the Hidden job market: How Tim got in!

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Katherine: Hi, everyone. This is **Katherine** and I'm really delighted to be here with **Tim** today.

Tim: Hello, everyone.

Katherine: Tim – hi, Tim. Gosh, it's so nice to have you here. How's the weather in Toronto?

Tim: It's sunny and, well, in Celsius, it's 27; but in Fahrenheit, probably around 78 today.

Katherine: Very cool, very good. Very good. And I wanted to introduce you to Tim. I think Tim has got some incredible information and insights. And he's got a wonderful story that I'm delighted that he agreed that we could share it with you.

Tim: Thank you.

Katherine: And Tim is the founder and president CEO of Stafflink Solutions, which is a full service IT search firm that he's had since 2002. And despite the economic crises, his business is growing year over year, which in and on itself, I think, makes him an incredible person to talk to.

And what Stafflink Solutions does is provide permanent end contract IT recruitment solutions. And actually, the way I first came in contact with Tim and what Tim has to say is by reading RecruitingBlogs and it's – what is the URL for that, Tim? Do you remember?

Tim: I believe it's recruitingblogs.com.

Katherine: Yes, I think you're right. And the reason that I read RecruitingBlogs is even though I'm coaching job seekers, is I want to know what recruiters are saying about the search process, their concerns, their wishes that they wish the job seekers knew so that I can share that with the job seekers. I'm trying to be the bridge between the two. And I really recommend reading Tim's blog. He's got a wonderful blog on Stafflink Solutions.

Tim: Stafflink.ca.

Katherine: I'm sorry. One more time.

Tim: It's www.stafflink.ca.

Katherine: Okay. That is a wonderful blog and I love it. His tag line is, and he's right, he's the guy who's placed a thousand people. And so he does know what he's talking about. Even though as an executive search recruiter with specialties more in human resources and marketing and sales, I can vouch for the fact that even though his specialty is IT, the information, the advice, the observations that he has in his articles are valid for a job seeker regardless of what level or what function or what industry. I really recommend that you subscribe to the RSS feed for his blog.

Tim: Thank you, Catherine. You're making me blush here. People could see me.

Katherine: I didn't think Toronto-ians blushed! The post that I read on RecruitingBlogs, which was what started this whole thing, thank goodness for networking …

Tim: Yup, great thing.

Katherine: … was about how long a resume should be. You remember that blog I'm sure.

Tim: Yes.

Katherine: And I made a comment and then Tim was kind enough to comment back. And his comment was, "I've been fortunate that I've not had to use a resume for my last four jobs. They all came about from networking. In today's economy especially, a person that attends networking events and gets to know people in their field at a networking event has a much better chance of getting an interview than sticking a resume into a massive applicant tracking system. I think people need to realize they may need to join associations and go to meetings on a regular basis." I love this part, "Networking is not a one-time thing."

Tim: I feel really passionately about that. And I feel very fortunate that I haven't had to create a resume for the last little while. But through my relationships and through networking, it led me to get these

four jobs. And actually, I realized after I've written that, as I do sometimes – actually the first job I got was through networking as well when I was in university.

Some of your listeners may be from there as well. When I was in university I found a job that I wanted to work at and a company I wanted to go to. And what happened was I had some friends that were at that – at that company, and what I was able to do was use their – the relationship I had with them to introduce me to that company. And I got interviewed that way too. Right even right out of university you can use those relationships too.

Katherine: That's a great point. That's a great point. I'm hoping that job seekers are more and more realizing that networking is not something you do when you are between jobs. And I am astounded and impressed with how you continue to network.

Would you tell them your story, a little about you? And your story is how you did get the last four jobs. And what's interesting to me, too, is that you did – you did some changes in industry and function, which is also very impressive. That you did all of that with networking and the hidden – what we lovingly to refer to as the hidden job market mechanisms. I'd love to hear that story.

Tim: So I was a teacher at one point. I started in the staffing industry. And then that was a job I received out of university. And then I went into teaching. I thought I really enjoyed teaching and did that for a few years. And then during the summer one year I was creating a data warehouse for a company called International Data Corporation. And part of that job was dealing with Accenture, a big consulting company, and I was asking them various questions.

And somebody asked me near the end of the summer if I knew somebody that had the specific skills that I had. And they also told me that the job would pay me triple what I was earning as a teacher.

