

The Sports Industry Networking Playbook:

The Only Guide You'll Ever Need



Do's and Don'ts of Job Board Searching	4
The Playbook	7
Why Networking?	8
Get in the Mindset	10
Improve Communication Skills	12
How to Be Authentic	13
The Art of the Follow-Up	14
Personal Branding 101	16
What Your Body Tells People	17
Groups and Organizations to Join	19

Your alarm goes off at 7 a.m. and you're at your computer, coffee in hand, within 15 minutes. The sun starts to come up as you log in to your job board account.

«Today's the day, you tell yourself.»

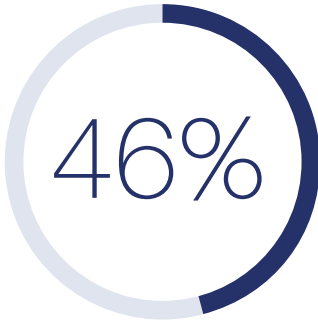
Several hours later, you're scrolling through repeat job postings on different websites. The next thing you know, you have spent an entire week sifting through job boards and have only found a handful of positions worth applying for.

Job boards are an essential part of your job hunt strategy, but they're only one aspect. Just like professional sports teams, you can't put all your effort and time into just one component of your strategy.

It's the equivalent of a baseball team investing in five ace pitchers and ignoring the lack of power in their lineup, or a football team focusing their entire practice on running plays.



Do's and Don'ts of Job Board Searching



Employers continue to use job boards because they are effective at finding the talent they need. LinkedIn's [*Global Recruiting Trends 2017 report*](#) found that 46 percent of employers say their top channel for quality hires is a third-party website or online job board.

You can still benefit from searching job boards, but be efficient with your time. In a [*study*](#) of German adults, published in February 2015 in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, researchers found that levels of agreeableness, openness, and conscientiousness decreased over time in unemployed participants.

The more time you spend looking over job postings, the more likely you are to experience changes in your personality and health.



▶ *Here's a quick list of do's and don'ts of job board searching:*

Do

- ⦿ *Find niche, industry specialized job boards*
- ⦿ *Conduct research on company websites, Glassdoor, LinkedIn, etc.*
- ⦿ *Understand which of your skills are transferable and how you can succeed at the position*
- ⦿ *Tailor your resume and application materials to each open position*

Don't

- ⦿ *Only focus on general job boards*
- ⦿ *Pursue ambiguous listings that don't offer information about the role or company*
- ⦿ *Apply to positions with suspicious titles or buzzwords*
- ⦿ *Submit an application to a posting you're unqualified for*

The Playbook

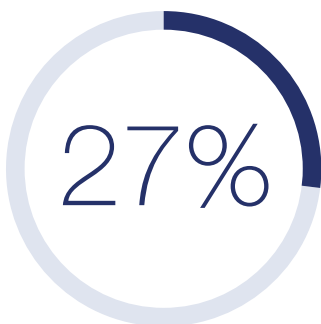


Why Networking?

When you understand how to properly navigate job boards and refine your search strategy, you free up a lot of time. Instead of staring at job boards and hitting refresh for hours on end, go out and meet people.

Professional networking is vital to finding your next big opportunity and, in a greater sense, to sustaining success throughout your career. Unfortunately, a lot of people neglect this pursuit.

A 2015 [survey](#) conducted by the University of Phoenix School of Business found that 53 percent of the 2,000 adults surveyed are either hesitant to network or avoid it altogether.



What's more, 27 percent of those who think they don't do enough networking also think they have lost job opportunities as a result.

You don't want to be left out of the loop and feel disconnected from your industry. There are several benefits to expanding your professional network.

▶ You can:

- ⦿ *Get noticed and build a reputation*
- ⦿ *Receive good advice from industry experts*
- ⦿ *Boost your confidence by talking to people you don't know*
- ⦿ *Expand your source of connections*
- ⦿ *Feel a positive influence from upbeat colleagues*
- ⦿ *Build long-lasting friendships*
- ⦿ *Find satisfaction in helping others*
- ⦿ *Create exciting career opportunities*

All of these benefits can help generate referrals, which is incredibly valuable.

Employers love hiring referrals. The [2016 Global Talent Trends report](#) from LinkedIn found that referrals are the top way people land their new jobs — 39 percent of professionals said they got a referral from someone they knew at the company.

Referrals don't just happen. You earn them by building meaningful relationships and proving yourself to others.

Get in the Mindset

Networking requires a particular mindset. You can't approach it feeling like you're taking advantage or doing something wrong.



A November 2014 [study](#) by Johnson at Cornell University looked at the effects networking has on people. It focused on “professional-instrumental networking” — the creation of social ties that support professional goals.

You want to prevent this negativity. Instead, focus on the goal of relationship building — not asking for favors — and [understand that networking is for the long term.](#)

Imagine being approached by someone you've never met. You shake hands and introduce yourselves. After about 30 minutes of chatting, he asks you to write him a letter of recommendation.

Would you help him?

Of course not. You do not know enough to write a paragraph about him, let alone a full-length letter detailing his work ethic.

The point is, when you lead with favors, you will be perceived as rude and disingenuous. Start by shaking hands, and take an authentic interest in getting to know people and maintaining a strong relationship throughout your career.

You should also expect and allow yourself to make mistakes. That's part of the networking experience. You may call someone the wrong name or forget to follow up with people. Note these mistakes and learn from them.



Improve Communication Skills

Communication is an essential skill in any career, and it's especially important when you're networking.

Employers want strong communicators on their team. A 2015 [study](#) from LinkedIn found that communication skills are the most in-demand soft skill. You can prove your skills face-to-face when you engage with them at an event.

