

WHY NETWORK WHEN YOU HAVE A JOB?

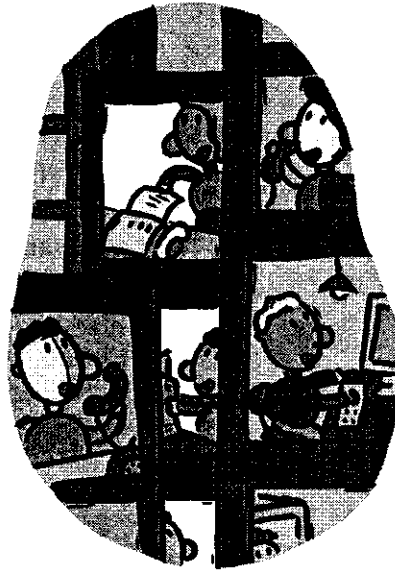
By Jean Baur

In my position as a career counselor with Lee Hecht Harrison, I meet people who realize in the crisis of job loss, that their network has dried up--that they're starting from zero. When your position is eliminated, the need for networking is clear, but what about networking when you're working? Why do it and what are realistic ways to make it happen?

First why: job security is often defined as knowing how to look for a job, and since networking is a critical way to use referrals to develop contacts at target companies, keeping this skill active can make a search productive from the start. Other reasons to network: to keep current in your field and learn about trends, to show you're investing in your profession and make yourself more promotable, to stay fresh and prevent burnout, and to find opportunities to mentor or help others.

So what are realistic ways to make networking part of your life when you're working and probably balancing other responsibilities as well?

1. Join professional associations such as SHRM, ASTD, Toast Masters, etc. Even if you can't attend monthly meetings on a regular basis, you'll have access to the membership directory and other services provided by the association.
2. Set aside 15 minutes a week to nurture your network. One client of mine blocked out this short amount of time on his calendar each Friday (from his lunch hour) and focused on what he needed to do to stay connected. He updated his resume, called a former co-worker or other contact, set up a networking lunch, checked his professional association for classes, seminars or meetings, helped someone in transition, updated his networking spreadsheet, etc.
3. Make networking fun. If you're a Starbucks fan, meet a contact over a latte, or if you love football, invite a friend to a game or strike up a conversation with someone at the stadium. One CPA client of mine was wild about horses and



4. Understand what networking is, and what it's not. It's not cold calling or bothering people. It's reaching out in whatever way works for you (email is just fine) to let others share in a process, whether that is looking for a new job, finding a great place to take a vacation, or simply staying in touch with others so that when you need their help, they haven't forgotten about you.
5. Use technology to make networking easy. LinkedIn, an e-business networking tool, is a fantastic way for those of us with busy lives to both stay in touch with our network and to expand it.
6. Send e-cards over the holidays or to announce special news.

Remember two things: networking (once you get past your own initial resistance) will make you feel better, and it's fine to ask for help if you're struggling with it. If you're reluctant to attend a professional association for example, take a friend or co-worker. Introduce yourself to someone at the meeting who is standing on the sidelines. And keep in mind that networking is something we all do a bit differently. When my son was about nine years old and we used to walk our dog together in the neighborhood, he would say to me: "Mom, can you please not mingle?"

This made me laugh as my style of networking falls into the category of: if it breathes, talk to it, while my son, a classic introvert, is more selective and only talks to others when there's an obvious connection. And it's fine that we do this differently—just make sure you're doing it as the rewards greatly outweigh the effort.

Jean Baur is a Senior Consultant with Lee Hecht Harrison in Princeton, New Jersey. She is currently working on a book about how to survive the emotional side of job loss. For details on her book and her other writing, visit: www.JeanBaur.com.

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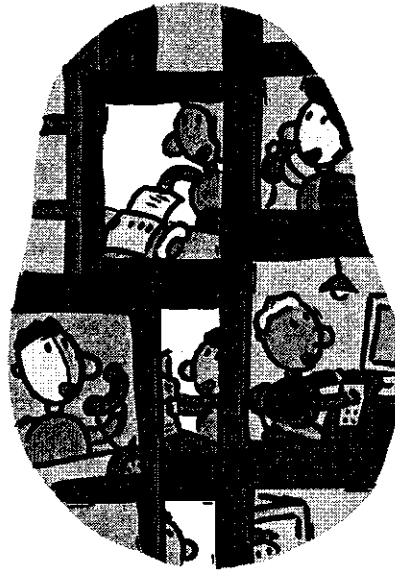
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4. rode several times a week. Her connections at the stable turned into solid job leads.
4. Understand what networking is, and what it's not. It's not cold calling or bothering people. It's reaching out in whatever way works for you (email is just fine) to let others share in a process, whether that is looking for a new job, finding a great place to take a vacation, or simply staying in touch with others so that when you need their help, they haven't forgotten about you.
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