

Networking is skill that needs to be mastered, but always tactfully

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As you know, I believe networking is a year-round activity. We are always networking -- formally or informally -- and I often reference two types of networks, the "cultivated" and the "fly by" network contact.

When you think of an insect that flies around your head or buzzes in your ear, it is annoying. This flying insect is one that you tend to swat away. When you encounter an individual who is not respectful of your personal space or in your face too soon, then this individual is more annoying than valuable. This networker for the receiver is a "fly by" contact that is not typically maintained.

On the other hand, the cultivated networker understands that relationships take time to develop. They will engage someone and continue to bring a value proposition to the table. There is typically a value exchange between the networker and the receiver. There is a solid reason to come back together and reconnect over and over again.

Why bother networking? In this tight job market, your reputation will precede you if you have worked in an industry or field for some time. So think about your reputation -- who are you, what consistencies does your story have, how do people perceive you based on your history of interactions with them?

Our presence and style provide a window into who we are and who we want to be. Our social identity or reputation is based on perception -- social interactions that happen in person, on social networking sites and by others who talk about us when we are not there. This identity determines how others interact with us.

When one is in a transitional phase, such as a job search, there is often a need for coaching to maintain a reasonable state of emotional well-being. This is often ignored when we are going through the mechanics of our search process. It is often difficult to have the wisdom to know when to engage and when to step back.

If you are still harboring strong emotions from being laid off, do not let these emotions (anger, frustration, disappointment, etc.) show when you need to be at the top of your selling game. Awareness is so key when launching one's transition plans. If your head isn't in the right space, then you typically will not be successful in your networking.

Recently, I was asked, "Is it ever okay to contact someone you don't know directly and ask if there are any jobs at the company?"

The standard advice is to ask for an informational interview. A growing number of people, however, believe you should just come out and ask about job opportunities because everyone these days knows the informational interview is just a ploy to get a job.

I believe the answer to this question lies in the art of networking. Do you want to cultivate your contact or create a fly by, limited relationship? Think about why you want to make contact. Transparency is one thing, but possibly putting someone on the spot is another.

When asking for a job straight out, it can cause an awkward reaction on the receiving end. Another way is to develop a relationship over time so the individual wants to refer you on their own.

A more creative technique is to understand the company you are targeting, identify needs they may have, and pitch an idea to your new contact. Depending on what is happening with this individual, he/she may be nervous about changes going on within his/her company and he/she may be looking for new ideas.

The pitch may help the individual in their position. You can also use this technique in a follow-up thank you message.

As you continue to develop the relationship, finding ways to remain on the contact's radar screen is helpful. Consider sending an article or reference something related to your meeting. Understanding their role within the company can help you add value in this new developing relationship. Think creatively.

Thinking outside of the box can be challenging. A certified executive and career coach can be instrumental in guiding you in your efforts to gain a new perspective.

I invite you to send your comments and questions to lisa@chenofskysinger.com.

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