

Jill Career Wise Column  
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### The Job Seeker's Toolkit: Networking

When job seekers are many and available jobs are few, the competition is fierce. We've all heard the conventional wisdom, "it's not about what you know; it's about who you know." In today's tough job market this has never been more true.

Consider the perspective of the overworked hiring manager or human resources professional charged with reviewing incoming applications. These piles of shiny new applicant resumes are now at least twice as high as they were this time last year, making it even more time consuming to find the right person for the job.

If it were your job to hire a new employee, wouldn't you welcome a short-cut to finding the perfect candidate? This is where networking can make a big difference to your job search. Consider two similar job seekers, Mary and Susan. Both are experienced bank tellers, looking for a new position with a bank in town. Both women saw a job opening at Anytown Bank and sent their freshly prepared resumes. On Monday, Susan stopped by Anytown Bank to check on her application where she was told they were already in the process of interviewing. Mary's sister-in-law Sara works at Anytown Bank, so Mary gave Sara a copy of her resume and explained how much she wanted this position. Sara took Mary's resume to her Manager at the bank on Tuesday. With Sara's referral, Mary was granted an interview.

This simple story is played out over and over again in hiring circles. While it might seem unfair, it is a reality. Mary got the interview because Sara was willing to put her professional reputation on the line to recommend her. Sara gave the Hiring Manager just enough reason to believe that selecting Mary to interview would be a good choice.

If you have a small family or are new in town, don't fret. While it is helpful to know someone on the inside of the company you are interested in working for, it is not necessary. Networking is the key to unlocking other ways to exert outside influence to get your application to the top of the pile.

The real power of networking comes even before an open position is posted. After you've developed a small army of professional contacts and prepared them for battle with a summary of your skills and abilities (if this sounds like a resume, you're on the right track...), they can serve as a kind of radar for you to uncover the hidden job market.

Jobs in the hidden job market are accessible only through your contacts. As an example, take another look at Anytown Bank. John Johnston has just announced that he plans to retire at the end of the year. Everyone inside the bank has congratulated him, saying it will be hard to replace him. Eventually, he will be replaced, but it will probably be months before the position appears on a job board. Job seekers, this is your window of

opportunity that your networking contacts can help you tap into. Temporary positions can be uncovered in the same way, as people take leave for health reasons or to care for family members.

At first glance this may seem a bit cold, like hiding in the bushes waiting to pounce on a job while the person's seat is still warm. On the other hand, you could be saving the hiring manager time and money by circumventing the hiring process altogether. After all, hiring a new employee costs money, and includes countless hours of time spent sifting through job applicants and conducting interviews.

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