

Outreach and Messaging Guide

You probably already know how building your network and connecting with people can positively impact your job search. But reaching out can sometimes feel easier said than done - as anyone who's ever stared at a blank email draft can tell you.

Connecting with people - especially strangers - can feel awkward and overwhelming. You're trying to make a good impression via text, and probably putting a lot of pressure on it in your head. After all, you hope this can lead you to your next opportunity.

The good news is that writing a strong introduction message is a skill. And like all skills it can be learned and developed. The bad news is – you won't get better at it by avoiding it.

Here are some tips to writing a strong first-contact outreach. Pick a few names off your "to contact" list and follow along to get your networking off to a great start.



Get Out of Your Own Head

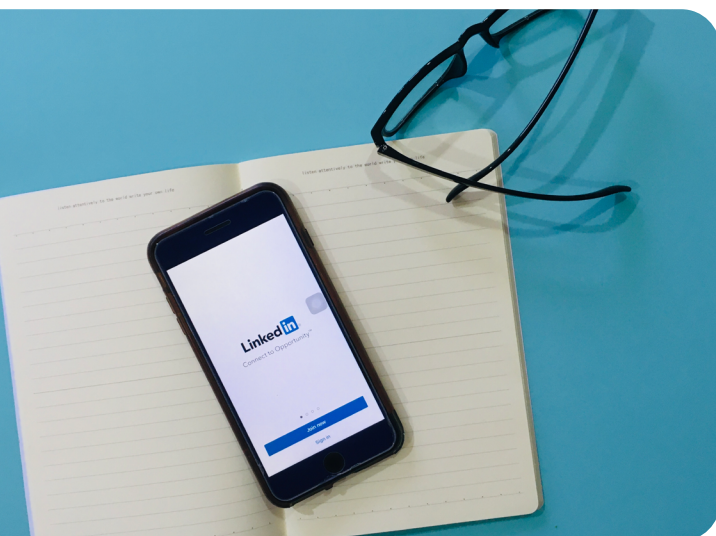
Reaching out to people can be uncomfortable - especially if you're used to doing things on your own. It can feel like "asking a stranger for a favor."

Try this framing: Most people like helping others. It feels good to know you were useful. Think back to times when you were able to help someone, and you'll probably realize this is true.

What feels like "asking a stranger for a favor" is really just "giving someone an opportunity to be helpful."

Imagine this: If you got an email from someone asking for advice on your job/hobby, or someone wanted to ask you about your experience at your old company, you probably wouldn't be upset to see that message, right? **Then why would you be afraid to send it?**

That said, it's important to keep your expectations straight. Unless you're messaging a recruiter regarding a specific role, your goal in reaching out is generally not to ask them for a job. You're looking for information, and to build a relationship that can be beneficial later.



Tell People Why You Want to Connect

Building a network doesn't mean you should reach out to everyone you can. 10 solid connections are more useful than 100 irrelevant ones.

Your goal is connecting, not collecting.

Before you send a message, you should ask two questions:

1. *Why do I want to connect with this person, specifically?*
2. *What do I hope they will do for me?*

Maybe you want to connect because you love their LinkedIn profile and you would like feedback on yours. Or you met at a convention once and their company sounded interesting, so you want to learn more. Maybe a mutual friend connected you, and you wanted to follow up.

Be clear about your goal and purpose, so that the other person knows they're not wasting their time by replying to you.

Half of your message is your answers to those questions. Once you've done that, congratulations!

Look for Common Ground

The easiest way to begin a relationship is to find something you have in common.

Research the person you're looking to reach. Try to identify common places, companies, education, experience, or interests that you can use to build connections with them.

This might be something as broad as working in the same industry or attending the same college, or it might be as specific as sharing an elevator every day for years. A shared connection is the best common ground - especially if that person is willing to make the outreach for you.

Be careful - what seems like a solid commonality to you may not translate as a good reason to connect in theirs. For example, if you went to the same college, but 20 years apart and in completely different departments - they may not care.

Try to identify multiple touch points, and highlight the most relevant ones in your outreach.

Pro Tip: LinkedIn groups are useful for this. Not only can you use the group to identify potential connections - often just being in the same group is enough common ground to connect.



Keep It Brief

One of the key things people want to know about you before starting a relationship is: Will you respect their time? If people feel like you're going to waste their time, they're going to shy away from responding and you'll soon find yourself with an empty inbox.

Demonstrate how you value others' time by keeping your message brief and to the point. Of course, you can still include little flourishes of your personality. But if your writing style includes long, wandering run-on sentences, try to keep that in check for the first message.

Be sure to end your message with a call to action: What do you want from this person? Don't make them guess - tell them how to follow up.

If You Can Offer Something, Do It.

If you're still feeling awkward about reaching out and asking someone else for assistance, try thinking about what you can offer in return.

This doesn't have to be complex. It can be as simple as offering to introduce them to contacts you think might be valuable to them. Maybe you have a skill or a presentation that you can offer to teach their team as a lunch-n-learn session. Perhaps the person you're messaging supports a charity that you can offer to volunteer with. Get creative.

You won't always be able to offer something to each person you reach out to. Don't let that stop you from sending the message. This is a bonus, not a requirement.

However, social media always allows you to offer one thing:
Your audience.

If you can't think of anything, try this:

Find some content that your outreach target has shared on LinkedIn, Twitter, or Facebook, then re-share it to your own feed. Add some of your additional comments and thoughts, and make sure to tag the person so they can see it.

This basically "warms up" the relationship. Even if you've never spoken before, this establishes you in their mind as someone who is interested in their work. They're more likely to take notice of your message if they recognize your name.

Outreach is stressful, but most of the time we make it harder than it needs to be. Remember that this is about relationships first, and everything else second. Take these tips and try not to overcomplicate things.



Ready to give it a shot?



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