So long story short on that instance, I ended up seven interviews later getting that position with Accenture. And while I was at Accenture my next position came from another staffing company where the president was somebody that I had dealt with through Accenture. And he took me out for dinner one night and offered me a position to be one of his fourth employees, which is very exciting getting opportunity to be part of a start-up at that time.

And while I worked with this company for five years, one of my biggest competitors from another company here in Toronto, again, another lunch. There seems to be food involved in a lot of these. This gentleman told me he was starting at this time with a dot com staffing company. And he invited me to join him there as well. And so all of these instances took place through relationships that I had developed through the industry and then just stayed in touch with people and they offered me these positions.

And none of these positions were post-it jobs anywhere. And they were positions that they had fortunately come to me for – to work for them. And now I run my own firm, Stafflink, as I have for the last eight years.

And we just had our best month in the history of the company – well, will be the best month in the history of the company in the month of April. And May looks as good or better. And here is a sort of a segue on to maybe another point. But at Stafflink, over 50% of the people that we place and that worked with us are referrals.

Katherine: Really? What an amazing story on – it's so interesting. Networking just sort of helps career planning because if you were to have planned a career, you probably wouldn't have planned such a varied and fun one. And it would have been so much harder. And I love that you did this. And one of the things that you said is that you were staying in touch with people. You're one of those people, clearly, who stayed in touch even though you had a job.

And often job seekers feel--and I know I did when I was in job search--that how do you stay in touch with people, how do you keep these relationships and how do you keep visible enough in their minds that when something comes up, they think of you? How do you go about staying in touch with your network?

Tim: Sure, it's a great question. I think – I have a calendar and I have probably about 15 to 20 people that I want to stay in touch with on a fairly regular basis. And for me, that would probably be quarterly. There are some that I stay in touch with more regularly than that.

One of the key things that I've found that's brought me a lot of success to my career, though, is staying in touch with people exactly like you said when I wasn't looking for something. So when you help somebody and you just ask them how their family is doing, you talk to them about how, you know, their favorite sports team or you talk to them about their company and ask them questions about themselves, and over time, what tends to happen is those are the people that offer you another job, refer you more business. And so that's when, you know, just staying in touch with them.

And it's knowing what type of things to stay in touch with them about that's key as well. Keeping track of that kind of thing through a – a good CRM system or just, you know, in an email. It's fine too. Not everybody has a customer relationship management system but …

Katherine: You know, I love that you mentioned talking to them about other things. Networking, really, is about relationship. It's not about, "Do you have a job lead for me? If you don't, I'm moving on." And I think that it's really clear that you're a success because you have well-rounded relationships with people. I think that's really cool. And so, therefore, you do know what kinds of things to stay in touch with them about.

I think what's interesting is that it sounds like you've got a real core of people that you stay in touch with. And quarterly, it's interesting. I would have thought maybe more often. And so that's good that quarterly is enough to keep those relationships. And I said you had a few that you stay in touch with a little more regularly.

And then do you have another group that maybe every six months or annually you get in touch with and stay in touch with? How do you handle those people that are maybe the next level out from this core that you have?

Tim: Yes, for sure there are other groups – alumni are a really good one. Most of us have probably gone to, you know – if you've been fortunate enough to go to college or university somewhere – really leverage – that's one of my next groups I would say.

So I try to attend different functions that alumni run in, not necessarily homecoming, although that can be fun. I'm kind of past the age where that fun – no. Yeah. You know, they run definite networking

whether it's a – then you have to judge what you like, too. There are different things that I go to. There are wine tasting, alumni event. Then I also participated in athletics. I was involved with track and field. So I stay in touch with those people through different races that we get together and go to. And surprise, surprise, a lot of those people 20 years ago that I went to school with, now are leaders in organizations.

Katherine: Yeah.

Tim: And so that's really helped me to stay in touch with some of those different things. And you stay in touch with people around things that you really enjoy to. It gives a lot more credibility to it.

Katherine: How interesting. I agree. I long ago made the decision I was only going to network with people that I like and go to things that I enjoy. Then, I like that you said that you do things where you're going to like the people at the event. Is that how you – so how do you decide which meetings and networking opportunities you're going to spend time with?

