

Networking is a vital tool for personal development



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**It is no good working hard and smart if nobody knows about it.
You need relationships to spread the word around**

GENUINE networking is not transacting business chores; rather, it is the active process of building and managing productive relationships. Networking is a vital component to marketing your employability. It does not guarantee a job. It is one of the tools to assist you in meeting your employment objectives.

Success in business depends on technical competence, ability to build strong relationships and the networks of relationships. It is not enough to excel at the technical part of your job. You also have to excel at the art and science of networking.

Networking is a process, which includes personal relationships with your managers, peers, subordinates, team members, and many others. It also includes relationships within and between departments, teams, functions, divisions, branches, and subsidiaries. And it includes all sorts of external ties – relationships with clients, customers, suppliers and investors, even your competitors.

The benefits of networking can be scientifically measured. Dozens of scientific studies reveal that those who network well are more effective, paid better, promoted faster, healthier, happier – and even live longer.

The most successful business leaders are the best relationship builders, but they are not necessarily the best, technically speaking. Those who ignore or neglect their relationship-building responsibilities ‘top out’ early in their career.

The main cause of failure for managers who take charge of a new situation is neglecting to build strong personal relationships. As you advance in your career, relationship-building becomes a larger and more significant part of your responsibilities. Those who benefit the most from networking build large, well-diversified networks that include a wide range of internal and external relationship. Genuine relationships are based on real trust, mutual understanding and benefits.

Genuine networking is the only road to long-term success. One of the objectives in networking is to increase the legitimacy of the idea of building and managing networks of relationships. Relationship-building and networking skills can be learned by anyone. What you need is new information about the importance and power of relationships and concrete advice on how to put this information into practice.

Networking is even more important and more powerful for business than for personal purposes. Think about that get-together party you recently attended. You will recall that there were guests who seemed to know almost everyone in the room, moving from group to group with great ease, leaving no hand unshaken. Others, meanwhile, stood either alone or with just one other person for what seemed like hours, chatting stiffly and appearing as if they could not wait to be on their way home. Which type would you expect to accomplish more in his or her career? And, why? The ability to relate well with others is a sign of a person’s mastery of the art of networking.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT: In the traditional corporate culture, an executive gave an order and subordinates were expected to follow it, no questions asked. Today, companies are constantly reorganizing. Clear-cut line of authority has faded. Actions and attitudes of superiors, subordinates, colleagues, customers, suppliers, competitors and government regulators are more important than ever to the success of your own efforts, because each individual plays a key role in today’s tight, ant bureaucratic world. How well you do your job, your pay raises, and promotions, they all depend on your ability to network with all of these different people. In addition, in today’s downsized business climate, the people whose help you need to get your job done may be located in another department, another company, or even on another province.

To build a network – and help others do likewise – managers must learn to use networking. Relationships are a basic human need. Helping other people fulfill their need for relationship helps you, too. People tend to do what is expected of them. If you expect the best from people around you, they will usually meet that standard. If you expect less, you will get less. Smart networking means building strong relationships that benefit both sides. By bringing together people with similar interests, you can build strong creative teams. This helps you, the managers, to earn the respect and cooperation of a wider spectrum of specialists.

Senior executives who avoid contact with the rank and file often find out about serious problems only when it is already too late. Repeated interaction encourages cooperation. People who repeatedly come into contact with each other tend to develop positive relationships, especially when they shared a common goal. It is a small world. You are surprisingly close to critical information, resources and people. The average professional knows 1,500 people directly, and each of these people has a similar number of contacts.

Just a few well-placed phone calls to friends – and friends of friends – can get you in touch with almost anybody in the country. You will have a much better chance of forming a new relationship quickly if you can use the name of a mutual acquaintance, even someone you don't really know very well, to introduce yourself to your target.

