

GET THE JOB

Leveraging your Network

Many job opportunities don't begin in the help wanted pages or on an employment website, but through conversations with your peers.

The vast majority of open positions, in fact, are never even publicized. Instead, they're filled through recommendations from managers and other influencers in the field. Call this area of the economy the "hidden jobs market."

If you're not participating in it, you're missing out on more than half of the potential employment opportunities out there. Here are some tips on building and maintaining a network that will take your job search into this increasingly critical area.

KNOW THE HIDDEN JOBS MARKET

You may find that seeking employment in the traditional manner – that is, setting up in-person interviews, using common marketing mediums or responding to posted openings – isn't getting the same traction that it used to. That means it's time to try something different. After all, experts say only 40% of these openings are ever advertised,



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leaving the rest to people who leveraged their peer network. The benefits go beyond landing a new position. The job retention rate is higher for those who network, since they are part of a tighter-knit team. They also tend to start at a higher pay rate, meaning the average annual income for referred employees remains higher throughout the time of the job.

RECONNECT WITH FORMER PEERS

Touching base again with previous bosses and co-workers is often the best first step, since they're most familiar with your skills and work habits. Of course, this can also turn into an awkward conversation since you may be asking for a recommendation letter or referral from someone you haven't spoken to in

years. That's why it's best to begin the conversation in a more casual manner, sending a request to connect on social media or short email seeking to catch up. Don't begin by discussing the job. Instead, ask how you may be able to help network on their behalf, and then see if there's a way for the two of you to benefit one another. Study what they do, and how their operation

functions. Present a new solution to a business need, and they may see you in a whole different light.

MAKE NEW CONNECTIONS

This is the most time-consuming part of leveraging your network. Sometimes a job opening represents an opportunity to move far away from your previous circle of peers. Other times, you might be interested in an entirely new field. In either case, you'll have to begin building a new network of contacts. This process isn't difficult, but requires time and consistent effort if you're going to do it well. Start by taking advantage of professional outlets like LinkedIn, then update your résumé and related accomplishments. Connect with people who share your career goals. Attend in-person or online job fairs and conventions, where you can make scores of new contacts in the real world that then translate into wider online opportunities. Bring a unique business card with all of your contact information along with you. And start plenty of conversations about your vision for work, successful job strategies and other related ideas, in person and on the web. You never know what might draw peers' interest.