Tim: Sure. I think – I think there's some trial and error involved in that. I've been to, you know, I don't want people to become discouraged because you're going to go to some events where you'll say, "Why am I at this event," or "Why have I come to this event?" And that's okay. You're not going to bat a thousand when you're going to these events. So, you got to stay at it, you know. If you can bat 300 like a good baseball player, you're going to come out of it pretty well.

What I look for in those types of events is I'm looking for times that are specific on an agenda around networking. If it's just going to be that you're going to go to an event and you're sitting at a table where there are eight people there, you could be a bit stymied by not being able to talk with other people there.

But if they have schedules before and after networking times, that's something that I really look for. And I also look for events where I can add some value to. I'm part of a group called President's Networking Association here in Toronto. I'm also part of a Computer Information Professionals Association. So they're both things that I understand and I know about. So, when I'm sitting and talking

to people, I'm not just selling my service, but I'm talking about the industry. I'm talking about things that are going on in the economy.

I've been to a few – I'm not sure in the United States, but I've been to a few, they have Chamber of Commerce events here. And some of them can be just full of all sales people that are selling you from the moment they shake your hand.

And I think that's – those are the kinds – the ones that I have stepped away from a little bit that didn't really add value for me.

Katherine: How interesting. What great tips.

Tim: Can I just add one other point?

Katherine: Sure.

Tim: I think it's important too – that you're going to establish a relationship before you sell yourself, sort of a leading into that a little bit. When you meet somebody, talk to them about what they do. Get them to talk and learn about their business, learn about their interests, and then they're going to be more engaged with you and then you can tell them about yourself. And you're going to, I think, form stronger relationships that way.

Katherine: I do, too. I totally agree. I just don't think that people can care about you and what you have, what you're looking for, what service you have until they know that you care about them. And it's lots more fun when you've got a relationship when you're thinking about building a connection.

So, how is it possible for you? Here you are; you've got this company that's doing stupendously well, which I'm sure takes a lot of your time. What percentage or how many hours – can you give us some idea? How much time do you spend networking on things that are going out and fostering, building these relationships?

Tim: Well, I have to tell you social media has sure helped me. Our relationship, Katherine, is a good example of that. You know, it used to have to take a lot more time. Every day, I do LinkedIn and Twitter, two daily staples for me.

I probably spend anywhere from 15 minutes to 45 minutes on those two tools. I use other social media tools, but those are the two big ones for me. I would go to at least one networking event a week. Most of those networking events are going to, probably, be a couple of hours long.

And I've been fortunate enough to be able to do some amount of core hours as well. What I find is that if you're doing an event after work, you're going to often get people that are working, that are going to be there. And if I find that you're doing a networking event, and this is a stereotype during the day, sometimes there is – it's not a strong a group, but that's, you know, that's just my experience.

Katherine: That's a really – that's a really interesting observation. I think that's a really powerful observation of the time of day can make a difference to there. So let me ask you, you say you spend time on LinkedIn and Twitter. So for those of us who are using it but would love to know what is it that you're doing that is around your networking, what is it you do on LinkedIn and Twitter? And it's wonderful that you're not spending hours and hours a day, which a lot of times people think that it's a permanent time requirement.

Tim: And it can be, you know. I mean, you can get very get caught up in it. So with Twitter, for instance, I've learned that, you know, for some of the listeners that are in staffing or interested in the staffing industry, I found that it was really important to build our brand and not just post about jobs that we have open.

So what we try to do within Twitter is to provide value, probably 5 to 10 posts – well, probably five a day. We go for about 25 to 30 posts a week, just to – there's regular information that is there. I noticed that you're following me now, Katherine, yesterday.

But then you also want to see who's following you, too, and you see the people – you can interact with some of their posts, and I try to retweet other people's stuff as well. And so, you're – it's a really great

exchange of information. And I'm able to create lists within Twitter that give me the best people that I want to follow on a more regular basis.

And then within LinkedIn, what a great tool, I tell you. One of the things that's happening here, just from the staffing industry, I mean, we see a lot of our competitors and people I talk to that are facing a lot of job boards because LinkedIn is so powerful.

So how do I use it? I talk about jobs that I've got posted there. I also use LinkedIn. I post all my blogs to LinkedIn and I also try to retweet things from other people. But within my connections, the really powerful thing that I've just sort of started doing a little bit more lately is to comment on other people's posts that they've made so that you create some information flow between the people and some interactions between them.

