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Feb. 28 1998 -- Networking shouldn't stop when you land the job

Most positions are found through personal contact, so don't let the grapevine wither after you're working again

You've finally landed a good job and your days of tirelessly working the grapevine for new leads are over, right? Well, not quite. In an ever-changing job market, there's never a good time to let networking skills and contacts slide, experts say.

"It's probably the No. 1 problem with networking" says Rob Hood vice-president of Drake Beam Morin Canada Inc. "If you haven't done a good job of keeping up your network, it's very difficult to build it back up from zero when you're out of a job."

Most job seekers have heard the statistics: about 80% of new jobs are found through personal contacts, and the percentage is higher at more senior levels. Yet people tend to forget about maintaining their network when they are steadily employed. Picking up the phone and calling former bosses, colleagues, old friends, and acquaintances after several years of silence is the

situation faced by many who suddenly, or even gradually, find themselves looking for a new job.

The problem says Barbara Moses a Toronto based human resources consultant and author, is that people tend to view networking in simplistic terms. Rather than attempting to build mutually beneficial long-term relationships with the people they meet, they resort to "fair-weather" networking - or only thinking of the immediate payoffs of a contact in terms of a new job lead or client. "You can't be like a shop keeper and think of the relationship in terms of a penny out and a penny in," she says. "It's essential to cultivate relationships that may be helpful to you in the short or the long run".

However those juggling consuming careers with family and other interests may argue the time doesn't exist for constant meetings and calls to people you may have only met once or twice before. Since it's impossible to know where your next job lead will come from, the only answer, say experts is to honestly evaluate how badly you want the relationship. "You have to measure the relative worth of a contact to how often you keep in touch," says Frank Bruni president Career Lab Inc. (formerly Independent Management Group Inc.) a Toronto-based employment search firm.

"It's natural to keep in touch with the people you like, but they might not be the most valuable to you. It's like *The Godfather* - sometimes it

pays to keep your friends close, and your enemies closer." He gives the example of keeping casual contact with a competitor, sharing information that affects neither of your businesses, such as comings and goings at other companies." Those types of calls will keep you top of mind should any interesting openings come up in the industry" he says.

Here are some practical networking tips:

- Keep your network broad. Just about anybody you meet - in any industry - could provide a job lead, resources, or support the next time you're looking for work. Take the time to be genuinely curious about the people you meet and what they do. Even if the relationship doesn't flourish, people remember others who are nice to them.
- Join a professional association and attend meetings. Not only will you keep abreast of changes and trends in your industry, you will meet like-minded professionals, many of whom will be employed at companies that may be interviewing you some day.
- Keep your referees at the top of your contact list. Employment references are serious business so keep these people up-to-date on what you've been doing. They will want to know you

well, at least on a professional level, if not personally as well.

- Have a purpose in calling. Ask a question. Share industry information, tips, and gossip to keep contacts fresh and to keep relationships from being reduced to a "What can you do for me?" scenario. Above all, get quickly to the point, and don't waste your contact's time.
- Plan face-to-face meetings as often as possible. A lot of work can be done over the phone, but it's hard to replace the impact of an encounter in person. Frequent social functions warm up old contacts and build new ones.

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