

# KEPPIE CAREERS

ENCOURAGING ♦ ENLIGHTENING ♦ EMPOWERING

## Drive Your Own Career Bus: Holiday Networking for Success

End-of-the year parties offer a slew of in-person networking opportunities. No matter how bad things may look in the economy, this time of the year seems to bring out everyone's generous spirit. It is a great opportunity to give your networking a jump start.

**This book will help you get started if you are planning to kick up your networking for any of the following reasons:**

- You've been looking for work for months with no luck.
- Your company is about to be bought out and you are pretty sure you'll be out of a job.
- You've seen what happened to friends who didn't network and had no "net" to fall back on when they were in trouble. You don't want that to happen to you!

Review these tips to get your holiday networking started off on the right foot. Following this advice will help you get the most out of holiday parties and get-togethers. So, stop dreading the idea of working a room! Put a smile on your face and read these tips with an open mind. You'll be glad you did!

***I am happy to help coach you through your job hunt, from writing a top-notch resume through teaching you negotiating strategies.*** Don't hesitate to contact me if you have questions, and I hope you'll be a regular reader of my blog, [www.keppiecareers.com](http://www.keppiecareers.com).

All the best,

*Miriam Salpeter*

Miriam Salpeter  
Career Action Coach, Speaker, Author  
[miriam@keppiecareers.com](mailto:miriam@keppiecareers.com)

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## Why Networking is Important

I feel obligated to start out by convincing you that networking is a crucial part of your career strategy! The fact is, statistics consistently show that 70 – 80% of jobs are filled via networking. It is important to note that not all of these successes result from what I call “brother-in-law” networking. These networkers are not all finding opportunities resulting from connections from family members or close friends. In fact, *The New York Times* recently published an article, [The Brave New World of Digital Intimacy](#), which emphasizes the importance of expanding your network beyond your immediate circle. The article notes:

*This rapid growth of weak ties can be a very good thing. Sociologists have long found that “weak ties” greatly expand your ability to solve problems. For example, if you’re looking for a job and ask your friends, they won’t be much help; they’re too similar to you, and thus probably won’t have any leads that you don’t already have yourself. Remote acquaintances will be much more useful, because they’re farther afield, yet still socially intimate enough to want to help you out.*

Malcolm Gladwell’s [The Tipping Point](#) (an excellent read for those interested in being connected) also reminds us of how important it is to expand your network beyond your immediate circle.

**What does this mean for the job seeker?** *Don’t discount casual connections.* Most people LIKE to help others. This is a message I’ve been sharing for years. “People are flattered when you ask their advice,” I tell my clients. “Wouldn’t you be happy to share your insights about your profession with someone if asked?” I’ve never had anyone argue that they would NOT be happy to help.

So, don’t worry if your brother-in-law isn’t influential in your industry! Seek “weak” ties. They may be more binding for your career plans!

**Remember the point of networking.** Making connections and sharing information are the key reasons to network. It’s not about how many business cards you can gather. (Who has time to follow up with 100 people, anyway?) Your goal should be to establish solid, long-term, mutually beneficial relationships.

## Get Your LinkedIn In Gear

If you don't already have a profile on [linkedin.com](http://linkedin.com), get one! While this book is about in-person networking, having your online profile at-the-ready will be key when you are ready to follow up with your in-person contacts. Even if you already have a profile, take a look at these tips to make sure it is optimized.

**First, a note on visibility.** If you use LinkedIn, you know that your visibility goes up the more links you have. Your second- and third-degree connections help put your profile in front of more people.

### **There are several ways to increase your connections:**

1. The preferred way is to link with friends and colleagues. When I started on LinkedIn, I convinced a friend who always sends mass emails to g'zillion acquaintances to join. In about a day, she had over 100 connections, all of whom became my second-degree connections.
2. Another easy way to increase your visibility is to link with a LION (LinkedIn open networker). These LIONS have over 500 connections and welcome any invitation to link. You gain visibility to all of their connections with the click of a mouse.

