



"Two Heads Are Better Than One"

A Guide to Forming a Job Club

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Why a Job Club?

Networking groups for job seekers, commonly referred to as job clubs, can ease and hopefully accelerate the transition to a new job. They provide not only networking opportunities but also support during the often isolating and sometimes demoralizing process of searching for work. As one member of a local networking group said, "If I were not coming to these meetings, I might be inclined to blame it all on myself and start down that dark path of self-pity." Group members help one another in the job search, exchanging leads, ideas, advice and introductions to their own contacts. If nothing else, members offer each other support and encouragement. "The association with people in similar circumstances with the same goal in mind has been quite uplifting," another member of the networking group said. "It has expanded my thinking."

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Starting a New Group - The Who, What, Where and When

Deciding to form a job club is only the beginning.

Who

First, who do you wish to target – everybody, just professionals or maybe those focused on specific industries or occupations? The possibilities are endless, but diversity can be a plus.

What

Then you must determine the group's purpose. Is it going to focus solely on networking and sharing leads? Will members be expected to report their weekly progress? What about honing job search skills? The needs of the members will dictate much of this, but job club meetings can incorporate anything.



Where and When

Having settled on membership and purpose, the structure is next. Who will lead the meetings? Where, when and how often will meetings occur? The meeting facilitator must not only want the role and its extra responsibility but also be comfortable holding a leadership position and be adept at public speaking. When

and where the meetings occur will depend on availability of the leader and space. But consider the beginning or end of the week. Fridays, for instance, allow participants to discuss their job search efforts of the

past week. Mondays, on the other hand, provide an opportunity to start the week's search on a more energetic and hopeful note. A lot depends on the dynamics of the group. How frequently the club meets and for how long will also be determined by available resources. But meeting every week is ideal, and one to two hours, depending on the size of the group, should be enough to give everyone an opportunity to participate. If you do not already have meeting space readily available to you, some possibilities might include a meeting room at a local library or perhaps a coffee shop with a large amount of table space. If the job club has a particular focus, résumés can be prescreened to ensure participants are a good fit.

With logistics in place, the time has come to spread the word. Here are ways to recruit club members:

- ☑ Talk to your friends, relatives and neighbors to enlist their help in getting the word out to people they know.
- ☑ Start a group on a social media site to generate interest and also use it as an additional networking forum for the group.
- ☑ Distribute flyers. (See the appendix for examples.)
- ☑ Place a listing in your local newspaper.

There still could be people who are skeptical of the value of job clubs. Stephen Van Vreede discusses some of those concerns in his article "Why Group Job Hunting Doesn't Work." Among those concerns:

Aiding the Competition

Job seekers worry that they would be competing for the same jobs with other people in the group so why would they want to help each other? There is the possibility of meeting someone else going for the same positions. But chances are great that job club members will encounter people with very diverse backgrounds from many different industries.

As Van Vreede puts it:

“Many job seekers only look to people in their field for support, but that is a big mistake. People know people from all walks of life. So if you are in IT, don't be shy about meeting up with another job seeker in marketing. Maybe that person is married to someone with strong IT connections or has contacts in that arena from past employment experiences.”¹

Not Worth My Time

Some job seekers might have a perception that other unemployed people are somehow out of the loop so they fail to see any value in talking to them. They only want to speak with people who have jobs. Van Vreede sees this line of thinking as fairly narrow.

“In fact, often employed people are the least likely to help job seekers. It is other job seekers who can empathize, who are more willing to offer assistance. In addition, it is other job seekers who are hearing about leads and exploring opportunities, who are often much more aware of what's going on in the job market as opposed to the employed professional who spends all day working at his or her desk.”²

Why Network?

For some job seekers the concept of networking seems strange. Author Richard N. Bolles explains it this way in "The Strength of Weak Ties." The idea is that each of us knows about 250 people – not just close family and friends but anyone with whom you interact, people who would recognize your name. This group includes your base – the few that you are very close to and 20 or 30 more you socialize with or see regularly. These people have a great deal in common with you

¹Stephen Van Vreede, "Why Group Job Hunting Doesn't Work," *The Free Library* (2009), <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Why+Group+Job+Hunting+Doesn't+Work-a01073971255>.

