unlike a traditional interview, the goal of the informational interview is to gather information. This means that job seekers have the opportunity to ask questions.

Many people are willing to share their experiences with someone who is interested. Formal and informal networks can be used to set up an informational interview. Because the job seeker is not asking to be hired, only to learn about the job, it is a more relaxed way to make a connection within a company.

## CONCLUSION

These are only a few techniques to help make networking easier. Like all things, networking gets easier and better with practice. By using the connections they already have and establishing new ones, job seekers can move closer to finding quality jobs.

### Questions Job Seekers Can Ask on an Informational Interview

- Can you tell me more about this company?
- What do you do at this company?
- What is the best part of your job?
- What type of education or training is necessary to do this type of job?
- How did you get your position?
- What other types of jobs are there at this company?
- How do you apply for a job at this company?
- Can you look at my resume and give me feedback on it?

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*This is a publication of the Making Connections project at the Institute for Community Inclusion, UMass Boston, funded by grant #90DN0083 from the Administration on Developmental Disabilities, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Additional support was provided by cooperative agreement #90DN0204 from the Administration on Developmental Disabilities. Points of view or opinions do not necessarily represent official Administration on Developmental Disabilities policy.*

## **Institute Brief series: Making Networking Easier for Job Seekers: A Guide (Issue 20)**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Special thanks to our partners: Dr. Renald Raphael and Micheline Jean-Baptiste at Haitian American Public Health Initiatives; Dr. Jean-Claude Gerlus and Tammy Parker at the Dunbar Community Center; Veronica Nielsen and Bob Schueler at Casa Primavera; and Dora Robinson, Denise Stewart, Larry Leak, and Rocky Slaughter at Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Center. Thanks also go to our colleagues at ICI: Meredith Aalto, Cecilia Gandolfo, and Deborah Metzel.

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