### **Your profile...**

First things first - Be sure that anything in your profile is spelled and punctuated correctly! Typos scream, "Don't hire me!" to anyone with a critical eye. Have someone with an eagle eye proof your profile. (We can help with this. Visit us at [www.keppiecareers.com](http://www.keppiecareers.com).)

Especially if you are looking for a job, focus your profile to include skills and experiences that appeal to potential employers. As with a resume, don't just list what you did - help the reader envision you working for them by highlighting your skills and accomplishments. As you would with your resume, use active and interesting language.

Unlike a resume, you can use mini paragraphs in your profile. Keep it short - large blocks of text are hard to read. It should be somewhat conversational to grab the reader's attention. It is okay to use "I, me or my" in your profile, unlike in a resume. (Don't overdo it, though. You don't want to appear self-centered!)

Make use of the “HEADLINE” feature. It goes right under your name and is the first thing people see. If you are a marketing professional, you can say so! Maybe you are a “Skilled problem solver and community builder.” Think of a tag line that grabs attention and describes you.

I really like the “Summary” and “Specialties” sections. This is where you can briefly sum up what you offer. If you have a “Highlights of Qualifications” or an “Accomplishments Summary” section on your resume, it should be easy to transfer it to LinkedIn. The “Specialties” section is like a list of tags - keywords that describe you and your work.

If you have a website or blog, use the “other” category and name your site when you add the URL. Also, you can edit your LinkedIn URL in your profile to include your name.

Ask colleagues and clients to “recommend” you on LinkedIn. They can say all of the flowery, fabulous things about you that you can’t say about yourself! Only ask those you know will write a quality review. Remember, most people will discount a poorly written recommendation.

LinkedIn has added new applications that allow you to incorporate your blog into your profile, your reading list and even presentations! Use the apps that make sense to enhance your personal brand, but don’t feel the need to include all of them in your profile!

Select applications that help propel your main message: You are a top-notch professional with a lot to offer.

## Set Networking Goals

Make sure you have specific goals when you think about attending a networking event. Knowing what you hope to accomplish makes it so much easier to be successful!

**It's okay to be selective.** Don't feel that you have to say "yes" to every opportunity. If you are lucky enough to have many invitations, try to attend a variety of different types of events so you'll meet a diverse group of people. (Work parties, purely social groups, etc.) Consider including some group volunteer opportunities as well! Make it a goal to meet a diverse array of contacts. Widen your net. Diversify. Attend at least one event where you **don't** think you'll meet any useful contacts. You will probably be surprised!

**Check your attitude.** No matter what your situation, consider holiday parties to be opportunities. Attend with a positive attitude, open ears and the idea of collecting information and helping others.

## Plan Ahead for Networking Success

*I cannot emphasize enough how important it is to prepare to get the most out of your networking.* While winging it may seem easier and less work, unless you're a networking natural (few of us are), you will be so happy to have thought out how to handle yourself and what to say in advance!

**Be a sleuth.** If you're going to a party or event, try to find out who might be attending. Do a little research – a Google search or LinkedIn review. If you know something about other party guests, you'll be well prepared to ask great questions. Decide who you'd like to meet and plan how to get introduced to your targets.

### Introducing Yourself

The most important thing you need to know how to do is introduce yourself in a clear, concise and succinct way. ***Of course, you don't want to launch into a speech all about you at the handshake.*** First, make a connection by asking how the person knows the host or about his or her plans for the holidays. *Remember that asking questions is the best way to connect with a new contact and to be memorable later on.*

Once you are engaged in a conversation, it is likely that you'll have a chance to try out your more formal introduction (otherwise

known as your Elevator Pitch or, even more briefly, your “Twit Pitch” (named for the 140-character messages shared on the social networking phenomenon, Twitter).

