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Network Like It's Your Job: 12 Ways to Create Job Connections in a Virtual World

Busting through the job search barriers can be a huge challenge in today's faceless, virtual world. The best way to overcome those challenges says Maribeth Kuzmeski is to bypass the whole resume emailing, no response hoopla by making great connections with the people who can put you (and your resume) right in front of the hiring decision makers at your dream job.

Hoboken, NJ (July 2010)—Finding a job in today's job market can be like conquering a new frontier for many job seekers. With the unemployment rate still over 9 percent, the job market has been flooded with tons of competition for job seekers. Many of whom are experiencing a culture shock when they send out their resumes. After all, the days of mailing in your resume and receiving a phone call to set up an interview are over. Today, everything is done online from sending in your resume to setting up your first interview—and 9 times out of 10 you're lucky to receive any kind of response, even if it's an automatic one thanking you for your submission.

It doesn't take long to discover that in a virtual world it can be very difficult to get noticed by the decision makers whom you need to impress in order to land the job. Maribeth Kuzmeski says there are three easy steps to getting noticed in today's digitally dominated job market—networking, networking, networking.

“Today you need more than a resume and a cover letter to get that dream job,” says Kuzmeski, author of *The Connectors: How the World's Most Successful Businesspeople Build Relationships and Win Clients for Life* (Wiley, 2009, ISBN: 978-0-470-48818-8, \$22.95). “Think of yourself as CEO of Me, Myself, and I, Inc. You need to be doing everything you can to get the word out about your brand. That means networking.

“Great networkers are capable of leaving something behind with everyone they encounter—a thought, a memory, or a connection. This is exactly what you need to do if you are in the job market. You need to make strong connections, become a relationship builder. You want to be the first person that comes to mind when someone in your network hears about a great job opening.”

Kuzmeski is an expert at helping businesses and individuals create strong business relationships that will help them get ahead regardless of their profession. Below she offers advice for how you can network your way to a great new job:

Rejuvenate your resume. Resumes rarely showcase how great you are. That’s why it’s probably time to breathe a little life into yours. Think of it this way: if you are the CEO of Me, Myself, and I, Inc., you will need some marketing materials to promote your brand. Your resume and cover letter will serve as those marketing materials.

“Grab the attention of employers by upping the impact of your resume,” says Kuzmeski. “That might mean bucking the traditional resume format to include eye catching (but informative) headlines. Also make sure you are emphasizing the tangible benefits you’ve done for past employers whether it’s increasing profits or improving efficiency. Turn your resume into something an employer would want to read.”

Build your online resume using LinkedIn. According to Jobvite.com’s 2010 Social Recruiting survey, 83 percent of employers plan to use social networks to recruit this year. If you aren’t already on business-focused social media sites like LinkedIn, take the time to set up a profile.

“LinkedIn is especially important because it is the most commonly viewed source for job seekers and employers,” says Kuzmeski. “Setting up a profile is simple: Just go to www.linkedin.com, add your picture and a summary of your past job responsibilities, and state what you’re looking for. As a LinkedIn member, you can also join groups, review books, and proactively connect with potential employers. Think of it as creating your own living resume and a great way for people to connect with you!”

Get face-to-face with potential employers! Find a way to get in front of your potential employer. These days it is much harder to show potential employers what you are all about and to forge a connection with them because so much of the pre-hiring process is done online and through email. That is why it is essential that you find a way to communicate with them face-to-face. Dropping off a follow-up note or resume are great opportunities for getting some face time with a potential employer. Another great face-to-face opportunity comes after the interview. To show you paid close attention to everything your interviewer said, stop by her office with an article that you think would be of interest to her or a small gift (e.g., a box of candy) based on some key piece of

information—what Kuzmeski calls the “remarkable”—you found out about the interviewer during the interview.

“Once you are face-to-face, in an interview or otherwise, focus on having eye contact throughout,” says Kuzmeski. “Lean in, show them you are interested in everything they say, and think before you answer any question. Thoughtful deliberation can be difficult if you’re nervous, but it is critical in answering your potential employer’s questions to the best of your ability. Establishing this face time is sure to set you apart from your job market competition.”

