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## I HATE TO BUG YOU, BUT . . . SIX NETWORKING NO-NOS

Getting out there is important, but doing it badly can do more harm than good

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One piece of job-hunting advice you'll hear over and over again is that you have to network to land a gig. Unfortunately, networking isn't easy for everyone and doing it badly can cause more harm than good.

So what is networking exactly?

"The exchange of information or services among individuals, groups, or institutions; specifically: the cultivation of productive relationships for employment or business," according to Merriam-Webster.

The key part of the definition is the word "exchange." Too often people think networking means you just harass people until they give you a job or help you make a connection. But browbeating your LinkedIn connections into getting you a job, for example, won't get you much job-hunting honey.

"Do not monopolize the conversation [by talking] about your career needs," stressed Thom Singer, author of "The ABC's of Networking." Instead, find out what your contact needs, Singer added. "You might know the person who can help them solve their biggest challenge, but if you are not asking questions, and listening to their answers, you will not even know you can help."

Networking is all about helping each other. For those networking novices out there who need a bit of help, here are six networking no-nos from hiring managers, human resource pros and people who are often hit up by networkers:

### **1. Don't be an amateur**

Networking is a bit more laid back than an actual job interview, but that doesn't mean you should leave professionalism at the door.

"One of my job-networking pet peeves is the style of communication that people use when networking to get a job," said Kurt Ronn, president and founder of national recruitment firm HRworks.

Good grammar and spelling should not go out the window. Texting in incomplete, hard-to-figure-out sentences, poor punctuation, and random capitalization, he said, "is too personal" and "should be left to social networking and texting friends. Networking for a career needs to stay in the realm of corporate communication."

### **2. The fake informational interview**

An informational interview is one of the greatest networking tools. It helps open doors and also helps you figure out if a job, a company or an industry is right for you.

The key to such an interview is to make it seem like you're not looking for a particular job, but you're just doing some exploratory research and want to sit down with a hiring manager or a contact to find out what a person in a particular position does.

People sometimes want to pull a fast one, though, and that's a big no-no, said Steve Langerud, a workplace consultant and director of professional opportunities at DePauw University. "In good times this is a benign game. In times like this it is an annoying and sometimes sad conversation," he said.

Many of the employers Langerud works with are open to informational interviews and they are open to job interviews. "Just be honest. The bait and switch game is just annoying," he explained.

### **3. The two-timer**

Networking is about making a connection with one person at a time, not 100 people. How do you expect to nurture a relationship with someone and get her to help you if she thinks you see her as just one person on a long list of contacts?

"I don't like getting what looks like a personal message that turns out to be (one sent) to the universe," said Steven J. Elliott, tax director for Schwartz & Company in Bellmore, N.Y. And not every person out there is a potential networking source, even though social media sites such as LinkedIn and Twitter make us think so.

“LinkedIn and other social media tools are not like a phone book,” said author Singer. “You would not take all the phone books from Los Angeles County and tell people you have 10 million people in your network ‘hey, you have their phone numbers, you could call any of them.’ Thus linking to strangers makes your social media not better than a phone book.”

#### **4. Ingrates don’t rate**

There’s nothing worse than taking your connections for granted.

The one thing Mary Ann Gontin, managing partner for talent management firm OI Partners in Danbury, Conn., hates is “people who don’t say thank you. I give of my time, knowledge, information, contacts, etc., and there are people who don’t call or write to say thank you.”

She also doesn’t like it when she offers help and never hears from the person, that is until they need help, again. “Everyone can afford to make a call or send a note or e-mail to say thank you,” she said. “If possible, people should offer to buy you lunch or find some way to show appreciation. Most of us in this field are more than willing to help so many people, but we would like our time and talent to be recognized and appreciated.”

#### **5. No sob stories**

Many of us are desperate to find work in this economy, so it’s totally understandable if your personal and financial lives are in turmoil.

That said, don’t dump this on your networking contacts, and don’t tweet or Facebook that stuff either. It’s not that people won’t be understanding or sympathetic, but human nature makes us gravitate to people who seem to have things together and don’t seem hopeless.

“It is never okay to beg for a job,” said Joe Kran, a managing partner with OI Partners in Parsippany, N.J. And he doesn’t want to hear about how bad your situation is, whether it’s your marriage, your finances or your former employer.

That doesn’t mean you should keep the conversation formal, especially if a friend or connection asks you about how you’re doing, experts advised, because that builds a good relationship. Just don’t go overboard and keep complaints to a minimum.

## 6. Beware stalking

There's this feeling out there that you should do just about anything to get your foot in the door, but that doesn't mean you should ambush people in public, at their office, or on the Web.

"Do not approach me at lunch," said Matt Murray, founder of SwarmJobs.com, a job site for young professionals. "No one likes to interview with spaghetti hanging out of their mouth."

Same goes for cyberspace. I see lots of people on Twitter publicly asking other tweeters if they can send them a resume, or asking them to connect them to someone they know. That's why Murray said he hides his connections on LinkedIn from public view. He doesn't want a bunch of people hitting them up for jobs or job leads.

And he doesn't like it when public messages are sent to him via social media with the actual intent of being seen by one of his friends or contacts that may be able to get them a job. It's all about being polite and sincere.

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