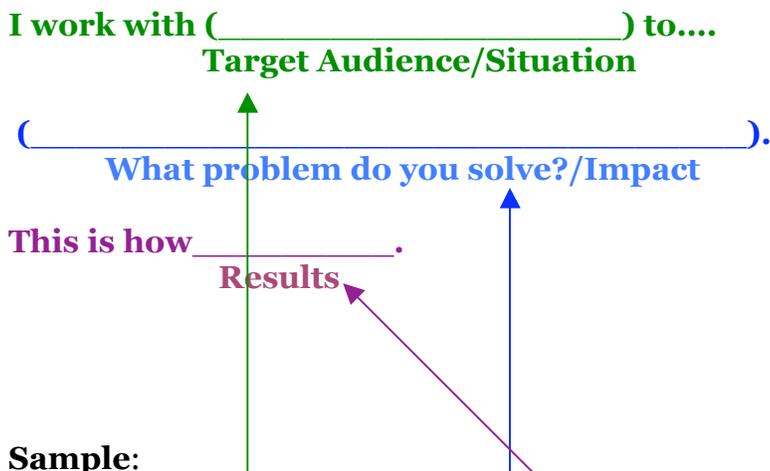
### Successful Elevator and Twit Pitch Guidelines

- Less than 30 seconds and 35 words to connect meaningfully and succinctly.
- Offer specifics about your skills and accomplishments that address the target’s problems.

### Questions to Consider

- What is your goal/objective? What do you WANT to do? (Consider target’s needs.)
- What impact do you have? What results do you create? What problem do you solve?
- How do you create positive results?

**Use this template.** Note that the information doesn’t need to be in this exact order (see sample):



**Sample:**

**I encourage, enlighten and empower job seekers** for success by **writing top-notch resumes and providing a toolbox of practical tips and advice** to help them **overcome obstacles** and approach their job searches with clarity and confidence. **(36 words)**

**Twit Pitch.** The “twit pitch” reflects Twitter.com’s requirement that all messages be 140 characters or less. This pitch really

requires you to get to the basics. The following pitch contains exactly 140 characters (includes spaces):

***I help job seekers by writing top-notch, targeted resumes & by teaching them to approach their search with clarity, confidence and know how.***

Thinking about how you'd describe yourself in a short elevator ride or a simple sentence should help narrow down exactly what you'd like people to remember when they think of you. *Write your pitch down, refine it and practice using it.*

### **Small Talk Preparation**

Now that you know how to describe what you do, consider making a mental list of questions to engage your contacts, including open-ended inquiries that allow people to talk about themselves.

**Read some newspapers and magazines (and blogs!) to be sure you are up-to-date on current events.** Consider attending some current movies. Read popular culture magazines and know something about sports standings. It might be a good idea to visit [www.alltop.com](http://www.alltop.com) to scan some blogs in topics of general interest. Bloggers are always up-to-date on the most timely and topical information – you should be too!

### **What Do You Offer?**

**Think about what you can do for others.** Can you offer introductions, ideas, resources, advice? Think outside of the box here. Consider your professional qualifications and your personal associations. Work at being a great connector! Can you hook up contacts with a terrific bar tender for their party or someone to paint a mural in their new nursery?

People appreciate someone who offers to help. Promising the name of a contact or specific information is a great lead-in when you reach out to connect after the event. *Think about how you can be a resource and be sure to approach contacts from a giving instead of a receiving perspective.*

## What To Bring

**Bring business cards and a pen.** Bring a lot more cards than you think you'll need so you won't run out. If you are not currently employed, print personal business cards. List your name, contact information - a professional sounding email (such as sue.smith@gmail.com) is appropriate. Include links to online resources where contacts may learn more about you. If you don't have a blog or website, a link to your LinkedIn profile is appropriate.

Give yourself a title that describes your expertise: Sue Smith, Public Relations Expert or Bill Jones, Human Resources Director, Organizational Development Specialist.

## What to Wear

**Ask about the dress code before you attend.** If you are very over- or under-dressed, you may feel self-conscious. **Do** wear something unique that stands out and makes it easy for others to ask questions. A fun tie, scarf or piece of jewelry can be a conversation starter. It might also help someone remember you after the event.

**If name tags are available, wear one.** It makes it easier for someone to meet you, helps people remember your name after the event and is generally a good practice. It's best to wear your name tag on your right side to help make it easier for people to see it.

## At the Event

**Arrive on time and offer to help the host or hostess.** Greeting people at the door is a great way to meet new people, so consider offering to be the "welcome wagon" for a while!

**Be sincere.** Even if you have been planning and plotting and targeting...The overall goal should be to share information and make connections. Keep that in mind!

