

Tap Your Network to Ace the Interview

By Margot Carmichael Lester, Monster Contributing Writer

Much has been said about using your network to research companies and find out about available positions. But what about employing your connections to ace the interview? Capitalizing on personal and professional contacts can make the difference between being an also-ran and landing the gig. Here's how to do it.

Get Started

“Before reaching out to your network, define:

- The industry
- The company
- Individuals

...you would like information about,” suggests Luna Zuniga, a senior technical recruiter with Bluware, an IT consulting company in Houston.

Then think carefully about what you need to know about:

- The corporate culture
- The job's expectations
- The boss
- Information about the interviewer

Then, e-mail your professional and personal networks to see who's got the information you need. “Reach out to these people purposefully, asking specific questions rather than general questions,” Zuniga says.

“Don't ask for a job or a job lead. It may put people on the spot which is a helpless feeling. Instead, limit your requests to information only.”

Extend Your Reach

But don't stop there. “Approach each person in your network not only in terms of whether they personally have contacts or information, but whether they can introduce you to people who do,” says Gary O'Neal, a partner at Austin recruiting services firm Coolhires.

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Also, look for friends and colleagues who are:

- Competitors
- Partners
- Vendors
- Customers

...of the organization you're interested in. "Not only can you learn more about the organization, you may be able to pick up value-added information you can use to show your understanding of things the company may be able to do to increase its competitive advantage," O'Neal says.

Use Social Media

Kendra Andrews, recruiting manager at HireNetworks, a human resources consulting and recruiting firm in Raleigh, North Carolina, tells the story of a client who used a social media site to search for his interviewer. "He saw all the people he and the manager shared as connections and reached out to get as much information about the manager as he could," she says.

"For people who knew the manager professionally, he asked about management style, how in depth his technical knowledge was, etc.," Andrews continues. "For people who knew him personally, he tried to get additional information to bring up. The interview process is still going on, so I can't say if he landed the job or not, but such preparation can't hurt."

Research the Situation

Robert Melos of Milltown, New Jersey, got his temporary job with the US Census Bureau after a friend in Virginia Beach told him about the opportunity. "He filled me in on what to expect in the application process," Melos says. Another friend, who's going for a higher position, is advising Melos on his quest to land a full-time job: "He has been giving me advice on the process that he's already experienced."

Knowing what to expect has helped Melos feel more relaxed in interviews so he can focus on selling himself, not calming his nerves. "Having some knowledge of a situation before going into it gives you a feeling of confidence," Melos says. "Preparation is a key to that feeling."

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Rehearsing Your Act

If you've got contacts in the industry, do a practice interview. "I sit down with someone for about 30 minutes and have them interview me; then we go over what I said or did and critique it," explains Elie Kochman, a programmer/analyst with the Dominion of Canada General Insurance Company in Toronto. This strategy helped her land her current job.

Kochman also uses her network to help formulate questions to ask during real interviews.

"An industry specific question shows that I did my homework before showing up, which shows me to be motivated and hardworking," she explains.

Finally, don't forget to be gracious to those who help you by sending a post-interview thank you note to let them know how their input helped you.

You never know when you might need them again, so you want to leave them with a good impression!

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