

Using your circle of contacts to create job leads

The idea of the circle of contacts was created by Larry Robbin, a nationally known expert in the area of workforce development. Here is how he describes it.

What is the circle of contacts?

Picture a bull's eye with your name in the center. Think of the people in your life that you are closest to. These people's names would appear on the first ring out from the center. The next ring would include people who you know but aren't as close to as the first ring. You might include friends in this ring, as well as relatives, neighbors and others. If you keep expanding the circles and fill them with people who you have contact with but may not know very well, you eventually will have your circle of contacts. The full circle of contacts goes way beyond your first circles. Most jobs are found by using your full circle of contacts.

Why is it important to use your circle of contacts?

Most jobs are filled because people had direct contact with the employer. Only a small percentage of people are hired through job postings. Yet most job seekers spend more time on the postings than working toward getting an employer contact. This is because it is easier to look at the Internet than work your circle of contacts. But not finding the right job posting can be depressing. If you talk to two or three people about how they found out about most of the job openings that led to their jobs, you'll usually find out that most of the job information came from personal contacts that led to employers. Working your circle of contacts can be the most effective way to find a job.

I'm not sure I know enough people or the right kind of people to make the circle of contacts work.

Contacts are people who become your eyes and ears during your job search. They aren't the people who have the jobs or do the hiring. Someone you know may hear about a job, see a job opening sign or know people who work in places that may have an opening for you. You want them to give you this information. It can come from any kind of person. It's easy to overlook contacts that could lead to jobs. It's easy to forget all the people who could be used in this circle. This work sheet will help you identify your circle of contacts. The important thing is to remember that contacts are not necessarily people that you know very well. They are contacts, not necessarily friends or people close to you. The person you contact may not have job lead information, but they may know someone who does.

I've tried talking to people about job leads but it hasn't worked.

There are a few different reasons that explain this situation. One is that while working your circle of contacts is one of the most effective job search methods, it is not the only one. This approach should only be one part of your job search strategy. You may get your job leads in another way. Another reason this approach might not be working is that people often don't use their FULL circle of contacts. They don't go out far enough from the center of the bull's eye to use all of their potential contacts. The higher the unemployment rate, the bigger the circles that you have to make. You also need to learn how to work your circle of contacts, not just make the first contact. This involves working the circle of contacts by repeated and varied types of contact. Often when you ask a person once about job information they quickly forget. If you use the ideas in this work sheet about multiple contacts, resumes and JIST cards they will remember your job search needs for a longer period of time.

It's hard for me to talk to people about my job hunting

This is one of the biggest barriers to overcome in using the circle of contacts. It's often very hard for people to talk about being out of work and to ask someone for help. It makes us feel depressed, so we tend to limit these kinds of contacts. This will make our job search last longer, because we're not fully using the circle. Ask your job counselor to help you practice how to talk to people about your job search. If you don't have a job counselor, ask a job counselor at your local One Stop Career Center or community college career center. The more you start working the circle of contacts, the better you will get at this. But it will be hard, especially at the beginning. Remember that working on this problem by using the circles will mean that your job search will end sooner.

To make the circle of contacts work, you should use as many of the following ideas as possible.

1. Use the list of potential contact types in this list. The most common mistake people make is not using big enough circles!

2. When you contact people remember:
 - A. They may not know of any job openings, but remember to ask them if there is anyone else who they know that you should contact. The circle of contacts gets built on the new contacts that come from this process.

 - B. Ask the person if they have any job search ideas you should use. How did they get jobs? Be open to new ideas!

 - C. If anyone gives you a contact or an idea to follow up on, make sure that you get back to them after you do the follow up. If people help you and don't hear anything, they assume that you don't need their help anymore. You want to keep them thinking about your job search. Getting back to them, letting them know that you followed their advice and thanking them are good ways of keeping them plugged into your job search. Thank-you notes are a great idea!

 - D. You need to contact people more than once to get them actively thinking about your job search. Depending on the person, you should contact them at least twice a month. You may want to contact some people more than this. It will also help if you vary the kind of contact. It can be in person, by phone, email, or sending a note via U.S. mail.

