

This newsletter was written by Debra Feldman, who has contributed to TENG newsletters in the past. She provides executive job searching services and you will find her brief profile at the end of this article.

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HIDDEN JOB MARKET SECRETS

Networking Boot Camp: Start Connecting before You Need a Job!

By Debra Feldman, the JobWhiz

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Most executives start looking through their contact database and reviewing their relationships with a critical eye for potential job leads when they need an introduction to power an ASAP job search campaign. Contrary to popular practice, the best time for leveraging your business contacts and to obtain access to potential openings is not when you are in transition or about to start an active job search campaign. Rather smart professionals are constantly on the lookout, keeping their ears open and ready to give advice as well as ask for help on a continuous basis. More importantly, by staying in touch with key decision makers and on the radar of hiring managers, everyone can be among the few “lucky” associates whose name is brought up as a candidate among their colleagues. Those with strong networking skills are always keeping in touch, sharing information and initiating ideas and reaching out, giving generously to an increasingly larger number of business associates. The payback: being among the first insiders to learn about a vacancy, new posting, restructuring or similar circumstance at a company that could be their next career opportunity.

How can you alter lazy networking habits? Pull up your bootstraps now and launch into Network Purposefully™ mode! Not only will developing fresh, targeted contacts and regularly renewing existing ones boost current job search efforts, but such activities also establish a lifetime foundation of employment insurance by putting you in touch with future opportunities that only those who are “connected” know. Best piece of advice for being a successful networker? Engineer your contacts and offer assistance even before you are asked and even when you are not looking for a new job!

A January 2006 study from CareerXRoads authored by Gerry Crispin and Mark Mehler shows that employee referrals is the number one external source for filling openings, eclipsing online and print ads, outside recruiters and all other means. Now more than ever, executives must be hooked into company rumor mills through periodically communicating with their personal network of contacts to be among the first to spot leads to new career opportunities. Employee referrals are useful for sourcing both posted jobs and those that have yet to be officially sanctioned, created in response to a quality person being in the right place at the right time and other

unadvertised openings that result from restructurings, new growth, transfers, unexpected resignations, retirements, pending project, etc. The hidden job market, or unadvertised job market, continues to thrive in today's environment generating way more new hires than the Internet and other posted openings.

How do these insights impact your executive career management? It is *not just what you know but,..... who you know and knows your potential contribution* that matters most. Here are some ideas for jumpstarting your network's healthy development and making more and better connections purposefully.

1. **Expand beyond your comfort zone and reach out to those you don't already know.** If the individuals that you keep in touch with on a regular basis are not producing enough high quality referrals, do not wait for things to change. This is your signal that it is time to stretch your connections by finding more individuals to reach out to and get to know.
2. **Choose your connections for their affiliations, reputations and position.** Prepare an introduction that can be passed along detailing how you can resolve challenges and ask your contact to forward your request for an introduction. Brand yourself clearly as a go-to person so that whenever anyone requests a referral to talent matching your credentials, you are the first person that pops into their mind as the right solution and the ideal candidate.
3. **Rely on third party referrals to bypass gatekeepers and increase your credibility and build up trust.** Research who you want to know and ask your contacts about using their connections to get you introduced. A personal recommendation is usually more warmly received than an unsolicited letter, email or call.
4. **Dialogue with decision makers, not HR, at target employers** to unearth unadvertised jobs and position yourself on the right person's radar for when something more appropriate becomes available. Making an outstanding first impression not only puts your name in play now, but hiring managers are also networked and can connect you to their colleagues elsewhere, further enlarging your reach into other organizations via a personal recommendation.
5. **Choose and nurture your target contacts** purposefully for their potential value to your job search and your career's future. While you may tend to focus on establishing those connections that will yield the new job you need now, any new, well-placed contact is likely to eventually deliver. Oftentimes after a dormant period, candidates will start being contacted out of the blue because one thing is certain: organizations and people are dynamic. Even if someone is not helpful, send a gracious and prompt thank you; you never know how small the world is and you want to maintain an unblemished reputation for being polite and professional. When you have a positive rapport, continue to keep in touch. You made the effort to network purposefully, don't sacrifice your investment after you happily land a new job.
6. **Increase your online visibility.** It is easier than ever before to create a web presence, support your positioning and get in front of recruiters and hiring managers by publishing your bio on one of the online social networks like Linked-In or zoominfo. Post your resume or profile on niche job sites where you are more likely to be viewed by those in your target audience. Niche career sites and professional associations' databases are more likely than general job boards to generate interest and new connections you can leverage in the future. Invest in your own professionally designed website and

- let it boast about your strengths, abilities, talents, skills and accomplishments and demonstrate your credibility. Make sure you can be found to fill employers' needs by posting yourself on the corporate databases of your target employers—most company websites today have a careers feature where you can upload your background.
7. **Promote yourself as an expert.** Join professional associations, attend local chapter events and assume a leadership role. Volunteer to present at professional meetings or be part of a panel discussion or virtual workshop. Publish a white paper on your personal website or elsewhere. Submit an original manuscript to a reputable firm, online or traditional media. Post comments selectively and routinely follow online networking group e-lists, chats, etc to keep on top of industry happenings, demonstrate your knowledge and invite inquiries and recognition. Write letters to editors and send comments to authors.
 8. **Keep in touch regularly and remember to give more help than you ask for!** Email your contacts to update them on industry news or a mutual colleague's achievement, send them your articles and announcements, share thoughts of common interest or a link, celebrate special occasions and honor their birthdays, the New Year, etc.

Using today's inexpensive and easy communication options, any one can apply themselves purposefully in regular networking initiatives and create and maintain their visibility to attract prospective new connections. Coupled with a strategic career plan that emphasizes opportunities in the hidden job market, being a sincere and champion networker is an essential component for success.

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CONTACT: Debra Feldman

E: DebraFeldman@JobWhiz.com

Debra Feldman is the JobWhiz™, a nationally-recognized expert who designs and personally implements swift, strategic, and customized senior level executive job search campaigns, banishing barriers that prevent immediate success. Network Purposefully™ with the JobWhiz, and compress your job search into mere weeks, using techniques profiled in *Forbes* magazine. In addition to her private practice, writing featured columns and conducting exclusive workshops, Debra is a recommended resource to alumni of top-tier business schools. Contact Debra @ www.JobWhiz.com to expedite your executive ascent.

Ed Pospesil
Chairman
Technology Executives Networking Group LLC
<http://www.theteng.org>
President
Edward J. Pospesil & Company
Information Technology Executive Search
221 Driftwood Lane
Guilford, CT 06437-1922
www.ejp.com
Voice: 203-458-6566
Fax: 203-458-6564

Mobile: 203-640-1580

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