

The Power of Networking®

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Introduction

It has been nearly twenty years since Anne Boe and Bette Youngs wrote a book entitled, “*Is Your “Net” Working?*” If you were asked the same question, how would you answer? Are the links in your net working? Is it time to take the pulse of your network? Have you achieved your networking potential? Is your network creating support? Are you leveraging your relationships to allow you to achieve your goals? ¹

What is Networking?

Networking is the product of connecting “people we know to people they know” in an organized fashion to achieve specific goals. While networking has the ability to increase and leverage existing contacts, networking should not be perceived as a taking experience. It is rather a giving one.² Diane Darling sees networking as simply “the art of building and sustaining mutually beneficial relationships.” Although she suggests limiting your network to “a few good strategic relationships,” she points out that each of us typically knows between 200 and 250 people and “so, you’re automatically two steps away from 10,000 people.” This exquisitely rapid growth in connecting people to people is the inherent power of networking.³

Just connecting people to people is not enough. Networking is building strong relationships. In a world of new technology, it is easier now than ever before to build strong relationships thanks to increasing bandwidth. Communication by telephone, email and Internet is available globally twenty-four hours a day. With the rate of and scope of change in the workplace, we need to deepen and broaden relationships to achieve success. “Bottom line: high trust relationships have great value in today’s business environment. Information comes at a premium – and the most effective way to acquire information is often through relationships.”⁴

Finding Jobs and Finding Internal Career Opportunities

1) The Importance of Networking

How can great jobs and outstanding career opportunities present themselves to you before being snapped up by others? How are job descriptions and career information disseminated? How can you get plugged in? Postings? Forums? Monsterboard.com? Of course, these may work, but personal networks can provide some unique opportunities that other media cannot. Networking allows you to interact through formal and informal settings with people who can provide information about jobs, career opportunities, leads, personal contacts and other business strategies. They often sound an alarm for changing organizational strategies or present job openings, long before any posting, to speed you to an appropriate response.

Malcom Gladwell in his best seller, *The Tipping Point*, points out that we don't live and work in a vacuum. The links between any two people anywhere in the world are not "few and distant," but rather "we are all bound up together in a grand interlocking web." Networking is about being bound together through "six degrees of separation" from one another. That is to say that we are connected to one another through others. Gladwell has found that not all people in the six-degree-of-separation chain are equal. There are a number of people who are linked to every one else in but a few steps. He calls them "the connectors, the mavens, the helpers, and the teachers." Networking is about people communicating with other people. Word of mouth is a powerful communication tool that can often influence people. It is governed by the 90-10 rule: 90 percent of the world is influenced by the other 10 percent. "While you may have a handful of close friends, the "connectors" know thousands of people... they have the power to spark a word of mouth epidemic... they are the messengers... they are connected to a mountain of acquaintances.... and more jobs come from acquaintances than from close friends." ⁵

2) Jobs and Internal Career Opportunities

Networking has long been the number one job search strategy. According to the US Department of Labor, networking is essential to uncover job opportunities in the "hidden" job market, which accounts for more than half the jobs in America. Knowledge and ability are important. However, jobs and career opportunities no longer solely depend on what you know and how well you do your work. You not only have to do your job well but also make sure that others know you're doing your job well. Visibility is key to keeping yourself employable given today's business environment, uncertainty, unrestricted competition, globalization, mergers, and acquisitions.

Millions of professionals already turned to broad based networking site like **LinkedIn.com** to swap job details and contact information, often for recruiting purposes. Business executives also have turned to online networks, message boards, email lists and information forums for job search and recruiting purposes. Another Internet site, **YorZ.com** offers opportunities to additional corporate alumni groups at scores of companies to connect and recruit within each organization.

<http://groups.yorz.com/groupsDirectory.htm>

3) Benefits of Networking

Networking provides information, support, leads, and skills for interviews. It will allow you to understand and validate jobs and career requirements through discussions with others currently working in the field. It will allow you to narrow the list of jobs and potential employers from available literature and emails on the Internet and through Internet Networking Sites. Networking efficiently allows you to assess your job skills, increase your self-confidence and gain recognition and visibility in your job and in your career. It will help you develop knowledge of the vocabulary of the field, gather information for job applications, and help maintain your employability in highly uncertain job markets.

4) Building a Network

Actively participating in high school and college alumni networks is an effective way to start networking with classmates. Make company workers and industry associates part of your links and become active in your professional association and trade group. Become active in your church or synagogue. How about the people who served with you in the armed forces? Your doctor, dentist, accountant, grocer, dry cleaner and your wife or husband's friends and business associates? Golf clubs, tennis clubs, and social clubs are all an integral part of building a network. Hobbies are a good place to connect people from all walks of life. Becoming a volunteer in charities such as, Feeding the Homeless, the United Way, Public Radio and Television support teams are a wonderful source of networking. Take an active roll in PTA or in organizations that best reflect your interests. And always start your day with the idea of adding at least two more people to your network.

