LETTER & TELEPHONE COMMUNICATIONS

Introduction

In talking with corporate recruiters, Human Resource Managers, Personnel Managers and department managers, the second most important skills they seek are written and verbal communications. **Number one is integrity.** Surveys indicate that the abilities to relate to individuals, to make presentations, and to write good business letters are lost skills in today's society. Over the past twenty years our educational institutions have been forced to change curriculums for the society of specialization. Individuals seeking technical jobs or those relating to data and things have had little opportunity to take electives that help them develop broader skills in written and verbal communications. On the other hand the liberal arts students have had less exposure to technical and business curriculums. This is changing as companies have expressed the need for a renaissance person. What is needed is exposure to a variety of disciplines. In fact for hundreds of years the traditional training in institutions of higher education required that students were exposed to many facets of learning in society to help them develop a variety of information and skills rather than limited skills in one specific area.

Since communication is a major concern in all businesses today you need to be aware of some basic techniques in writing resumes, composing letters, making presentations, interviewing and making contacts in person, over the phone, or through prospecting letters.

The following are general techniques that you should be aware of:

- Communication should be focused, clear, concise, and demonstrate substance as well as a unique writing style.
- Written and Verbal communications should be organized like a composition. There should be a general thesis statement stating the goal of your communications. *(The purpose of this letter and/or conversation is...)*
- In knowing your major direction you should select major points that you wish to make relating to your thesis. Data should be offered congruent with your topic.
- Having clarified your general direction with specific back up information you summarize or restate in a different way the purpose of your communication.
- Communication is indeed a two-way exchange and listening or tending to the other person's responses is as important as anything you say. A good writer, a good talker is first and foremost a good listener.
- You seek information that matches your career objective so that your letter demonstrates that you have an understanding about the job, the industry, the company and is written a way that clearly and concisely demonstrates your focus. You have listened to the company's needs by learning about yourself and conducting research.

**Informational Letters to Contacts That You Know**

The best way to begin networking is to write letters to people that you know and to individuals that make you feel comfortable. Start your list with familiar people. Write letters first to people with whom you feel comfortable. You will be able to talk directly with them, and you can request feedback on your letter and information interview from a professional that would not be as threatening as a stranger.

**Networking Letters**

The letters written to make contacts with professionals you have met or that were referred to you should be designed to seek a meeting to exchange ideas and information; a resume should not be included. You should explain that you are exploring career options and that you do not expect that there is a job opening. Explain what information you are seeking. Suggest that you get together to discuss a specific item. Remember you are sharing information and you want to be in a position to exchange ideas that demonstrate your competencies.
Cover Letters

Cover letters are written to apply to a specific job, to contact an Executive Search Firm or Employment Agency. A cover letter should highlight competencies that match the position you are seeking. In your first paragraph you should state the reason for the letter, name the specific job for which you are applying and indicate your source of the position for which you are applying.

Secondly, you should indicate why you are interested in the position, the company, its products or services. That is what you can do for the company. Point out your specific achievements or unique qualifications. Be sure to read the job description thoroughly so you can match your skills and abilities with the required competencies. Do not repeat the same information presented in the resume. Then refer the reader to the resume enclosed. In the closing paragraph, indicate that you would like to have a personal interview and your availability. Restate your phone number and offer to be available at the convenience of the employer.

Follow-up Letters

Follow-up letters are as important as introductory letters - you should write the contact or interviewer as soon as possible after the meeting to show appreciation for the employment interview or information interview. Restate the main points of your discussion and point out your competencies that demonstrate your ability to be successful on the job or in the company and industry that you discussed. Add additional insights and/or information and let it be known that you are interested in the job and in learning more about the company.

The letters you write should always be addressed to a specific person with his/her title. Never write “To Whom it May Concern.” Your formal and informal contacts can assist you in finding this information as well as your own research. Always use a fine grade of stationary and envelope that match the paper of your resume. The printer can help you make your selection.