And it's much easier when you're networking, when you just need to spend 15, 20 seconds than to actually go and physically meet somebody because of simple, fast way of doing it. We also have used some surveys within LinkedIn, which are very interesting because, then, you can provide value to your clients or to some of your relationships or to your networking, because if you have hundreds of connections, you can – and you've got a good survey topic, it's a – you can provide that data out. And the results are very quick and fast within LinkedIn.

Katherine: That's a really cool idea. I suggest to my clients, to my jobseeker clients, to use surveys as a way to open doors to the executives or the people at the hiring manager level asking an interesting question is a great way to get someone on the phone or over coffee.

People love to ask interesting questions that ask for their opinion and their observations and then using it as a door-opener. And I can see, how on LinkedIn, that would be a great way to start building visibility if you're in the right group that builds visibility with either on your peer group or people who could hire you.

And you get great data, which is also a door-opener. You have a report that you can share and to do that on LinkedIn—and you're right—it is fast, and you get wonderful input and it makes you visible on LinkedIn as well. I think that's a fabulous idea.

Tim: And the other thing within – thank you, Katherine. And within LinkedIn, they also have groups. I should've mentioned that as well. You know, if you're a jobseeker or if you're an employer, you can join – mostly these groups are – don't have restricted membership and once you join those groups then you have this plethora of people out there that you can network with.

Katherine: Yes.

Tim: You know, as an example of that might be if you're a Java programmer, you might want to join the Java user group, more of the Java programmer group and all of a sudden, now you have 10,000 different people, and a lot of them are employers.

Katherine: Really?

Tim: Or people that worked in Java from different places. That's just one example. We have a Stafflink group and there we have comments and discussions as well, which create a lot of discussion.

Katherine: I can tell you, as a recruiter, I always join the group where my candidates are likely to be hanging out.

Tim: Exactly. Yeah.

Katherine: You know, and you're right, the job boards, LinkedIn is where most recruiters I know are going. I have a friend who is a recruiter at corporate headquarters for a very large entertainment company here in Southern California and he hasn't posted a job or looked at resume databases for probably the last eight months.

Everything he saw immediately to LinkedIn. So that's – without a good profile and a lot of connections, good appropriate connections on LinkedIn, people will never get seen for the job. Would you tell us what your Twitter's name is so that people can follow you?

Tim: Sure. @stafflinks, so it's just S-T-A-F-F-L-I-N-K-S.

Katherine: Cool and yes, I am following. I do like your information and I just think that it is so universally applicable. Would you tell me what you think is – what is one of the misunderstandings that jobseekers have about networking and how to get into this hidden job market? I'm sure you talk to people and see mistakes that jobseekers are making or misunderstandings. Help us understand how to do it better.

Tim: Well, I think one of the misconceptions is that some people don't believe that there is a hidden job market. They think that all the jobs are posted online or, you know, the jobs are going to go through the company website and that's far from the truth is, you know, people that are in recruitment understand, too.

So it's uncovering those hidden jobs, you know, how you uncover those. And that's where I come back to networking and looking at who your allies are within those companies. Or maybe you have, you know, LinkedIn is – we'll just go back to LinkedIn. You can search if supposing you want to work at Microsoft in a job and you don't know anybody at Microsoft, well, somebody else within your LinkedIn network might.

And you can request them to make a connection to you. And, one of the things that's really interesting now, too, is that if you – I recommend people get recommendations on their LinkedIn profile, too, because many of our employers now instead of having us do references, they're just looking at if the person has ample recommendations on their LinkedIn profile, which is really changing the paradigm a little bit, too.

Katherine: Wow. That's interesting.

Tim: I should've went off on another tangent there. Sorry.

Katherine: No, that's a really good point. And I think there is a formula for getting the right kinds of recommendations on LinkedIn, and so I think that people should know…

Tim: Good point.

Katherine: …what kinds of people to ask and kind of help them. Usually, when you ask for a testimonial, it's appropriate and helpful to tell the person the area that you'd like them to address, because I've seen a candidate who had 22 testimonials and not one of them really speaks to the result that they can get for an employer.

Tim: Excellent point. You got to make sure it's succinct, too, so people will actually read it. I've seen some of them that can go on for a little bit.