Make an impact by using video. If you really want to capture the attention of a potential employer, record a quick video. Use it to get an interview or as a follow-up after an interview. Here’s how it works: Instead of just emailing a resume or a post-interview thank-you note, include a link to a video of you. Carefully script your response and record the quick message using a Flip video camera or even a web cam. Post it on YouTube or some other service and send a link for the video to your potential employer.

Here are some helpful scripting tips for getting the interview:

1. The video should be no longer than one or two minutes.
2. Introduce yourself.
3. Identify the job you would like to be interviewed for.
4. Tell them three things about your background that may make them interested in interviewing you.
5. Thank them for watching the video and ask them for the interview!

Become a contrarian networker. The focus of networking should not be on gaining an immediate job offer from the people you network with. In fact, that tactic almost never works. The goal should, instead, be to build a mutually beneficial relationship with someone who may never even be able to give you a job, but might know someone who can.

“It’s what I call contrarian networking,” says Kuzmeski. “Before you go to your next networking opportunity create a game plan. First, think about which contacts are the most important to you. Remember, these will not necessarily be the people you think might be able to give you a job on the spot. Brainstorm before the event to decide who the best connectors are. Who knows the people you want to know? By connecting with other great connectors, you are able to widen your reach. You expand your opportunities.”

Let them do the talking (You ask the questions!). There’s nothing worse than coming away from a great networking opportunity realizing that you didn’t capitalize on the situation. Be sure to have more in your arsenal than small talk. Kuzmeski suggests coming up with a list of questions to get the conversation going. Here are a few great ice breakers:

What did you do for your vacation this year?
Where did you grow up? Do you still have family there?
How are your kids? What are they up to?
What do you think about...? (Complete this question with something from current events, your town or city's local news, or a recent event in your industry.
Remember, it is always a good idea to avoid topics that can lead to contentious conversations such as religion, politics, etc.)

Once the conversation is flowing freely, then you can move on to more in-depth business questions:

What's the best thing that has happened to your business this year?
What's one thing you've done that has really changed your career?
What will you never do again in business?
What's your biggest challenge?
What's makes a good client for you?
What do you find is the most effective way to keep a client happy?

“After they answer you, it's always a good idea to follow up with a secondary question that encourages them to tell you more,” Kuzmeski adds. “The more they talk and you listen, the more they will like you because you are showing genuine interest in them. Pretty soon, they will be asking you questions, and a valuable business connection will have been made!”

Be prepared to pitch yourself in 15 seconds. It's no doubt that you have a lot of qualifications and experience. So much that you could probably go on for *hours* about yourself. But the hard reality is that no one (except for your mom!) wants to hear that much about your accomplishments. Kuzmeski says that when you are networking and getting the word out about yourself, you should resist the urge to give a ten-minute introduction about yourself. Instead, prepare a short, fifteen-second elevator pitch that hits on your career high points and top skills. Think about what's unique about what you have done and what will help you stand out from a crowd of other job seekers.

“The key to an effective pitch is keeping it short while still including your biggest wins,” Kuzmeski explains. “For example, I've had great success with the following pitch about myself: ‘Hi! My name is Maribeth Kuzmeski. I own a marketing consulting firm, Red Zone Marketing, which employs six people who are all focused on helping companies find more business. I've worked with an NBA basketball team, with US Senators, financial advisors, and mutual fund companies. I've even closed a sale while upside down in an aerobatic biplane at 7,000 feet above ground.’ I find that it is hard for most people to walk away without asking me about that last part or which NBA team or US Senators I've worked with. Be creative and think about how you can frame your accomplishments in a way that gets peoples' attention.”

Network to the people you know. Sometimes the most obvious connections are the ones most easily ignored. When you are building your network or considering who might be

able to lend you a helping hand during your job search, don't forget about the fruit closest to the ground. "Again, think about the people close to you, who might have huge networks of their own," says Kuzmeski. "For example, maybe your mom is or used to be a teacher. She's had contact with tons of parents over the years who just might be working at a company that could hire you. Or maybe your best friend is in a completely different industry than you, but he has a huge network of friends on Facebook. You never know how a great opportunity will present itself. Don't count anyone out of your networking efforts, especially those who are the closest to you and therefore the most willing to help."

Get involved in organizations that are connected to your profession. Job fairs can be great ways to get in front of potential employers, but you might not want to focus only on companies you know are hiring. In order to meet people within your industry who might have the potential to hire you attend trade shows and seminars and join organizations or associations connected to your profession.

