

Too Busy to Connect? Use professional networks online to build credibility and solidify connections

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After eight hours on the job, most people balk at spending priceless evening time surfing professional networks online. If you are not currently looking for work, why bother? Here's why: You might meet someone. You might learn something. You might have an opportunity to help someone else get ahead.

I have enough connections, you say. Sure. Today you do. But when you lose your job tomorrow, or choose to relocate or retire or change careers altogether, then how many connections are enough? And do most of your connections know or care that they are connected with you? On a scale of tight to barely attached, how connected are you, really?

Professional networks are a platform for meeting people. One in eight married couples today met online. By developing your network, you improve the odds that you will know the right person when an excellent opportunity opens up for you. Cultivate your connections by keeping up, notice and comment on others' successes and comment professionally on discussions. Ask questions you already know the answers to; this lets you see someone else's perspective.

Groups within these networks offer dynamic, current thought on professional issues that matter. Pay attention and you just might learn something that will help either you or your employer. Education is golden, we all know, and these sites are rife with articles and commentary on virtually every topic. Learn about innovations in your industry, hear your competitor's views and volley about current problems in your field.

That whole "goes around comes around" motto is tiresome but true. Getting active on a professional networking site increases your visibility, meaning someone who needs you might ask a question or request an introduction to someone you know. Never discount the value of a favor in the bank. What goes around... well, you know.

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