Katherine: Yes, yes. So what do you think is the one thing that – how can jobseekers be better at reaching out and starting a conversation? Maybe someone they've seen on LinkedIn. How do you suggest to people go about starting to build this relationship connection?

Tim: Sure. People are going to need to research the sort of the person's interests or backgrounds. And the great thing of the Internet now is you can find out so much information about people whether it's through Google or ZoomInfo, LinkedIn, Twitter, and find out what the interests are of that person.

So if I was going to go and I'm trying to get a job as a sales manager at a company, I want to find out everything there is to know about, say, the director of sales, or the VP of sales. And then by the time I reach out to that person, I'm a lot more confident in being able to speak with them or send them an email with some information.

One of the techniques I used when I'm selling to new companies is I look at the mission statement of that company. So, I'm trying – often I'm selling at a fairly senior level. But if I'm selling to a CEO or a VP or an executive and I'm quoting their mission statement as part of my sales strategy to them, they usually notice that and they usually want to deal with me as somebody that has put in the time and the effort to understand. But the reality is it's not really that long a time to figure out and integrate that into my sales strategy.

Katherine: Yes. I think that's brilliant. And I suggest to jobseekers that they spend that time. And I had a jobseeker who was interested in a position and found some marketing materials on the Web and was able to craft what they had used in the marketing material as what this person could help them achieve.

And I tell you, I think that candidate went to the head of the line because he was speaking the language that they still wanted to hear and had done something, and you do this, too. Clearly, you do something extra that shows that you're taking time to get to know them. And again, I think that you do is because you're all about the relationship. That's really what you're after. Not the sale or not the job lead, but because it's really about relationship for you.

Tim: You know, one of my theories is and, you know, it's a bit of a cliché, I suppose, but it's, you know, what goes around comes around. So, you know, we talk about – I train my staff to connect to people with other people. And we might not get a placement fee all the time, but those people will remember us connecting them to other people.

Katherine: Yes. That's fabulous. I have found that now that I understand a little more about networking and I'm getting better at it because I was the original reluctant networker when I first realized I had the network if I wanted another job. And one of the things I love to do is to be able to connect people for their mutual benefit. That's just a part of the fun and the joy of being in the network, to be able to help people that way.

Tim: Sure.

Katherine: So when – if people were trying to connect with you, what is something that they could do – your thoughts on what is it people do that kind of turns off the prospect that they like to connect with? Now, maybe not just for a job lead, but they'd like to get to know this person or maybe they'd like to do informational interview.

What are the things that could make you – that you think make people say, "Oh, gosh, I'll talk to this person"? And also the things that make them say, "I'm just not going to spend time with this person."

Tim: Yeah, it's a very good question because that first impression is a – and there's so many different ways to make first impressions now, too. So, I think you have to look at who it is you're trying to make that first impression with, first of all. For some people it's going to work better through email. My belief is if you can get in front of somebody, it's much, much better, but not all of this is possible.

Katherine: Right.

Tim: So, first of all, I'll start with what are the things that you can do to try to get people to engage with you? I think, first of all, just being engaging, friendly and getting to their purpose very quickly. Most of the people don't want you to ramble on and going on about something different. And try to understand them. And I talked about this before, but understanding about, you know, if you found that they have family, you know, what their family is or if you're in an office and you see pictures of a person's degree or if you see pictures of their children – if you're in my office right now, you'd see I have pictures of my son all over it and I have pictures of golfing and skiing all over my office. So that means somebody that was smart would engage me about those things because I would talk for a long time about those things.

And then when they follow up with me again, if they start it with that thing again, that connection, it would work very well. You might not be able to see the person's office that you're trying to connect with. And in that case then you need to use some of the tools on the Internet. And then you may need to find somebody else that works on that organization to give you tips about that person.

What type of personality are they? What type of management style do they use? What is going to work best? You know, should you be sending them a careered package with a Starbucks gift card and your resume inside. You know, there are different ways – that's a (Peter Lockwood's) style. I'll give him credit for that one. Some of you that are in the recruitment industry will know that trick that he does.

Then, things that of sort of, you know, might turn people off or move people away, one of the things for me is people that don't listen, that are not engaged. It's hard to do because you just want to get your points out and you're excited, but learning to be an active listener, that's another bowl of conversation, Katherine, but is very important, I think.