"These events and organizations provide great opportunities to help you get your name out in your industry," says Kuzmeski. "Again, you might not find someone who is going to hire you on the spot, but you will have the chance to meet people who have potential to hire you in the future. Take hard copies of your resume and of course business cards to any of these events. The more people within your industry or profession who know you the better."

Volunteer. Volunteering is a great way to give back, but it is also a great way to sneak in some networking. For example, if you are in marketing, volunteer to work with the PR director at a nonprofit or if you are an accountant, volunteer your financial expertise. "There are usually many hands that go into keeping a nonprofit running," says Kuzmeski. "Volunteering provides you the opportunity to meet them. And remember, you don't necessarily have to be doing anything that is connected to your profession. Simply volunteering at a place with a cause you are passionate about will provide you the chance to get in front of a lot of great connectors that you might not have met otherwise."

Be a mover and a shaker. The next time you attend a networking event or even just a party, force yourself to get outside your comfort zone. Don't just hang out with the people you already know. Make it a point to introduce yourself to new people and find out as much as you can about them. The more you move around from group to group the more connections you will be able to make. "It's all about expanding your opportunities," says Kuzmeski. "If you are at a party or event with friends or coworkers, sure, you might have a great time spending the entire evening with them, but you won't have networked to the best of your ability. By getting outside of your normal fish bowl, you can expand your connections."

Always be networking. You don't have to be at an event or party or working your social networks to build your connections. "We all run into people everywhere in our day to day lives, but very few of us capitalize on all those great connections," says Kuzmeski. "For example, next time you're on an airplane instead of working on your laptop or reading

the paper the whole time get to know the person next to you. Network at your kid's soccer game or the next school PTA meeting. Strike up a conversation with the person behind you in line at the grocery store.

“Remember always be prepared to sell yourself. Provide what I call a simple, repeatable statement of value. That's something you can say to someone that you know will trigger their interest and that will be easy for them to repeat to others. Companies do this too. For example, think about how you first learned about Google. It wasn't via some elaborate advertisement. It was most likely from someone in your network saying, ‘Search for anything and everything on the Internet for free at google.com.’ By creating a statement like this, those you connect with can easily pass along information about you. They might say, ‘I just met this guy Mike on a plane. He said he's closed a sale in all 50 states. Here's his card.’ Or ‘I met this publicist Sarah at my daughter's school. She's always booking her clients on The Today Show...’ You get the picture. When you start to think about all the networking possibilities that are open to you, it's easy to see that your opportunities are endless.”

“Trying to find a job in such an overcrowded job market can be a daunting task,” says Kuzmeski. “But by placing a renewed focus on networking you open yourself up to many more opportunities than just the ones on the job boards or those being offered at your local job fair. I truly feel that there are only six degrees of separation between everyone in the world—or at the very least the U.S. Every time you make a new connection you get that much closer to a great new opportunity.”

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About the Author:

Maribeth Kuzmeski, MBA, is the author of four books, including *The Connectors: How the World's Most Successful Businesspeople Build Relationships and Win Clients for Life* (Wiley, 2009). She is the founder of Red Zone Marketing, LLC, which consults to Fortune 500 firms on strategic marketing planning and business growth. Maribeth has personally consulted with some of the world's most successful CEOs, entrepreneurs, and professionals. An internationally recognized speaker, she shares the tactics that businesspeople use today to create more sustainable business relationships, sales, and marketing successes.

Maribeth is a regular media contributor appearing on Fox News, ABC News, WGN-TV, and in publications such as *The New York Times*, *BusinessWeek*, *Entrepreneur*, and *Forbes*.

She regularly speaks to audiences on topics relating to business development, marketing, and sales strategies.

Maribeth graduated with a degree in journalism from Syracuse University and has an MBA from George Washington University. She lives in the Chicago, Illinois, area with her husband and two teenagers.

About the Book:

The Connectors: How the World's Most Successful Businesspeople Build Relationships and Win Clients for Life (Wiley, 2009, ISBN: 978-0-470-48818-8, \$22.95) is available at bookstores nationwide, major online booksellers, or directly from the publisher by calling 800-225-5945. In Canada, call 800-567-4797.

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