

Pre-Emptive Networking

by Rose Jonas, Ph.D.

Your life is busy; you're constantly on the go; you have endless family responsibilities; you don't even have time for a personal night out. And your work life is going smoothly, for a change; no downsizings over the horizon. Why should you be worried about networking?

The way the job world is spinning, you have to behave the way politically astute climbers have always behaved. They *always* keep in touch. I call it pre-emptive networking; staying in contact with a wide range of people when you *don't* need them. Most people look on networking as a loathsome part of finding a job. When they're in the hunt phase, they grit their teeth and twirl their Rolodex, wondering who they can call, who will take their call, and thinking how much this feels like begging.

They make half-hearted calls, fail to have a contact management system, do a bad job of following up, and leap at the first opportunity that presents itself, gratefully tossing all those business cards in the air, promising, "Never again." They're going to hold so tight to the new job they can forever escape the dreaded networking.

Fond, fruitless hope. While it's true that more companies will be focusing (at last) on keeping good people, the 30-year job your grandparents had now sits as a display in some prehistoric museum. It's not here anymore. And networking will still be your best resource for finding your next job. You can make it nearly painless if you'll keep that Rolodex humming at all times.

If you barely have the space to breathe in and out on a daily basis, how can you do eternal networking? Marketing coaches tell their client companies they have to make contact with their customers seven times a year. Doing business is about relationships and it's easier to get business from an existing customer than to go find a new one. And the word beneath the "relationship" surface is "friendship." You have to build and maintain friendships. And that means you have to do more than make outbound "gimme" calls.

If you were to make a list of seven contacts you could make in a year with someone, what would they be? Think of these: Send holiday cards (or call people), remember birthdays (computer greetings make this easy), go to lunch or coffee, offer to help with a friend's home project, go to a wake when someone close to them dies, call just to see how things are doing, send a postcard from vacation (take a sheet of labels with you), have a chili party to kick off the football season. In short, look for ways to be friends with others, and do it with an open heart rather than a grasping hand, and that attitude of giving is important.

That way, when you find your self on the "gimme" side of the relationship when you're looking for your next job, you'll find that you only have warm calls to make to friends, not the cold calls you dread making to strangers. All those people you've helped and been thoughtful to will now leap to help you. I promise.

By the way, don't keep a tally of what you give vs. what you get. You will always give more, but that is, I think, one of the main points of life. Pre-emptive networking is a way you reach out to others and make yourself useful. It's another way of saying, "You have to be a friend to have a friend," and you need a lot of friends when you're job hunting.

Build the friendships now. You and your life will be richer for it.