

## Seven networking strategies

By Eli Amdur

As networking has become more and more of a factor in your career – it is now the way a little over than half the jobs in America are secured – it’s time to devote more time not only to doing it, but to thinking about it.

Like anything else, thought should precede action, but for some reason, we tend to forget that too often. So, about as fast as someone can say “let’s network,” everybody’s running around doing busy-type stuff – making a flood of phone calls, sending out more invitations on LinkedIn, joining groups, and so on – and thinking they’re doing a good job of networking.

Without good networking strategies, though, all that activity will make you very busy but not necessarily more well-connected. Once again, the words of Sun Tzu, 4<sup>th</sup> century BC Chinese military strategist, ring true. In *The Art of War*, he said, “Victorious warriors win first and then go to war, while defeated warriors go to war and then seek to win.” Twenty-five hundred years later, nothing’s changed.

The subject of networking comes up in virtually every coaching session and every workshop I do, so I can tell you that, while almost everybody agrees on the importance, few have thought it out sufficiently. So, with Sun Tzu looking over our shoulders, let’s win first and then go to war.

**Strategy #1: Identify and use all resources.** Your network is a lot larger than you think. If you don’t, it’s because either you haven’t sat down and made a list of who’s in your network, or you haven’t worked your network well enough, or both. So start by making lists, six of them, in fact: friends, family, friends of family, family of friends, contacts I didn’t know I had (these are the people we encounter when we think we’re not networking – like in church, at PTA meetings, or while volunteering), and contacts I’d like to have (this is your first target list). Keep these lists forever, and never delete anyone from them.

**Strategy #2: Join and go.** It’s extremely important to belong to affinity groups like your alumni association, industry association(s), professional association(s), and civic group(s). Now that you’ve done that, go to the meetings! These are exceptional networking events.

**Strategy #3: Never break the chain.** Networking is not a bunch of on again/off again, irregular, spasmodic, reactions. It is a proactive method of job seeking and career management and development in which you have take control. The only way it works is when it’s a continuous flow. Networking is not a sequence of events; it’s a state of mind, a way of life. In that vein, one of the rules I live by is that anyone who is central to my network hears from me a minimum of twice a year, even if it’s only to say hello or I’ve been thinking about you. Another unbroken chain rule is that while you always add to your lists, you never delete a name. Ever. Because you never know.

**Strategy #4: Help first, get help next.** Networking is about building relationships, and the best relationships are symbiotic, helping both participants. The way to get a relationship off to a good start is to be the first to help. Reach out. Make introductions that can help two other people help each other. Volunteer. Refer people to each other and to organizations. In other words, build your good will. And if you’re thinking, “But what’s in it for me at first?” you may as well stop reading right here.

**Strategy #5: Fill your tool bag.** Aside from a good attitude and professional appearance at all times, you should always have – for immediate use – your 15-second elevator speech which must be well thought out, well-rehearsed, smooth, and memorable; your personal business card which

needs only your name, what you do, how to get in touch with you, and any affinity groups that matter; your resume and a one page profile in hard copy, on a flash drive, and attached to your email that you've sent to yourself that you can open anytime, anywhere; and your list of references. Keep your tool bag full at all times.

**Strategy #6: Think big and think small.** It's not just the "big dog" that can help you. Obsequious people (those who kiss up and kick down) are not good networkers; they're users, and condescending ones at that. It's amazing how much help any one person can be to you, if you look at it that way. And if we're bluntly honest with ourselves, we'll all agree that we, too, are all small players – small fish in a big pond – but we can be big to those we wish to help. The bottom line is that you never know who can help you.

**Strategy #7: Go for quality, not quantity.** It's not that a big network is a bad thing. After almost 64 years on this planet, my six lists (see Strategy #1) have almost 1,800 names. But what I concentrate on most is the quality of the contacts. There's no contest between quality and quantity. Quality wins every time.

If you will employ these seven strategies first – before just jumping into action – you will become a good – or in some cases, better – networker. And given the fact that over half the jobs in America are now secured through networking, it's not a bad idea.