

Find a Job with Massive, Structured Networking

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by Bill Barnett

Whether you're searching for your first job, considering a career change, or seeking opportunities while unemployed, finding a job can be one of the toughest challenges you ever face. How should you conduct a job search?

You start with a personal value proposition (PVP). Your PVP is the target position and why you're right for that position. Even with a strong PVP, however, attractive opportunities won't land on your doorstep. You must go out and find them. That's the hard part.

The best source of possible jobs is **networking**. The way to succeed at networking is to reach out broadly to people who can help. The way to fail is to limit your contacts to the few people you know well. Massive outreach is the only reliable path to victory.

Frederick (names have been changed) showcases structured outreach. He left the company where he was COO after a disagreement with the founder. From his twenty years in the industry, he had close professional friends and many contacts. He made the most of this network:

"It's a question of how many people I'm touching each week. It takes wide outreach. Discussions to possibilities to offers. I keep an Excel spreadsheet: name, location, industry, prior career, and intensity of relationship. Each week I touch 50 people and score the quality of touch from one to seven. Is it an email or a meeting? If I touch 50 a week and score 150 a week, then I was going to get a job whether it's three months or six months."

No kidding. Frederick was communicating with 50 people a week through a large number of emails, a smaller number of phone calls, and some in-person meetings. Frederick asked about possibilities at his contact's company. He asked broader questions about the industry outlook and who else to meet. This led to several opportunities. After four months, he accepted an attractive offer.

Management consultant Isabel provides another example of an active job search. She targeted three fields and built a list of people to contact by talking to her consulting colleagues and from alumni data bases at her two universities. She added relevant search firm contacts. She used a spreadsheet like Frederick's. She emphasized learning from interviews:

"I had forty or fifty conversations. Thirty-five were informational. I was talking to anyone who seemed close to being relevant. What do you do? What do you like? I was willing to explore any option in my target areas, in some cases if only to learn."

The more she heard, the more she learned. Insights from earlier meetings helped her ask better questions later. She dropped one of her target industries once she realized it didn't match her objectives. People suggested others to contact. Isabel found two good opportunities in three months.

Active outreach isn't easy. It takes commitment and organization. But it is absolutely essential. Take these six steps:

1. **Broadly define your network.** Most people don't realize how many contacts they have. They talk to close friends, but stop there. Consider former classmates, colleagues from earlier employers,

business relationships outside your institution, and civic acquaintances. People will be flattered. Few will get to Frederick's scale, but be as broad as you can. Even 23-year-old Sarah who thought she didn't have a professional network was able to have quality in-person meetings every week and additional contacts by phone or email. Massive outreach is best practice.

2. Create a new network along the way. Ask people who else to call. Imagine people you don't know who are relevant to your search. Cold call them.

3. View discussions as learning opportunities, not just job inquiries. Ask about more than jobs. Ask about the industry, how to succeed, and how to position yourself. Approaching these meetings as conversations breaks the ice. It's disarming. What you learn may lead you to shift your target, like Isabel did, or change the way you present yourself.

4. Contact people in different ways. Contact your close professional friends in whatever way is most comfortable. For more distant acquaintances and certainly for people you're trying to meet, the best path usually will be an email or a letter, followed up with a phone call, and then hopefully a meeting. Buy coffee or lunch. After a substantive discussion, send a thank-you email or letter. As time passes, go back to people with an update on what you're learning and follow-up questions.

5. Be systematic with good record keeping. Staying on top of broad outreach is complicated. After each meeting, write down what you learned and what you'll do as a result. Frederick's spreadsheet and scoring methodology to gauge progress is one excellent example.

6. Periodically evaluate your progress and whether to change the approach. View this as conducting a study. Review your notes from different meetings. Look for patterns. Are there better ways to move in the direction you've selected? Are there reasons to shift direction, to change your PVP? You may benefit from confiding in a friend or a spouse, but even if you don't have the right discussion partner, "meet" with yourself.

Massive, structured outreach is the best way to find new opportunities. How do you leverage your network?