Make sure there are no misspelled words or grammatical errors. This will immediately eliminate you from obtaining an interview. Have a number of individuals proof read your work and if you are using a computer that has spell and grammar check this can be quite helpful.

Remember: The first impression your contacts have of you is your written and verbal skills.

Telephone Skills

As mentioned previously, employers are seeking individuals with written and oral communication skills. Telephone communication is yet another way to demonstrate your ability as a communicator. You will use the telephone in the same way you have used letters.

- You will network with contacts
- You will set up interviews
- You will conduct follow-up on letters by telephone
- You may be interviewed over the phone
- You will spend as much time on the telephone as you do writing. 70% of your time should be devoted to networking.

Telephone Techniques

- Define your reason for calling your contact.
- Write out a script that defines your objective and specific ideas you wish to communicate clearly, logically, and concisely.
- Establish rapport; in contacting the company you should first call general information to get your contact's direct line, title, and administrative assistant's name if you don't have it.
• In calling the contact’s office for the first time explain how you know the contact.
• Suggest why you are calling. Suggest that you want to discuss ideas of material interest.
• When you talk with the contact directly be brief and state who referred you and concisely refer to topics you want to discuss.
• If the secretary makes the appointments for the contact and must check with him or her, first offer to call back to avoid being put off or dismissed.
• If you are referred to someone else in the company, contact then in the same manner as mentioned above.
• Always record and write down all pertinent information for your records.

A Suggested Dialogue For Your Telephone Contact:

Hello, my name is James Chapman. Is this the office of _________? And your name?...

Mr. Jim O’Connor, a colleague, suggested that ________ and I should get together to discuss (some topics of mutual interest.) I have some research on _______ and wanted to discuss this with him.

Once you have made contact with the person, you might say:

_______, a mutual colleague of ours (name this person) suggested I get in touch with you to discuss some research I have been conducting on ________. I am calling to see if we could get together for a brief meeting.

If you are put off by the contact ask if you can call back at a more convenient time. Set a specific day that you will call.

In conclusion, written and oral communication skills are major competencies employers are seeking today. Networking by letter and phone are excellent ways to demonstrate these much sought after skills. Remember to contact referrals, promote interest in the industry, and state what information you have that is of value to the company.

Remember you are conducting research to network, to pass on pertinent information and to follow-up on meetings and interviews. Remember to reflect on who you are. Be yourself, as achieving is never so important as authenticity.

What Is "Networking?"

The most effective way to seek employment is meeting with people who are in a position to assist you in making contacts with your target companies or with other valuable business contacts. This process is known as networking. It is a concept that plays a major role in our everyday lives. Seventy to eighty percent of your job search should be devoted to this method as 70%-80% of job searchers find jobs through networking.

Sharing information with others who have common interests with you is part of everyday life. On a day-to-day basis you connect with people in your personal and professional life who can assist you in your career transition. What is needed is an organized plan that includes goals and methods of interconnecting with selected individuals; market research; listing of sources for networking; application of network techniques; and follow-up.

In addition to overall planning and techniques a positive attitude is essential. Remember you have control over your life. Don’t view employers as having all the power. This will put you in a position that makes you feel you have to beg or plead for a job opportunity. You start by applying the information and training you have received.
- Review the skills and abilities you have previously identified.
- Be prepared to cite evidence of these competencies.
- Clarify your career objective.
- Plan a two-minute personal presentation, which includes all of the above and a summary of your background as demonstrated in your resume.

Make sure you write out your two-minute presentation and rehearse it until you feel comfortable with it. Keep an outline in front of you as you make your networking phone calls or as you prepare correspondence. Remember you are networking to exchange ideas and information that will hopefully lead to understanding you particular job market.

If you have an understanding of yourself and a career objective that specifically reflects that understanding, you are in a position to organize your network by:

- Directing your research to target industries and companies that match your career goal.
- Identifying the needs of these companies.
- Compiling information that could be of use to these companies.
- Developing contacts with people that you know, as well as new individuals.
- Sharing information and ideas.

