



## 10 Step Networking Plan To Advance Your Career

Networking skills are one of the well recognized skill sets that will make the difference in finding a job, advancing a career, and learning new skills to improve your professional development. The challenge for military veterans transitioning into a new career is how to network. Everyone realizes that networking is important – the question is how do you network in an effective manner? How do you create a networking plan?

- 1. What do I Want to Do, Learn, Or Achieve Through Networking – Your Goal?** Brainstorm what your purpose and goals are for networking. Are you seeking employment, a closer connection with a hiring manager, or do you want to learn a new skill, such as sales? Knowing what you want to achieve through networking is vital.
- 2. Write Your Mission Statement for Networking.** Use the format of the military mission statement (Who, What, When, Where, and Why) to precisely outline your goals and what you want to achieve. Here is a sample mission statement for networking.

**Goal:** Gain employment in a mid-to-large Midwestern US based manufacturing company by securing 6-7 contacts per company.

**Networking Mission Statement:** As a military veteran transitioning into the civilian economy (WHO), I want to gain 3-4 job offers from Midwestern based manufacturing companies (GOAL). To accomplish this, I will conduct research, direct mail, and phone contacts (WHAT) of the top 10 Fortune 100 manufacturing companies with plants based in MN, IA, KS, MO, NE, SD, and OK (WHERE) over the next 3 months (WHEN). The creation of a personal network will help me understand available opportunities, company cultures; important skill sets, and position me to have relationships in the company beyond HR and the hiring manager (WHY).

- 3. Define Your Value to a Company & Career.** Too often, veterans only consider their technical skills and do not leverage their full range of military skills for business. My book, [Combat Leader to Corporate Leader](#), gives veterans 20 ways to immediately leverage their military skills for an employer in a format that the employer needs . . . NOW! Networking contacts want to talk about what you can bring to a company.
- 4. Conduct Research of Networking Contacts.** Based on your target locations from your mission statement and goals, use Business Week, Fortune, The New York Times, Hoover's, Company Websites, the Leadership Directories – Corporate, and other sources to identify business leaders, company, name, position and their postal addresses. A military veteran should contact other mid level leaders in an industry (industries) that they would like to work to learn more about the industry, what it takes to succeed, and to position them for employment. A great technique is to look through the work biographies of key leaders to see if any of them are military veterans. Vets nearly always help other vets. Use your local library, both physical location and on line, they have lots of databases and people who can help.



5. **Create a Simple Excel Database of Your Contacts.** As you conduct your research, build a database in Excel with the following fields to help you begin to build your own personal database. This database that you build will be used in the next step to conduct a letter writing campaign to meet your networking goal. You should capture the following: First Name, Last Name, Position, Department, Company Name, Street Address 1, Street Address 2, City, State, Zip Code, Phone Number, E-Mail, Date Mailed 1, Date Mailed 2, Date Called 1, Date Called 2, and Other Names to Contact. You should plan on having 20-25 prospective contacts per company that you are interested in. You should assume about a 20% response rate to your letters – so if you have 20 prospective networking contacts, you can reasonably expect ~4 people to contact you to network.

6. **Write Your Networking Letter.** A simple, direct and clear networking letter to your prospective contacts works very well to create contacts as well as demonstrate your skills. You should write your letter stating that you are interested to build connections that will help you understand the company, industry, and the business environment. Do not directly ask for a job. You can have two or three questions on how the contact started their career, other people to talk to, and what the growth areas are in the industry – all of these are invaluable for your search. Make sure your contact information is included, the letter is free from grammar and spelling errors, and the letter is only one page. When networking, letters are a wonderful resource to contact specific people in companies (but not only the HR department), because people receive very little “snail” mail anymore. Use a personal direct mail campaign to help build a network.

7. **Mail Your Letters.** Use the Mail Merge function in Microsoft Word to create professional looking labels, letters, and envelopes. You can include 1-2 business cards with your letter as well. Try to time the arrival of your letters to a Thursday or a Friday when an executive will have time to read them – Monday and Tuesday are very meeting & travel heavy for most people.

8. **Follow Up With a Phone Call.** Wait 3-4 days after your letters arrive and call the networking prospect to schedule a call. It is possible, but doubtful, that someone can take your call immediately. Schedule 30 minutes to discuss your questions. Confirm the date, time, time zone, phone number, and other contact information. Use Microsoft Outlook or some other scheduling program that allows changes. The follow up phone call to schedule a networking discussion time is vital to show your interest and build the relationship.

9. **Conduct the Networking Meeting.** During the networking meeting, take time to explain your goals, ask how to learn about the industry, explain your military background, as well as your skill sets. It is vital that you use these sessions to understand about the person, company, industry, and business challenges. Do not oversell yourself. Use this time to make sure the company, industry, and corporate culture will fit you. At the conclusion, thank the person for their time, schedule another meeting time, and see if there are 2-3 others that you can talk to. Enter these new prospective contacts and the results of your meeting in your Excel database. In the follow up meetings, you can begin to explore job prospects and opportunities.

10. **Plan for Success and Embrace Failure.** In combat, we always planned as best we could for a successful mission, but also planned multiple contingencies and back up plans to account for enemy actions and other possible points of failure so that, no matter what happened, the mission would be successful. When you transition, your networking and job application plan should have multiple back up plans and contingencies as you start your new career. If you are not immediately successful, relax, step back, reassesses, learn, and move forward. This happens to everyone and you need to expect a tough road ahead. A resourceful candidate leverages failure to make them better for the next opportunity and plans multiple opportunities so they are successful in their quest for a new or a better job.