

How Healthy Is Your Network?

Eight Questions to Assess Your Professional Network's Strength

By Margaret Steen

If you needed to find a new job, how many people could you turn to for help? If the answer is "not many," you may need to upgrade your professional network.

"Maintaining a network should be a routine part of your career-development strategy, not just something you turn toward in a career crisis," said Janet Civitelli, associate director of University Career Services at the University of Houston, who works with both students and alumni.



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Civitelli and other experts offer these eight questions for assessing the health of your network:

How many former coworkers' contact information do you have?

Focus particularly on your peers and people above you in the organization. The more people you're in touch with, the better.

Does your network include a handful of people who could serve as references?

These people need to be willing to recommend you -- and they need to know your work well. "[References](http://www.monster.com/career-advice/article/prepare-your-references) ([//www.monster.com/career-advice/article/prepare-your-references](http://www.monster.com/career-advice/article/prepare-your-references)), can't be vaguely positive," Civitelli said.

If you can't think of four to six good reference candidates, you need to step up your networking to make sure people you work with know about your achievements.

How many of your contacts have you communicated with in the past six months?

This is a measure of your active network.

"You don't need to talk to everyone in your network every three minutes," said Richard Phillips, owner of Advantage Career Solutions. But you should check in regularly, even if you just send a brief email saying you hope all is well. That way, when you do need to ask for job-hunting help, it will be "emotionally much easier" to make the contact.

Have you had lunch or coffee with someone from your network in the past month?

Make a point of meeting in person with a former colleague or another professional connection every few weeks.

Have you attended a professional event recently?

Attending [professional conferences \(//www.monster.com/career-advice/article/networking-tips-be-a-conference-commando\)](http://www.monster.com/career-advice/article/networking-tips-be-a-conference-commando), will help you expand your network beyond former colleagues. Becoming active in a professional association will also boost your resume.

Have you added any professional contacts in the past month?

Your network needs to grow in order to stay vital. Try to add new contacts -- either by getting back in touch with former colleagues or by meeting new people -- frequently.

Are you networking "outside the box" -- that is, making connections beyond your former colleagues and friends?

Job opportunities can arise from unexpected sources. Marianne Adoradio, a career counselor in Silicon Valley, recommends expanding your network to include some people outside your industry and at different stages of their careers, who can tell you about trends and opportunities you might not otherwise hear about.

When your professional contacts get in touch with you, do you answer?

"People just kind of steer away from you if you're not responding," Adoradio said.

What if a contact is asking for job leads and you don't have any? "You do have the ability to offer something of great value," Phillips said: encouragement. This will also increase the chances that that person will help you sometime in the future.

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