

DAVID SIEGEL, CEO, MEETUP



---

# OPEN JOB OPPORTUNITIES WITH ONLINE MEETING PLATFORMS

HOW MEETUP BUILDS COMMUNITY, CONNECTION, AND IS A CONDUIT TO CAREER GROWTH

---

BY GINA RILEY

One frustrating aspect of the job search process is the idea you must “get out there and network” or “go foster relationships.” Many of my executive-level clients ask, “Well, exactly how do I do that?” This is an especially painful or daunting prospect for introverts or those suffering from social anxiety. The good news is there are safe options for networking, relationship building, and finding people with similar interests by attending in-person and online virtual events.

I’m pleased to share my Q&A with David Siegel, the CEO of Meetup, the largest platform for finding and building local community. He has over 20 years of experience as a technology and digital media executive leading organizations through innovative product development, rapid revenue growth, and digital traffic acceleration.

Prior to joining Meetup, David was CEO of Investopedia and before that, President of Seeking Alpha. David holds a BA in Philosophy, Politics & Economics, and an

MBA from the University of Pennsylvania. He is an adjunct professor at Columbia University where he teaches strategic planning and entrepreneurship. He hosts the podcast, Keep Connected, which is dedicated to the power of community and is the author of the soon-to-be-released book, [Decide & Conquer](#).

**What are ways people have successfully used the Meetup platform as a conduit to networking and finding rewarding jobs? How many active job-related groups are there?**

The top two categories for Meetup are tech and career or business groups. When it comes to groups focused on networking, growing your career, and building career paths, we have over 40,000 groups around the world and you can find places to network and grow your career in one of 300,000 groups across 190 countries. On average, we have 100,000 Meetup events taking place every single week.

My philosophy about networking is that it should be about getting to know people personally and building relationships. I’ve got many great examples to illustrate how building personal relationships can lead to opportunities. One is a group organizer in California who owns two Meetup groups. One is a networking group he started to help build his career, and the other is a bowling group. He told me he got two different jobs from relationships he developed within the bowling group, and he met his best friend there, too. This is the beautiful overlap between the personal and professional.

If you are looking for a job, the best thing you can do is find something you are passionate about, get out and find people and groups that share your passions, whether that is board games, Buffy the Vampire Slayer fan club, or Harry Potter trivia.

**How did the pandemic open opportunities for people to connect literally from anywhere?**



“

**MY PHILOSOPHY ABOUT NETWORKING IS THAT IT SHOULD BE ABOUT GETTING TO KNOW PEOPLE PERSONALLY AND BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS.**

I was talking to someone who runs an ecstatic dance Meetup group that was originally in St. Louis with ten people attending. They opened it up online and they now have 35 people coming to every meeting from twelve countries like Argentina, Bulgaria, and Israel.

Does this help with job opportunities? Yes! Everything can potentially help. One of the things I like to say is that **luck is hard work**. Our job is to work hard to put ourselves in situations where luck ends up happening.

**I call it putting yourself in the line of fire of opportunities.**

Beautiful! That's exactly right. That is why Meetup is so important. If you put yourself out there enough and go to different events, something will happen. I met with an organizer who wanted to build up his company by meeting more people. He committed himself to go to a Meetup event every single week for 52 weeks. He met thousands of people.

Another beautiful story is about a homeless veteran in Australia who did not have an advanced education. He started attending groups to learn technology and basic JavaScript. He's attended over 1000 events. He met his wife through a Meetup event, got his first job after being homeless, and now devotes his life to creating Meetup events to help other people grow personally and professionally.

**What does it feel like to lead an organization that has that kind of impact on people?**

This is my life's purpose. The most important thing is creating a life for your family. The second most important thing is to have an impact. I spend my time helping to cure the loneliness epidemic, which is enormous in this world.

The way I started my career was in Human Resources, which is not common for a CEO. I care deeply about helping people. Did you know 46% of people regularly feel lonely and for GenZ, it's higher – about 62%. This can lead to depression and other harmful outcomes. Twenty-five percent of people don't have one trusted confidant. Meetup addresses the loneliness epidemic and can be part of a cure.

I met a man who told me he spent eight hours a day playing video games at his home in Texas. His brother encouraged

**IT'S VERY IMPORTANT FOR JOB SEEKERS TO REDUCE THEIR EXPECTATIONS BECAUSE THE HIGHER YOUR EXPECTATION, THE GREATER YOUR POTENTIAL DISAPPOINTMENT WILL BE IF IT DOESN'T WORK OUT.**



him to get out there and do something else. He ended up going to only five group events for an outdoor club and then was asked by the outgoing organizer to take over the group. That was 10 years ago. Since then, he's hosted over 900 events. There have been marriages and dozens and dozens of jobs that have come out of the relationships in this group.