²Stephen Van Vreede, "Why Group Job Hunting Doesn't Work."



and an overlap between their circle of 250 acquaintances and yours, so they are more likely to know what you know and less likely to know things you don't know. If they do, that information has probably already been shared.³

“Though it seems paradoxical, it is the people that you know the least well

who are most likely to be helpful in your job hunt. This is called ‘The Strength of Weak Ties,’” the JobHuntersBible.com tells us.⁴

Bolles has concluded that conducting a job search in a group setting with other job hunters is 15 percent more effective than if a person just goes it alone.⁵

Stay the Course

Depending on the demographics, some communities will take to a job club more readily than others. Don't get too discouraged if early attendance is lacking. One of the most effective forms of advertising is word of mouth. Even if the club has just a few members to start, they are likely to tell people they know, and attendance will pick up. Of course, no one wants to see a groundswell of unemployed. In an ideal world, job clubs would not exist.

³ "Contacts and Networking," JobHuntersBible.com, <http://www.jobhuntersbible.com/contacts/>.

⁴ "Contacts and Networking," JobHuntersBible.com, <http://www.jobhuntersbible.com/contacts/>.

⁵ Richard N. Bolles, "The 14 Ways to Look for a Job," JobDig, http://www.jobdig.com/articles/571/The_14_Ways_to_Look_for_a_Job_.html.

Meeting Format

The meeting format will probably undergo some evolution along the way. The only true way to figure out what works and what doesn't work is through trial and error. Initially, however:

- Pass around a sign-in sheet or post a greeter with the sign-in sheet at the door. The sheet should include name, e-mail address, phone number and the work currently being pursued. This could include specific companies.
- Update that information each week and distribute it to each participant to facilitate networking and lead-sharing after the meeting ends. It can also be used to send out information and e-mail reminders announcing the weekly meeting agenda. All of this information can be part of the facilitator's introduction and should be reiterated each week there are new participants.
- Explain the vision for the group.
- The facilitator should ask group members to introduce themselves and describe their backgrounds, the jobs they are looking for, what they hope to get out of the group and any ideas for future meetings.
- Ground rules should be established so meetings run smoothly. For example – show everyone equal respect, listen attentively, actively participate. But participants are more likely to adhere to any guidelines if they take part in creating them.

For subsequent meetings:

- Continue using the sign-in sheet each week and keep members updated with a weekly agenda and other pertinent information via e-mail.

- At the beginning of each meeting, the facilitator should reiterate any information necessary to acclimate newcomers, announce the agenda and share news on job search issues, the labor market, successes of group members and other issues.



- Members should introduce themselves by name, background, work preference and any specific companies they have targeted and then possibly deliver their "elevator speech." They can mention any specific struggles or successes to get feedback or advice from the group.

- The facilitator should make note of specific companies of interest so any leads or information can be passed on. A spreadsheet with that information for each participant could be distributed along with

the sign-in sheet. Both should be updated after every meeting.

- The remainder of the meeting can be devoted to open networking and discussion, a specific activity like mock interviewing or a guest speaker. Possible guest speakers could include local employers, career coaches, local economists or an employed former group member.

Gathering Feedback

It is also a good idea to periodically gather feedback from participants through a written survey to find out what's working, what isn't and any ideas on improving the format. Remember that this group exists for the members' benefit so they ought to have some ownership of it.

Once the group has gotten into its groove, you'll begin seeing firsthand just how valuable and beneficial the meetings can be for the participants. Here is what some recent participants had to say about their experiences:

"I feel it has been valuable as it helps to increase confidence levels and give you great ideas for job searching."

"I have met a lot of helpful and enthusiastic people, who have kept up my spirits."

"The practice interviews were very helpful, and I appreciate the personal feedback I get from the staff and the group participants."

"I've learned about the importance of networking and have received many good suggestions. I have also learned new ideas to present yourself to employers and ideas for interviews."

"I have found [the meetings] very useful. It provides a good support group as well as an opportunity to broaden my network."

"It is very helpful to practice that elevator speech on a roomful of real people. I have also appreciated the networking opportunity. I have exchanged job leads with several people. I have also appreciated hearing about the various programs available to us and being given names to contact directly for more info."

"My connections with the folks here help me to feel less alone in my search. I can follow up on suggestions, i.e. volunteering, making business cards, potential referrals."

"[The networking group] has helped me on several areas. One: providing me with various information that I could use in my job search, educational research, economical needs and contacts. Two: it is an outlet for me to express my frustration towards looking for employment and see that others are struggling as well.

Three: it holds me accountable that I am still diligently searching for employment and am working with others in my job search.

Four: it provides me with the help that I need in order to find the right direction in my job search, personal struggles, fear for security and relate to other professionals that are in the same boat as me."

"It's been a wonderful group, and I look forward to it every week. The positive support and encouragement from everyone is the best part!"