Katherine: We are going to that conversation, too, at some point.

Tim: And also I'm not making assumptions. When you're talking to somebody and they are nodding their head or if somebody is patronizing at all to you, you have to be very careful. And one of the way – well, how do you do that? How can you not come across that way?

I would say I'm a big believer in mock interviews and going out and trying and falling down the first few times because what I do, sometimes, it fails people and recruiters here, if you just have to keep practicing and you could go out there. And if you're trying to get the job but, you know, company A but maybe there's a B and C company that you're thinking about being interested in, maybe you should try your techniques on those before you go to company A, because sometimes there's no better practice than the live theater than – you know, the mock interviews can work well, but when you're actually out doing it, I find it works a little bit better.

Katherine: Oh, that's excellent advice.

Tim: Thank you.

Katherine: So, I think that you've given us a lot of things to think about and really great advice. And so I just have a question. What question did I not ask you that you think we should talk about?

Tim: Well, I think that one of the – I don't know if it's a question, but I think one of the things that comes up a lot of times for people that I've done a lot lately is – and this sort of relates to what you were talking about – is, how do I get past sort of the applicant tracking systems and how do I get in front of who I want to hire me or to get out there?

And it relates – it sort of brings it all full circle but the research, the relationships, and the networking are so important and take time, you know, we spend so much time on our resume and we spent so much time, you know, going to interviews. But if we spent five times as much time as that getting ready for them and doing our research, I think, people would find they're a lot more successful.

And I would also say, just to say it out, in conclusion, too, just sort of say, you know, you – and schedule time for networking. It's not something that, you know, you can just say, "Well, I'm going to go to the baseball game or the hockey game and, you know, I'll meet some people there." You need to pull it in to your calendar. And that's something I've had to do. And sometimes it's three, four hours in a week and I'm tired and I don't want to go to these things. But, you know, I had a really good example, if I can just share one more story, Katherine?

Katherine: Great. Yes, oh, absolutely.

Tim: I had a really good situation. I went to a networking event. It's actually a company – a group called Sprouters. Something your listeners might be interested in, it's sprouter.com. And it's actually a – it's like a Twitter site for entrepreneurs. So it's an entrepreneurs-to-entrepreneurs site. And I went to an event they had here in Toronto and they had a number of people that –and they do them all over North America. But I was at this event where there would people up representing their business and it was a very good networking environment.

And I met a guy who was a venture capitalist. And at that time I felt, "Well, I don't, fortunately, I don't need any ventured capital." But I spoke with him for about 10 minutes and we developed some rapport. I knew some people that he knew. Then, within two days, one of my new clients as a startup technology firm, the owner called me and he's having a lot of trouble finding ventured capital, and I was able to connect them with this guy. And they've done – they've since done half a million dollar ventured capital deal and I've since made two placements with them.

Katherine: Oh, I love it.

Tim: So, you know, just those connections, they can result in – great results for everyone.

Katherine: Yeah. I think any success I've had, all the great stuff that I'm able to do and I've learned all has come from networking. It's just such a wonderful thing to do. And you have given us wonderful stories that represent why it's important and how it can work, and you've given us fabulous tools. And I can't thank you enough. I hope I'm going to be able to return the favor in the spirit of networking. You have to let me know how I can be of assistance to you.

Tim: For sure. For sure I'm sure will come up with synergies between the two of us.

Katherine: I hope so. I'd love to have you in my network and be in yours. And so, Tim, I really, really appreciate your time and what you've shared with us today. Thank you so much.

Tim: Thank you, Katherine. I really appreciate it.

About Tim Collins:

Tim Collins founded Stafflink Solutions, a full-service IT search firm in Toronto, in 2002. His business success as well as his last four jobs prior to founding Stafflink came from his networking and the hidden job market. You can find more of Tim's great advice for jobseekers at http://stafflink.blogspot.com/

About Katherine Moody:

Admitting to being the original reluctant networker, Katherine would do almost anything, including hiding out in the ladies room, to avoid a networking event. Then she interviewed some networking masters to learn their rarely discussed techniques. With their amazingly simple strategies, she went on to get her last 4 jobs by networking her way into the hidden job market. Katherine shares those insider tips on her **job secrets blog**. While there, get her free report: **How to create a memorable brand for your networking**. This is the very first thing you must do to break into the hidden job market.