And what is funny is, he is the biggest introvert. When you give an introvert the opportunity to be a leader, that's the greatest gift you could give them. It is such a confidence builder to have a whole community looking up to you. It gives you a sense of your life's purpose.

**I listened to your podcast with David Spinks. The two of you spoke about having zero expectations as you enter an ecosystem like Meetup and that purpose and expectation are two different things. There can be purpose in connecting and networking with no expectation of a specific outcome. Could you expand on this and give advice to job seekers?**

It's very important for job seekers to reduce their expectations because the higher your expectation, the greater your potential disappointment will be if it doesn't work out.





**WHEN YOU GIVE AN INTROVERT THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE A LEADER, THAT'S THE GREATEST GIFT YOU COULD GIVE THEM.**



Often when job seeking, your conversation is not going to lead to something, which means you're going to end up with a batting average of one in ten. If you can get a job from ten meetings, that means that nine of the ten times, you're unhappy. The higher the expectation you have that a job will come out of a conversation, the more likely you will be unhappy. This leads to you to not wanting to do it again because the experience was painful.

The best thing to do is to have a goal and purpose to meet amazing people, and while you might want a job, it might take a meaningful amount of time. But your goal should be to simply connect with people, and the job will end up finding you, so long as you meet the right people and have the right conversations. It's like dating. If you expect every date will lead to your future spouse, it might make you miserable.

**I have seen you quoted as saying, "Meetup is a company focused on building community with the underlying belief we become better people when we're around other people." Would you talk about how Meetup maintains its mission in the wake of the pandemic?**

Our mission statement is to empower personal growth through real human connections. We realize personal and professional growth are intertwined – they overlap. Real human connections are about building relationships with

people whether it's online or in person. When the pandemic hit, we doubled down on our mission to empower personal growth and real human connection whether it is in person or not.

Meetup was founded by Scott Heiferman right after 9/11. He saw people who were vulnerable, in trauma, and needing community. They needed to be around other people. He gathered a bunch of people together in his building and realized it should not take a tragedy to create community. That is how Meetup was born. We are coming up on our 20-year anniversary.

Our platform supports and enables people to take action, but they need to act for themselves. We are not fishing for them. We are teaching people how to fish and creating the environment. They need to get themselves off the couch to do things.

We know people need to meet up with others even more now when they're homebound than ever before. We made a hard pivot when the pandemic hit and within three days started hosting online events. In the last year and a half, we've had over 5,000,000 online events!

**What role does Meetup play in bringing very different people together?**

One of my core beliefs in life is that xenophobia and hate

come from ignorance. Too often our society is separated by color, religion, socioeconomic groups, etc. But, if someone is really obsessed with beanie babies or horror films, it doesn't matter their religion or a socioeconomic group. Meetup brings people together with similar interests but otherwise very different from each other.

Ageism is a real thing and there are perceptions around people who are in their late 40s or 50s by people in their 20s and vice versa. The reality is many of those people don't interact with people who are 30 years younger or older than they are – so Meetup serves to bring people together who could look totally different from each other but share common passions and interests. This allows people to check stereotypes and assumptions and ask questions that help build meaningful relationships they would never encounter otherwise.

**What are some creative ways you have seen people come together despite the pandemic?**

There are so many success stories about people bonding through online events. For example, I know of a running group where the people would go for individual runs, get back together online, drink beers, and talk about their runs together. There were cooking and dinner party groups where people would send out a recipe, set their laptops up in the kitchen and cook and eat together.

**I've felt sad for our younger workforce because I know I met many of my best friends in the formative years of my career. Golf outings, going for beers or margaritas, and the in-house candle parties. These are my friends thirty years later. These are the people I turn to in times of difficulty.**

**I read on a LinkedIn post that Meetup has a relationship with Starbucks. Would you tell me more about that?**

The primary way people socialize, especially for younger people, has been at our offices. The second place we socialize is at home. The third place are coffee shops, like Starbucks, which is known for being that third place where people meet. With the pandemic,



**OUR PLATFORM SUPPORTS AND ENABLES PEOPLE TO TAKE ACTION, BUT THEY NEED TO ACT FOR THEMSELVES. WE ARE NOT FISHING FOR THEM. WE ARE TEACHING PEOPLE HOW TO FISH AND CREATING THE ENVIRONMENT.**

we have not had a way to hang out with our colleagues. We are not seeing people. Building a local community outside of work can be that third place. Since Starbucks is known for being a community hub and Meetup is known for being a community building platform, it made sense for the two brands to team up.

