

VERTICAL VERSUS HORIZONTAL NETWORKING

Vertical networks are industry or skills based. For example, American Animal Hospital Association, Society of Professional Journalists, American Bar Association, American Records Management Association, American Medical Association, American Society of Mechanical Engineers, etc., are vertical networks. Anyone with the credentials or a job in the industry may join. The role the individual plays on the job may be anything from entry level to CEO. She may be an individual contributor or a manager. What unites these people is the skills (and frequently education or training) they have in common.

If you are not familiar with an industry but you think you'd like it, becoming involved in vertical networks will help you find answers to the following questions:

! What is the normal career progression in this industry?

! What kinds of jargon separate the insider from the outsider? Remember that learning the jargon of a new field is essential protective coloration. You want to be seen as "normal" and an insider, not as an interloper or wannabe.

! In a broad overview, what are the problems and time bombs in this industry? For example, in health care, not knowing what the Bush administration may propose is causing a great deal of industry uncertainty. IBM's exit from the PC business is throwing its competitors into disarray and everyone in the industry knows it. Outsiders have no idea of the impact IBM will have on a variety of computer retailers and manufacturers.

! What are the staff/line distinctions in the industry? Are managers in industry A line, while managers of the same function in industry B only staffers? You need to know. Given a choice between a profit center and a cost center, would anyone choose the cost center? Which is which is rarely obvious. You need research and networking to know.

Horizontal networks are role-based. The National Association of Women Business Owners, Purchasing Management Association, Data Processing Managers Association, etc., cut across all industries but you must be in a certain role to belong. Any association with management in the title is a horizontal network.

Why should you know the difference between a horizontal and a vertical association? Each serves different needs and job hunters can benefit equally from both. If you're a manager looking for a job, the people you meet at a horizontal network can help you find answers to the following questions:

! In a specific industry, what do managers with a certain title do that may be different from the role you play in your industry?

! What are the salary ranges? Salaries always vary by industry and only insiders know what the true ranges are.

! How have people who left your current industry done in different industries? Horizontal networks are the very best way to track down your industry's alumni.

! What are top management's goals and hiring needs in a particular industry?

Part of your game plan must be to identify and become active in at least one association of each type. Devote annual meetings (which are traditionally large) to meeting people in as many groups (people who know each other) as possible before deciding which you might like to join for a meal function. Don't be hasty. It's a good idea to attend a couple of meetings of each group before deciding.

Subscribe to a different industry publication this year. Don't think that the one you read is the only choice or necessarily the best. Is there a newsletter that offers more acute analysis, even if it costs more money? Look for it. (The *Oxbridge Directory of Newsletters* lists 20,000

newsletters cross-referenced by topic and industry.) Find a friend or two and share the expense. You only want to read it, not treasure the copies forever. If money is tight, find a library that gets the publication and block out the time to read it thoroughly every month. Both your time and money will be well spent.

We have a client who believed he'd exhausted the possibilities in his field. We asked him, before he prepared a plan to change careers, to gather copies of *all* the industry publications and look them over carefully. He balked but eventually did it. Imagine his surprise when he found three that took very different views of not only the industry's prospects but of which companies were front-runners. Where is it written that because the largest or best-known publication says XYZ is the company to watch its judgment is correct or that it represents a consensus of knowledgeable people? Your own research is so much better because you're looking for personal and professional fit, which only you can assess, as well as profitability and growth.

One of the discouraging aspects of career counseling is that so few people do the simple, the obvious, and the logical. They'll make hundreds of telephone calls to strangers rather than build a networking base of people motivated to assist them. They'll do without information that's readily available rather than hit the library or pay for publications, even though more information means a shorter search. Both are mistakes because the next few years will test the strategy-planning skills and savvy of everyone who changes jobs or re-careers.

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