Focus on continually building your communication skills, which include nonverbal communication, listening, body language, and verbal communication.

▶ *Here are a few ways to further develop them:*

- ◎ *Read more content, such as novels, business blogs, and newspapers*
- ◎ *Enroll in writing and public speaking courses*
- ◎ *Join [Toastmasters International](#)*
- ◎ *Read about the art of storytelling*
- ◎ *Create a blog (more on that in Personal Branding 101)*

How to Be Authentic

People can read you better than you think. If your only intention is to collect business cards and find ways to use people for your benefit, you will repel them. Desperation can be spotted a mile away.

Start with sincerity. Once you set your mindset and know your intentions are to build relationships and share your value, you can confidently introduce yourself to people and converse, even in intimidating situations.

When you feel like you're worried, check in with yourself and understand your true purpose is to share your knowledge and build a mutually exclusive relationship with industry colleagues.

Authenticity includes preparation. Know what you want to accomplish when connecting with each person.

Let's say you're interested in sports management and you meet a director of operations at an event. Set a specific goal that's realistic and true to your intentions. It can be as simple as get his email address from him or as ambitious as scheduling an informational interview. Define what success means to you with every encounter.

The Art of the Follow-Up

Following up with connections is vital to relationship building. Your biggest mistake is collecting business cards in a drawer and only contacting people when you need a favor.

You want to be assertive, but also respectful of your connection's time. Don't bombard them with daily emails and several voicemails every week, but don't forget about them. Or, more importantly, don't let them forget about you.

Remember that networking offers benefits if you maintain relationships for the long term. These connections can be lifelong friends, so reaching out on a regular basis is essential.

Let's look at the steps you need to take to maintain strong relationships:

1. Keep a list of every connection you make, with notes on who they are, how you met, and what you discussed. Remember something personal that you both connected on, such as a favorite sports team or a shared hobby.
2. Write a schedule for each contact. For example, always follow up an introduction with a thank-you email. Then plan to message them in a few weeks.
3. Follow through on your strategy. You should be setting up lunch or coffee meetings within a few weeks.
4. After the meeting, send another thank-you email, then schedule follow-ups every few months.

Your emails can be short, informal messages to see how they are doing or they can be personalized recommendations. For example, if you read an article on trends in sports technology that are impacting management styles, you can send them the article and mention how you thought they could get value from it.

▶ *Here are some other ways you can maintain professional connections:*

- ◎ *Share exciting announcements, like if you change jobs or start a new project*
- ◎ *Invite them to exclusive events and networking opportunities*
- ◎ *Follow through on promises you make, like recommending them to a client*
- ◎ *Be helpful whenever they need something*
- ◎ *Congratulate them when they share exciting changes in their life or on special days, like work anniversaries*

You're ensuring they remember you when they see you or hear your name. Even better, if they know you're passionate about pursuing a career in their industry, they may think about you first when a position opens up.

Personal Branding 101

Build your personal brand, and share your value with a strong online presence. When you're developing your brand, you must play by one rule — be authentic to yourself.

First, find what platforms you want to build. For example, you can create a professional website that showcases your experience and shares what your unique skills and strengths are. Prove your passion and strengths by creating valuable content.

Blogs are excellent for sharing your passion and skills. Let's say you are building a personal training business. You can write content on new fitness equipment, provide instructional videos on strength training, and post reviews of supplements and other nutritional products.

Your social media presence should be an extension of your brand. Engage in tweet chats that address topics of interest, and join LinkedIn group conversations. Not only can you create connections online, but you could also show potential employers your level of passion.



A May 2015 [survey](#) from CareerBuilder found 52 percent of employers use social media to research candidates. If your blog is informative and your conversations online are engaging and substantial, you earn credibility, and employers will want to talk to you.

What Your Body Tells People

Face-to-face networking is the most powerful form of interaction. Nothing beats the intimacy of in-person conversations. They provide you a unique opportunity to become memorable — to your benefit or to your disadvantage.

Make sure your connections remember you in a positive way. You can either be the shy, slouched person in the corner of the room or the vibrant, excited person they want to approach.

▶ *Here's a list of body language do's and don'ts:*

Do

- ⊙ *Maintain consistent eye contact*
- ⊙ *Give a firm handshake*
- ⊙ *Articulate what you want to say clearly*
- ⊙ *Keep your voice at a moderate volume*
- ⊙ *Hold good posture*
- ⊙ *Smile and project positivity*
- ⊙ *Relax your arms at your sides*

Don't

- ⦿ *Avoid eye contact*
- ⦿ *Speak too quietly*
- ⦿ *Lean away or slouch*
- ⦿ *Fidget, play with your hair, or touch your face*
- ⦿ *Cross your arms across your chest*
- ⦿ *Stare blankly*

Now you know how to use body language to make a positive impression. Time to get out and start meeting people.



Groups and Organizations to Join

Consider joining the following sports groups and organizations:

- The *National Sports Marketing Network (NSMN)*
- The *North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM)*
- The *National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics (NACDA)*
- The *Sport Marketing Association (SMA)*
- The *National Association of Collegiate Women Athletics Administrators (NACWAA)*
- The *College Sports Information Directors of America (CoSIDA)*

Networking goes beyond landing a job — it's the secret to sustainable careers. With this playbook, you're on your way to creating a career that aligns with who you are and guides you to becoming who you want to be.



JobsInSports.com is the only place online with all the tools, statistics, and information needed to connect job seekers with the top sports employment openings. Members gain access to nearly 8,000 employers and thousands of career openings with professional organizations, such as the NBA, NFL, NHL, MLS, WNBA, and MLB. Through weekly verifications and resume referrals, JobsInSports.com makes the job search convenient, up-to-date, and effective for its members.