When I told the CEO and chairman of Starbucks that the number two place where people attend Meetup events is Starbucks, he asked me how they could become number one. So, we formed a partnership with Starbucks at a time when they are celebrating their 50th anniversary and we at Meetup are celebrating our 20th. Both are iconic brands that are all about gathering and helping people to connect with other people. It's a no-brainer because they have the venues, and we connect people together. It's going to be a beautiful thing.

**Another thing I heard you talk about on one of your podcast episodes was the pendulum swing due to working from home. We've gone from being socially removed and introverted to over-socializing. How do you recommend people find a happy medium or their sweet spot?**

Let me tell you about David Good. David is a long-time introvert, and he decided that he was going to devote his time and his energy towards helping people who were new to the city where he lives in Michigan.

He created a Meetup group where many of the participants don't necessarily know many people. David ended up establishing a brand as someone who helps people come together. He became the go-to connection expert even though he's a strong introvert.

**I talk with my clients about how they can showcase their thought leadership in ways that feel authentic to them. The idea is to start conversations that are relevant to their field because it is a great way to build their brand and future-proof their career. What are ways you've seen unlikely people establish their brand through the platform?**

Meetup is a great way to grow your thought leadership and your business. There is a woman who is a financial advisor who used Meetup to build her practice by creating a small group of women who got together to become more educated on personal finance. She has been helping women become less intimidated about managing their finances and save money. She's gained 50+ clients for her financial advisory practice from the exposure alone.

When you share your knowledge and provide a service, people are attracted to you and want to build relationships with you because you're doing it to genuinely help. There are authors who write books who build their brands through Meetup groups, and it helps with book sales, speaking engagements, TED talks, etc.

**For introverted jobseekers who are having a hard time pulling the trigger to find a Meetup event to join, what encouragement would you give them? What are ways to "find their people"?**

Many introverts sign up and RSVP to an event and then don't go. Some even drive to the event, look in the

**WHEN IT COMES TO YOUR CAREER - YOU ARE THE PRODUCT. EVEN IF YOU'RE IMPERFECT AND YOU FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE, GET YOUR PRODUCT OUT THERE. BUILD RELATIONSHIPS, GET FEEDBACK, AND LEARN SO YOU CAN FIGURE OUT HOW TO ADJUST YOUR APPROACH.**

”

window, and walk away. They can't do it. They feel intimidated.

So, here is some advice. Number one is to commit yourself. If you RSVP, show up. Number two is if you go the first time and it's not what you expected but you see the group's potential, show up at least one more time. Don't just give it one shot and think it's over. Be persistent and give it a second try. Third, take a buddy or someone you know as a security blanket. Even if you spend all your time with your friend, the next time you go you'll be more open to introducing yourself to new people.

Meetup has hundreds of groups dedicated to introverts. You can find them by typing in the term introvert. The great thing about these groups is they are run by like-minded people who understand how to approach introverts and create safe and secure meeting environments.

**There are job seekers at home right now, reading this article, who feel hopeless. They may have had little connection for two years. Why is it so important for people to get together? How do people take that first step when they feel vulnerable?**

First, acknowledge there are thousands of other people like you in your city. You're not the only person

”

**OFTEN WHEN JOB SEEKING,  
YOUR CONVERSATION IS NOT  
GOING TO LEAD TO  
SOMETHING, WHICH MEANS  
YOU'RE GOING TO END UP  
WITH A BATTING AVERAGE OF  
ONE IN TEN...THE HIGHER THE  
EXPECTATION YOU HAVE  
THAT A JOB WILL COME OUT  
OF A CONVERSATION, THE  
MORE LIKELY YOU WILL BE  
UNHAPPY. THIS LEADS TO YOU  
TO NOT WANTING TO DO IT  
AGAIN BECAUSE THE  
EXPERIENCE WAS PAINFUL.**

“

that has social anxiety right now. This is magnified by the pandemic because you've had less practice and less time around people.

Second, find smaller groups of people to get together with. The average Meetup group is seven to eight people, not twenty or fifty. Do not go to a conference. Find a small group or event with 3-4 people showing up, and you'll be more comfortable. Work your way up. It's about taking baby steps.