Sources of Contacts

How do you go about identifying contacts for networking? Review the following (alphabetized; not in order of significance):

- Alumni of your college/university
- Business Associates (past and present)
- Business Contacts (Attorney, Accountant, Banker, Real Estate Agent, Insurance Broker, Stock Broker, Travel Agent, Doctor, Dentist)
- Executives in the Chamber of Commerce
- Friends
- Members of your Church or Synagogue
- Neighbors
- Pastors, Ministers, Rabbis
- Political Contacts
- Previous Employers
- Professional Acquaintances
- Relatives
- Schoolmates
- Social Acquaintances
- Speakers at meetings you've attended
- Teachers

Remember the goals of networking when reviewing your contact list. Your purpose is market research. You are developing a thorough study of the job market and company needs that match your own professional goals. You are searching for companies that are looking for an individual with your skills and abilities and you are conducting research to define the company's goals, products, needs, and future direction.

Then you decide which organizations match your career goal and who to contact to help you learn more. Remember that networking is not specifically directed toward asking for a job; rather it is connecting with people to exchange ideas, information and resources. Just as in the application of the traditional methods of job search you must understand the true purpose of networking so that you will not become discouraged. This is the most effective way to ultimately find a job but in order for this method to be successful you must always remember that the information you seek will help you form solid contacts that could eventually result in the job that is right for you and your future employer.

It is extremely important that you maintain a detailed record of your contacts. This should include name, title, company address and any additional notes that are pertinent. You will want to make notes about the results of your contacts as well as follow-up information and general comments. This can be done by keeping index cards on file, by using a computer, or by designing a form for a notebook or whatever you feel is most effective for you.
Techniques of Networking

Preparation is the key to success in making contacts. Ask yourself why you are preparing to meet with targeted individuals. The answer should be: to expand your market research, to acquire information and more individuals to contact, to plan in advance what you want to discuss so that you can direct the meeting and demonstrate your knowledge of the industry.

The second question you should ask yourself is what can you do for your contact. Prepare yourself as though you are a consultant to the company and offer pertinent information in a tactful manner.

Thirdly ask yourself why your targeted contacts would want to talk to you. Present yourself as a professional referred by a particular person. If you are well targeted you should be prepared to offer information that your contact might be able to use in his/her particular industry.

Specific Elements of a Networking Visit

- Personal introduction.
- State the purpose of your visit.
- Explain that you are not seeking a position but information from an expert in your field of interest.
- Outline what you want to discuss.
- Be a good listener so that your discussion will be focused and the information you share will be of value to your contact. (Rule of thumb: 60% listening, 40% talking)
- Ask for additional sources you can contact in your field.
- Leave a resume for future reference if your contact requests it.
- Make a record of the visit in your networking file.
- Follow-up with a thank you note summarizing the main points of your visit and providing any information that you said you would send.
- Always stay in touch with major contacts and keep them informed of the results of your meeting with individuals they referred to you.

How Can Networking Lead to a Job?

Synthesizing and applying the techniques in this chapter can result in a job offer if you consider the following:

- You are not after a job; rather you are seeking individuals with problems and needs that you can help by applying research and offering information. Draw upon specific achievements from your work experience that show your skills and abilities as a problem solver.
- Small or medium size companies offer opportunities to reach senior level manager as there are less managerial levels. You can stand out more.
- Always use referrals in your networking process and seek information.
- Facilitate discussion that provides you with information to offer solutions to the company’s problems. Demonstrate your competencies.
- If a job becomes available you have already applied your skills to demonstrate successful job performance.

Since networking is the most effective technique in conducting your job search, make a commitment to this method and enjoy meeting professionals who offer you new information that bolsters your creativity. Apply your experience and skills to help others develop solutions and a new perspective to meet challengers in their company.