

Last updated: 16:00 (GMT+04) Wednesday, July 23, 2008. Rajab 20, 1429.

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Role of networking in job-hunting

By Carole Spiers, Special to Gulf News
 Published: December 03, 2007, 23:28

Job-hunting should be the engine that drives your career. And as a stress consultant to industry, I'm the one who has to listen to that engine straining and struggling, no different from a car on a steep hill.

Of course job-hunting does have stress built into it. If you're at your desk all day, it can be impossible to get away from interviews, so you feel trapped. Getting round this may involve deception, which adds to the pressure. And resigning from a steady job can be stressful in itself, with all that agonising on the brink. But a resourceful job-hunter ought to be able to work around this problem - and this kind of initiative (thinking round corners) is a quality increasingly sought-after by employers in today's entrepreneurial culture.

So - what exactly is a vacancy? If you perceive it purely as an empty post, waiting to be advertised, then you are thinking yesterday's way. The creative vision of a vacancy is of an opportunity that may or may not emerge in the form of an official post. In other words, you should be aiming to help create the vacancy.

Suppose you're an air-conditioning engineer working for a big corporation. You hear about a new company that's due to occupy a major office block in Dubai or Abu Dhabi. You think "They'll be needing an air-conditioning engineer by the time they move in." And you find out the name of the appropriate director, and simply make your approach, long before any official vacancy has been announced.

But even that is only halfway towards the truly entrepreneurial style of job-hunting. This rests squarely on the networking principle - that is, building up a file of contacts who become your support network. It is not a desperate response to the threat of unemployment. It is a means of furnishing yourself with a range of options involving people you already know. It gives you time to review each option. And to get the most out of networking, you should make a special study of networking techniques.

So here are my three main rules:

First, assert a clear identity. Make sure that people know who you are and what position you're wanting. If you feel they've forgotten your name, slip it back into the conversation, to save them embarrassment. More importantly, find a way of defining your role and function

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with particular clarity. Next time, they'll know what to call you, and may want to take up the thread.

Second, be a good guest at functions. Be polite, amusing and an attentive listener. Make a point of talking to some of the nervous or under-confident people, perhaps from abroad and feeling left-out. You'll be favourably remembered - and asked back to more and perhaps better networking functions.





Third, always return favours, even if you don't immediately get the chance. This will mark you out as someone to do business with. Which is, after all, the whole point.

The writer is a BBC broadcaster and motivational speaker, with 20 years' experience as CEO of Carole Spiers Group, an international stress consultancy based in London.

Key points: Finding jobs

- Don't wait for vacancies to be announced. Approach people yourself
- Long-term career planning rests heavily on the networking skills.
- A good networker gets remembered - and asked back.

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