5) Four Categories of Network Sites Based on Functionality:

A. General business network exchange leads, contacts, and information. These sites are not generally industry specific. Examples of well-known sites are:

- Business Network International at www.bni.com
- Leads Club at www.leadsclub.com
- Le Tip International. Inc. at www.letip.com
- National Association of Female Executives at www.nafe.com

B. Trade and Professional sites are groups organized around specific industries, companies and professions to provide information, training, education, and opportunities. Google.com, Ask.com and Yahoo.com can be the best search engines to find the right associations for your industry or profession.

C. Service network sites are public, private and charitable organizations with members from all walks of life that come together to provide service to others. They range from cancer support groups to organizations that build houses for the poor in Guatemala. Examples of these organizations are:

- Rotary at www.rotary.org
- Lions at www.lionsclubs.org
- Kiwanis at www.kiwanis.org
- Chambers of Commerce at www.chamberofcommerce.com
- Political Advocacy Groups at www.vancouver.wsu.edu/fac/kfountain/
- League of Women Voters at www.lwv.org
- PTA's at www.pta.org

D. Special network sites consist of a variety of clubs and events that bring people together and allow them to mine business contacts such as, health clubs, bridge clubs, gourmet cooking classes, sports boosters, tennis mixers, travel clubs, etc. Go to Google.com, Ask.com and Yahoo.com for a virtually endless list of special networks in your area.

Internet Networking

The notion of having access to hundreds or even a few thousand connections has given way to the burgeoning numbers of connections available on Internet Social Network Sites and Internet Business Networks. Internet networking goes far beyond connecting strangers. It enables users to set and make visible their common interests electronically, resulting in both online connections as well as frequent offline connections through those connected online.

Internet networking has experienced exponential growth since 2003. For example, MySpace.com, the social networking behemoth founded in 2004, currently has had more than 4.5 billion-page views to the site per day (65 billion page views per month). MySpace.com has more than 110 million monthly active users around the globe with an average of 300,000 new subscribers signing up daily.

Facebook.com, also launched in 2004, has the highest growth rate in the industry and is expected to overtake MySpace.com in 2009. Facebook.com reports a 270% increase in users and currently reports more than 60 million daily visitors and an average of 250,000 new daily registrations. It has 50 million mails per day, 10 billion "friends" relationships, and more than 65 billion views per month. Facebook's widget platform, launched last summer, allows advertisers a deeper level of free access to Facebook's users by providing users with the ability to write applications that can be shared from person to person.⁶

Other social networking sites, such as Hi5.com showed 28 million monthly visitors, Friendster.com and Orkut.com each reported 24 million, Bebo experienced 18 million and Tagged had 13million monthly visitors to their networking site. Although both MySpace and Facebook are competing for global dominance, two thirds of their visitors are from North America. Bebo.com attracts a majority of its visitors from Europe while Orkut.com is firmly entrenched in Latin America and the Asian-Pacific as is Friendster.com. Both Hi5.com and Tagged.com have a balanced visitor base drawing visitors from all of the five continents. It appears that social networking is not a vagary of the moment but rather an activity that has been sewn to the fabric of our everyday routine.⁷

Social Networks in the Business Arena

Social networking is one of many technologies, including blogs, wikis and virtual worlds, that have crossed over into the business arena. However, the business-networking world has been far more cautious than social networking. Employees are wary of disclosing proprietary information on line to potential competitors. Executives are reluctant to jeopardize their jobs and divulge information online about their companies. Policing these services to weed out impostors can be difficult and the sites are still in the early stages of turning their networks into sustainable businesses.

However, leading organizations in their respective industries such as **Accenture, Amazon, Apple, EA, Gap, Intel, Intuit, Microsoft, Pepsi, PWC** and **Teach for America** were morphed into the blog lists of Facebook.com two years ago and present a well for career and job information.

"Professionals are fairly protective about [using] their social networks which they spend [their] whole lives [gathering]..." says Professor Piskorski of Harvard Business School. He adds that the appeal of social networking is limited largely to industries where workers are fairly isolated from their colleagues on a day-to-day basis, like medicine, construction and sales.⁸

"But taking a risk on an advertising social network paid off for Angela Glenn of Long Beach, Calif. The 40-year-old graphic designer first joined a free social network created by the blog AdRants as a 'lurker,' reading but not contributing to the site. Before long, she gained the confidence to debate topics like Web-site design, and she and one sparring partner grew so fond of each other's styles that they eventually started an ad agency together, the GASP Company LLC. 'You get to hear potential partners out and see how they think about things,' she says. 'It's the closest thing you get to a personal recommendation.'"⁸
See above.

Notwithstanding business sites are popping up all over the web. For example, Blue Chip Expert is a site, by invitation only, for hiring managers to find highly qualified experts. Blue Chip is a service similar to LinkedIn, which helps exchange contact information for jobs, often for recruiting purposes, but with the added benefit of earning referral fees when someone hires from a member's network. Another example is Sermo.com which serves licensed physicians. A Reuters Internet site serves employees whose companies are Reuters customers, while Inmobile.org serves a network for high level executives in the wireless business or related industries. AdGabber.com is a web site for the advertising industry. ExcuNet.com is an example of an executive job search company that has added networking capabilities.