PERSONAL NETWORKING: Effective networking depends on managing your personal relationships in three directions: Up – with your bosses; Down – with your subordinates; and Lateral – with peers inside and outside the company. In all three directions, effective networking means that you identify key relationships, build mutual understanding and act in ways that benefit both sides. Here are some tips:

- Make a list of critical contacts – those relationships that are particularly important for your effectiveness. Identify critical gaps – personal relationships you need, but don't yet have.
- Don't rely on memory. For two weeks, keep a log of all your interactions – who, what, where, why. Put each person on a card and arrange the cards in order of the importance of the relationships. This will tell you how you should be dividing your time.
- Work to improve your critical relationships. Think of what the other people need, and find ways you can help them do their jobs better. Fill the gaps. Get together with new people who are important to you, have yourself introduced or introduce yourself – invite them to lunch.
- Get used to continuously appraising all of your relationships and try to get and give as much feedback as possible. Networking is a lifelong project.

Making the 'Right Friends' inside your company is also vital. It can lead to better pay, faster promotions, greater job satisfaction and the ability to find new opportunities.

Do personal network inventories. Map out the relationships – strong and weak – that you already have within your organization. Is your network diversified, balanced between strong and weak links, and built on long-run and mutually beneficial relationships? Most important, identify what your network lacks. What are the critical gaps? What are the relationships you should have to get the information or resources you need to get your job done?

Fill your critical gaps. Once you know where the gaps are in your network, start filling them in. Be authentic and genuine as you develop relationships. If you are too obvious, people will see right through you and it will backfire. The best way to initiate a relationship is to let it happen naturally. Meet people at company social events or as part of teams, committees or task forces. Always volunteer for such activities, as they provide ways to meet a diversified set of people.

Find common third parties. Remember the small world principle. If you don't know someone directly, you undoubtedly know someone who does. They can provide an introduction. If nothing else works, start a relationship with someone by finding some reason to talk to him/her. Is there some information he/she needs?

Know your boss. Your most immediate and direct relationship will always be with your boss. Generally, this will be the first link in your network. Use it to practice your networking skills and to learn other skills such as working successfully with people in authority.

Build around the core. All companies have a core business that is at the very heart of its enterprise. You may work in a manufacturing company that has a service division. But the service division may be viewed

as peripheral to the company's manufacturing. You must identify the core of your business. If you're not in the centre, build relationships with the people who are.

Come to with ideas that could help them. try to set up lunches with a few, key people to share those ideas. Or stop by their offices early in the day or late in the afternoon to pass along information. This will establish you as someone to be taken seriously, someone who is truly interested in the core business and someone who is truly informed.

Remember your peers, they make powerful friends, but dangerous enemies. Peer relationships are complex because they involve a mix of both cooperation and competition. A peer today may be your boss tomorrow – or vice versa. Peer relationships are more important than ever, given the rise of such new corporate styles as multifunctional teams, 'network' organizations and horizontal corporations. All replace the traditional top-down vertical hierarchy with a complex web of relationships.

Peer relationships are not defined on organizational charts, which only define reporting relationships. But they are becoming more and more critical to one's success. The trick to building strong peer relationships is reciprocity. You help others, and you will be helped in the process.

Build relationships for the long run. That means being responsible and ethical in your relationships. It means always remembering the secrets of building strong relationships – mutual understanding and mutual benefits. There is a paradox in building relationships for the long run. You must focus less on what you need and want, and more on what the other person needs and wants. Try to figure out how you can contribute to the other person's life. In the process, you will be helped as well.

And, do not forget to become a critical relationship yourself. You can do things that will make other people want you as a member of their networks. Become a 'bridger', the one who is the critical link between groups. This person knows the business and inner workings of both groups. Peers often turn to him, making him an extremely valuable player. Join committees that bring together disparate parts of the business. Volunteer for – or start – a multifunctional team. Being a 'bridger' puts you in a very advantageous position. You contribute to the organization – and make yourself a critical relationship in other people's networks.

Do not commit the blunder of forgetting to network at all because you think you are immune and do not have to do it. You must network inside your company to tap into the informal grapevine and be in the know about as much as possible. You need internal relationships to help you build your knowledge to protect yourself, and to have allies who will come to your aid and defense.

Finally, you need buddies who can spread the word about you. It is no good working hard and smart if nobody knows about it. You need those relationships so people will know that you are doing a really great job.

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