## What to Do!

### ***Share information, introductions and ideas. Be generous!***

**Be a good listener.** Listen more than you talk. Think about it...Most people will think well of someone who is a good listener. Asking questions can endear you to a contact much more than boring them with different versions of your personal pitch. You don't need to stand around, smiling and nodding, but when you really care about what others have to say, they are most likely to respond favorably to you after the event.

**Give more than you get.** Make successful and lasting connections by focusing on giving instead of getting. (The getting will come naturally once you generously share ideas and resources.)

**Keep track of contacts.** If you're meeting a lot of people and don't have the greatest memory, excuse yourself to the restroom and take the opportunity to jot some notes on the back of business cards you've collected. (*Woman in blue blouse. Just moved to new home. Follow up to discuss \_\_\_\_\_.*) You'll be glad to have these notes when you are ready for following up.

**Review business cards when you receive one.** When you exchange business cards, the polite thing to do is to look at it. If appropriate, comment on its unique design. Just sticking it in your pocket can be considered rude.

**Stay open to new introductions.** If you come to the party with a friend, stand *next* to him or her instead of face-to-face when you talk to allow others to join your conversation. You don't want to miss the opportunity to meet new people by closing yourself off.

**Remember:** It's all about laying the groundwork for connecting and sharing information.

## What NOT to Do

- Don't overpitch.
- Don't talk too much.
- Don't drink too much alcohol!
- Don't give people unfavorable reasons to remember you.
- Do not offer a copy of your resume
- Don't ask about a job or focus on job hunting.
- Don't make things all about you or your needs.
- Don't bad mouth anyone - avoid negative conversations.
- Stay away from subjects such as politics or religion.

**Try to avoid overly long interactions.** Remember, the point is to meet and arrange to follow up. It's okay to excuse yourself by stepping away to the restroom, offering to get a drink (which provides a break and opportunity to move away), or simply saying, *"I'd love a chance to speak to you more about \_\_\_\_\_. Would you mind if I follow up after the weekend to arrange to get together for coffee?"*

You can also consider introducing your long-winded conversation partner to someone else, which offers a natural break.

## Follow Up

**Networking is useless if you don't follow up.** Let's face it – you aren't going to make a strong, meaningful connection after a few minutes of small talk, no matter how well prepared you might be! Ask if contacts would be willing to connect via LinkedIn. Request a follow-up meeting for lunch or coffee.

**Follow up right away – within a day or two.** When you reconnect, be sure to mention something specific about your interaction. (*"It was great meeting you. What a coincidence that we both attended the U of M!"*) Include the purpose of your follow-up contact. (*"I'd love to continue our conversation about \_\_\_\_\_. I know this is a busy time of year, but I hope you'll be available for me to buy you coffee."*) No matter what, do **not** send a generic LinkedIn message. Unless you made a very strong impression, it is very possible that the person doesn't remember you, and if you don't include a personalized note, you may never hear back.

**Even if you don't arrange an in-person meeting, stay on the contact's radar screen by keeping in touch online.** Send occasional links to articles that may be of interest and make a concerted effort to touch base regularly.

## Track Your Contacts

Your tracking system can be low- or high-tech (for example, a rolodex of business cards, an Excel spreadsheet or a system available on [www.jibberjobber.com](http://www.jibberjobber.com)). You might even consider setting up a Google alert for some of your new contacts' names so you can touch base when they make news, win an award, or give a speech. Do what works for you to keep track of everyone in whom you have an interest.

## Summary



Like any other aspect of your professional or personal life, planning ahead is the key to success. Few people have the luxury of being able to randomly approach their work life and hope for the best. If you want to drive your own career bus, successful networking is paramount. Take it seriously, follow these tips and plan your success. Be sure to let me know what worked and what additional questions you have.

Since my goal is to encourage, enlighten and empower job seekers for success, I am planning a series of “Drive Your Own Career Bus” ebooks. Stay tuned to [www.keppiecareers.com](http://www.keppiecareers.com) to learn about new rollouts. I hope this advice will help you stay “a head above the rest.”

Photo by [ChinCillaVilla](#)

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