Even our own employees have expressed that it has been hard for them and feel grateful once they force themselves to attend a couple of meetings. So, what I would say is create a mechanism that forces you to meet with people once a week or once a month. The key is to set specific goals and start doing things. Break the habit of watching Netflix in the comfort of your home. Find an accountability partner to make sure you go.

### **What are some missed opportunities you wish people would take advantage of?**

Inertia and analysis paralysis are comfortable states for many people because they minimize risks, and decrease the likelihood of failure because you don't act. Perfect is the enemy of good enough.

One of the things I teach in a class at Columbia is about a minimum viable product. Get your product out there in the market, even if it is terrible. Get people to react so you can learn as much as possible. When it comes to your career – you are the product. Even if you're imperfect and you feel uncomfortable, get your product out there. Build relationships, get feedback, and learn so you can figure out how to adjust your approach. Take the lean startup approach and apply it to your career by testing your product and getting feedback. It is all about pivoting and seeing what resonates.

### **How can companies take advantage of Meetup to attract a diverse talent pool? Are you seeing recruiters on the platform? Or executive search consultants?**

Many companies use Meetup to attend events where

there is a pool of talent. It is great for recruiting and finding jobs. We've had thousands of people connect and cofound businesses, and we have recruiters come to our events. It's no accident that many of the people who join the Meetup team have been long-time members and organizers.

If a company is looking for greater exposure and diversity – attend an event in your city focused on people of color, LGBTQ, women, etc. in an industry and you'll be able to find amazing candidates.

We have about 5000 different companies that sponsor Meetup events. For example, Google has 350 different Meetup groups and AWS has 200 groups. Another way to find a company to work for is to go to an event that's being sponsored by that company because the organizer is a direct conduit.

### **Why Meetup over competitors? What distinguishes Meetup from other options in the marketplace?**

Facebook is focused on online, and Meetup is focused much more on getting people to get together in person to do things. If you want to message back and forth with someone and meet people who share your common interests, you can join a Facebook group. If you want to go to an event, meet people, and have in-person dialogue, then Meetup is for you. Our brand is associated with "in real life" friendships and their brand is much committed to keeping the conversation going online. I'd say that is the biggest difference.

### **Do you follow authors who write about business, management, or leadership? Any resources to recommend?**

I like books about hiring great management teams and influencing people. The classic go-to is Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. For the class I teach at Columbia there are several required readings like *The Hard Thing About Hard Things* by Ben Horowitz or Tony Hsieh's book, *Delivering Happiness*. I also like *Lean Startup* by Eric Ries, and another is *The Power of Habit* by Charles Duhigg.

**OUR MISSION STATEMENT IS TO EMPOWER PERSONAL GROWTH THROUGH REAL HUMAN CONNECTIONS. WE REALIZE PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH ARE INTERTWINED - THEY OVERLAP. REAL HUMAN CONNECTIONS ARE ABOUT BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE WHETHER IT'S ONLINE OR IN PERSON.**

**You've got a new book coming out in the first quarter of 2022. Tell me more about that.**

Yes! March 8, 2022, my first book is coming out, **Decide and Conquer**. It has been a dream of mine to share my thoughts about decision making with a broad audience and impart ideas from 25 years of working. Much of what I cover is related to my experiences with Meetup and WeWork, and combines leadership advice with management principles in an easy-to-read storytelling format.

Not becoming a better decision maker is oftentimes what prevents people from leading the life they want and settling with the life they have right now. There are general principles that are fundamental to decision making. You need to be willing to take risks. You need to be kind, because kindness always comes back to you. Be surprised about being surprised, meaning people get surprised too often. Your job is to figure out how to avoid being surprised by things. The book covers the major ways you can improve your decision making and lead the life you want.

**Thank you so much, David! Our conversation makes me realize social meeting platforms are for everyone – introverts and extroverts alike. Anyone willing to bet on themselves and take risks to meet new people, build genuine relationships, and learn from others will find real ways to uncover career opportunities that may not be advertised yet. I know your stories will spark new ways for people to think about networking to benefit their career advancement opportunities. Best of luck to you with your new book launch in 2022!**

## CONTRIBUTING WRITER'S PROFILE



*Gina Riley Consulting & creator of the CareerVelocity System™. She is a career transition coach who helps leaders customize their career stories to land jobs where they can leave a legacy. She is an Executive Search Consultant for Talence Group.*



**CONTACT  
GINA:**

[ginarileyconsulting.com](http://ginarileyconsulting.com)

 [@ginariley](https://www.linkedin.com/company/ginariley)