 - E. If you are using a resume or a JIST card, always give several copies to each contact. They need more than one copy to realize that you are serious about them putting your resumes and JIST cards into circulation. Giving people resumes and JIST cards means that they will think about you after the initial contact.

 - F. Sometimes a conversation with a circle of contacts person may include a variety of topics. Make sure that the conversation ends with you reminding them about your job search needs.

True examples of the circle of contacts in action

1. Tran was looking for work as a truck driver. He gave a copy of his resume to a grocery store owner. The owner showed it to a delivery driver who told him that there was an opening in his company because someone just quit. The company had not put the ad in the paper yet. Tran got the job!

2. Yolanda was working her circle of contacts when she remembered one that she had overlooked. In her old neighborhood she had often babysat for the Patterson family. Yolanda contacted them but nothing happened. When she called back several weeks later, Mr. Patterson admitted that he forgot about her job search but had just found out some information that might be useful to her. He frequently ate lunch in the building cafeteria, and the manager told him that he was considering hiring another waitress. Yolanda asked Mr. Patterson if he would mention her name to the manager. He agreed, and Yolanda followed up with a call, got an interview and got the job!

3. Pete had been looking for a computer job for weeks and thought he had his circle of contacts covered. He had lived in the same neighborhood for 15 years and one day was picking up his dry cleaning from the place he had always gone to when he mentioned his job search to the store owner. There was a computer office in the building above the dry cleaner. The store owner gave him the name of the office manager. Pete called the manager, got referred to another company and eventually got a job!

4. Jose had been out of work for three years after the factory closed. Using the circle of contacts and the phone book, he was able to get in touch with his former foreman. While the foreman had retired, he still belonged to the foreman's association. He circulated Jose's resume at a meeting, and Jose landed a job the following week!

Developing your circle of contacts working list

Use one sheet of paper for each category that applies to your circle of contacts. Think about this carefully – remember to make your network big. Use resumes and JIST cards if possible and re-contact people frequently. You have to activate the circle, and don't assume people will help you unless they get thanked, get feedback on their leads and are re-contacted.

1. Immediate family members.
2. Relatives and extended family members.
3. Friends of family members and relatives.
4. Current neighbors.
5. Former neighbors.
6. Former supervisors.

7. Former co-workers.
8. Small business owners.
9. People in supervisor or manager positions.
10. Union officers.
11. People who have the same hobby you do.
12. Religious leaders.
13. People from recreational, sports, social or cultural activities.
14. Salespeople.
15. Businesses that were connected to your former employer.
16. Caseworkers, social workers, probation or parole officers, and counselors.
17. Politicians.
18. Doctors, lawyers, accountants and tax preparers.
19. People who work in community agencies, government agencies and nonprofits.
20. People in business organizations (neighborhood groups, chambers of commerce and specific types of business associations).
21. People who are active in other kinds of organizations (sports, cultural, community, special groups etc.).
22. Former landlords and real estate agents.
23. People whose jobs put them in places where they may see job leads advertised or hear about jobs: truck drivers, utility or city maintenance workers, waitresses, newspaper carriers, police officers, bartenders, cab drivers, delivery people and many other kinds of people who work outside or in positions working with the public.
24. People who work in a place with many other businesses – malls, industrial parks, office buildings, business parks, etc.
25. People whose jobs take them into other businesses – electricians, repair people, salespeople, food delivery, builders, temporary workers, etc.
26. Mail carriers and postal workers.
27. People from places where you do business – owners and/or employees at the gas station, restaurants, dry cleaner, food store, car repair, laundromat, hardware store, bank, pet supplies, hobby stores, childcare provider, entertainment, etc.
28. Retired people who you know.
29. People who you send or say holiday greetings to.
30. People who repair things for you.
31. People who you communicate with on the Internet.
32. Alumni from high school, college, apprenticeships, training programs, etc.
33. People you know from the National Guard or the military.

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