

## **Networking Letters 101**

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No matter what field you're in, a successful career is built on human relationships. Your job search will be much more effective if you connect with and expand your network of contacts rather than just respond to job ads. Thousands of positions are created and filled without ever being advertised. A networking letter will help you uncover these hidden job opportunities.

### **What Is a Networking Letter?**

This job-hunting tool lets you reach out to friends, friends of friends and professional contacts, asking for job leads, career advice, referrals and introductions. The letter's focus is not to ask your contacts for a job, but to request their assistance in your job search by connecting you with people or opportunities.

### **Who to Target?**

To tap into your network and create job leads, consider all these sources: friends, your spouse or significant other's friends, current or former coworkers and supervisors, professionals you have met through online networking sites, associations (alumni, civic and professional organizations), clergy, nonprofit organizations, customers/clients, vendors, teachers and classmates.

You may even consider distant acquaintances as part of your networking campaign -- someone you met at a lecture, tradeshow or seminar might be willing to assist you. Or someone you have met online through professional networking sites like Monster Networking.

### **The Fundamentals**

**Be Friendly:** The tone of a networking letter is casual and professional.

If you don't know the person well or it's been a while since you last spoke, refresh his memory in the first paragraph:

Dear Mr. Jones:

I attended your "Effective Merchandising Techniques" presentation last Friday and introduced myself to you following your lecture. Your speech was very informative, and your examples were extremely enlightening; I left with a number of new ideas.

If you know the person you are writing to well, you should punctuate your opening with a comma instead of a colon for a warmer, less formal tone:

Dear Ginger,

I am in the process of a job change following my former employer's Chapter 11 filing. I am writing to college friends whose opinions, insights and advice I value.

**Have a Message:** To be effective, a networking letter must do more than communicate that you are job searching. It needs to provide a brief summary of key strengths you bring to the table and include a few examples of ways you benefited your employers -- such as saving money, generating revenue, increasing efficiency and improving service.

**Respect the Reader's Time:** Be concise. Your reader is busy and doing you a favor -- don't drone on and on. Whether you are looking for job leads or seeking professional advice, be positive and upbeat in your letter. Ask for the reader's help, showcase your strengths and express your thanks.

**Ask for Leads and Information:** Don't be afraid to ask for help. Here's an example:

I would be very grateful for your review of my enclosed resume. If you know of anyone who might be looking for someone with my background, please contact me at (555) 555-5555. Or if you have any suggestions as to where I should direct my search, I would appreciate your input and advice.

**Keep Networking:** Keep in touch with your network of contacts, even when you are not searching for a job. If someone has helped you, express your gratitude and return the favor if possible. Your diligence in using networking letters will pay off in your current and future job search.

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