"Thank you for making this available!"



Appendix A

Job Club Resources

Books/Manuals:

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Appendix B

Why Group Job Hunting Doesn't Work

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Date: Aug 4, 2009
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For those of you who are familiar with the work that I do (career coaching, resume writing, and promoter of the group job hunting concept), my title probably seems a bit surprising. After all, how can one of the biggest fans of group job hunting claim that there are times when it doesn't work?

Well, most great concepts require more than just theory to make them beneficial. You can talk all day about how wonderful something is, but without true application, it will fall flat. The same is true for group job hunting.

The idea is that job seekers, who are all essentially in the same boat, will join forces and assist each other through the job search process. This assistance can be anything from swapping leads and resources, making introductions, and even offering referrals.

To me, it's a no-brainer. In this age of social networking and nonstop talk from career pros about the importance of building contacts during your job search, you would think group job hunting would be taking the Internet by storm. Although we have seen "pay-it-forward" attempts pop up across many social media sites, by and large, you are still hard-pressed to find job seekers really banding together.

Why is that?

To help put some perspective on this, I've compiled a few reasons I think job seekers might be struggling to get this concept working for them:

1. Job seekers are worried about competition. I hear this a lot when I speak with job seekers about networking with other job seekers: "But aren't they my competition?" Of course, you could always meet someone else who is going for the same position as you, but with the amount of virtual social networking websites for job seekers, I think it is a pretty safe bet that you are going to meet candidates from all

backgrounds and industries. Many job seekers only look to people in their field for support, but that is a big mistake. People know people from all walks of life. So if you are in IT, don't be shy about meeting up with another job seeker in marketing. Maybe that person is married to someone with strong IT connections or has contacts in that arena from past employment experiences.

2. Job seekers only want to speak with employed people. We seem to have this perception that currently employed people are "in the know," whereas unemployed people are "out of the loop." Considering our unemployment rate at the moment, I would say that this thinking is pretty shallow. In fact, often employed people are the least likely to help job seekers. It is other job seekers who can empathize that are more willing to offer assistance. In addition, it is other job seekers who are hearing about leads and exploring opportunities that are often much more aware of what's going on in the job market as opposed to the employed professional who spends all day working at his or her desk.

3. Too many job seekers are too worried about receiving help and not about giving help. When people are stressed (and a job search is no doubt stressful), true character often comes out. And sadly, all too often, people only want to be helped. They can't be bothered with helping anyone else. I see this a lot in my firm. I often will recommend job seekers connect with one another, particularly if I think they are a good fit for supporting each other. Too often, one client will reach out to the other and then come back frustrated that "she didn't do anything for me." It doesn't take much to find out that this client didn't help out either. Sometimes it is amazing how they even neglect to respond to each other's e-mails!

4. Job seekers are obsessed with online job boards. As much as this drives us career pros nuts and as much as we report the appalling statistics (less than 4% effectiveness rate), candidates continue to insist on devoting the bulk of their time job searching to applying for job postings. It doesn't matter that many of these jobs are not real; job seekers are infatuated with them anyway.

And I can understand why. It seems so straightforward. Company has position available. Job seeker applies. Company calls for interview and makes offer. Job seeker takes the job. But it is a little like playing the lottery. You can spend a lot of resources and never win the reward. At some point, you have to ask yourself, "What are the odds?"

How can I create a better balance of my resources?" By all means, you can still dream, but you also need to be realistic.

5. Job seekers are afraid group job hunting is too much like a support group. For this last reason, I blame career counseling. Although the intention is nice, helping job seekers, the application often comes off like an addiction support meeting. Job seekers are already often feeling down; they don't need to be treated like they have fallen off the wagon. Instead they want to attend networking functions with other professionals who are united for a common purpose. That is support and encouragement, but it isn't patronizing. These people haven't failed; they are looking for jobs. We tell them to represent themselves as top talent, but then we have meetings where we all sit in a circle and look lost.

It really has become my goal to see job seekers utilize the group job hunting concept with success. I know that it can be a powerful tool in the job search arsenal. But in order for that to happen, we need a shift in mindset for how we go about conducting our job search and where we place our time and resources. Truthfully, without this shift, very few tools will work for us.

My company is called No Stone Unturned, and I am an MBA and certified professional resume writer (CPRW). Call me, toll-free, at 1-866-755-9800 or sign up to receive my free Job Search Advice eGuide today. In February 2009, I launched a group job hunting networking site at <http://www.noddleplace.com>.

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