Top Ten Tips on Networking

- 1) **Make networking an instinctive part of your life** from the first conversation of the morning to the last conversation of the night. Organize and attend weekly networking meetings. Be sure to focus on developing and maintaining a few strong strategic relationships rather than creating a database of people who are unable to contribute productively. Surround yourself with the best people possible. Cultivate contacts with people who can help bring you support and opportunities.
- 2) **Be yourself and have a plan of action at each meeting.** Prepare and keep a personal profile of the people you meet daily. Sit with strangers. Create a system to remember names and make it easy for others to remember your name. Don't be afraid to ask for contacts and always follow up on contacts given.
- 3) **Prepare for networking events and opportunities.** Don't be too talky. Be interested, interesting, and, most of all, be a good listener. Be ready to quickly give quick conversational highlights of your past and what you are doing currently both professionally and personally. Learn from everyone. Talk with people at all levels because everybody can teach you something.
- 4) **Utilize the 90-10 Rule and treasure people who network well.** Ask them what resources and ideas have helped them the most. Always respond to calls quickly and graciously
- 5) **Honor the reciprocity of networking** - if you give, you will receive. Share your knowledge and your contacts and give referrals freely. When you meet someone you want to help, ask what you can do for him or her and follow up. Always follow up meeting new contacts.
- 6) **Send a relevant email out weekly.** Try to gain value from every contact and always follow up. Remember to call if you're in town. Write them about a change of job or circumstance.
- 7) **Set goals and be committed to your network.** Be a team player and strive to help others. Utilize the telephone, emails, snailmail and the Internet to increase your connections, opportunities and resources.
- 8) **Be aware of the value of chance encounters.** Seek out new experiences and make new contacts. Never avoid building your network at events, such as weddings, confirmations, graduations and Bar Mitzvahs. Arrive early.
- 9) **Give, receive and graciously ask for help and support.** Learn from those around you.
- 10) **Stay plugged into your network** and consistently reevaluate and add to your network. Use a calendar for important community events, birthdays, anniversaries, or company changes.

The Power of Networking

MasteryWorks, Inc. has prepared An assessment entitled “**NETWORKSMART™ - The Power of Networking®**” at http://www.masteryworks.com/newsite/assessments/assess_ns.htm.

MasteryWorks’ “**NETWORKSMART™ - The Power of Networking®**” teaches that powerful networks can get work done quickly and resourcefully. The deeper and broader one’s relationships, the more power one has to achieve success. Speed becomes an asset - with strong ties to industry, organization and professional resources.

Benefits for Individuals Include:

- Building confidence;
- A new mindset towards networking - building strong relationships vs. manipulating or using people;
- A quick way to assess the depth of their relationships;
- A framework for building resources in their industry, organization, profession/trade and personal life; and
- A matrix for plotting their total network - so they can see the strengths and gaps.

Benefits for Managers Include:

- A simple talking piece for coaching individuals in how best to strengthen their network;
- 2.A method for assessing their own network and seeing where they have strengths and gaps; and
- 3.A tool for helping new employees "jump start" their professional network.

Network Alliances

Firms normally enter an alliance on the back of one basic assumption; if two parties work together, they will achieve more than if they remain apart. Companies are constantly seeking to develop alliances with other organizations to spark innovation, increase access to otherwise scarce skills, knowledge, resources, new markets and physical assets to ultimately generate value. Big tech corporations have led the way in breaking free from vertical integration and partnered with transparent networks that can respond efficiently and stimulate innovation through access to external knowledge networks. Using open business models that allow co-creation not only facilitates access to scarce resources but also brings new technology to the marketplace quickly and efficiently.

For example, **IBM** has successfully developed alliances and partnerships in its Open Source Strategy for collaborative software projects such as Linux and Apache. It has demonstrated that a large and complex system of software code can be built, maintained, and developed in a nonproprietary setting in which many developers work in highly parallel, unstructured ways. Cooperative alliances create more functional, reliable and faster evolutions than proprietary software built within a conventional corporate organization.⁹

A.G. Lafley, Chairman of the Board and CEO of **Procter & Gamble**, actively seeks external collaboration and alliances. “Our vision is simple, we want P&G to be known as the company that collaborates — inside and out — better than any other company in the world.” Indeed Procter & Gamble has forged alliances that have culminated in acquiring resources and capabilities for sustaining competitive advantage. Those who use open business models as a superior paradigm for driving growth have tended to remain focused at the relations and outcomes levels. P&G’s Connect and Develop program has been a key role in nearly 50 percent of P&G’s products.¹⁰ Mr. Lafley points out, “We’ve collaborated with outside partners for generations but the importance of these alliances has never been greater.”

Summary

Networking should be an instinctive part of your life. Face to face or on the Internet, focus on developing and maintaining a few strong strategic relationships. Prepare and keep a personal profile of the people you meet daily and always follow up. Be a team player and strive to help others. Give, receive and graciously ask for help and support. Learn from those around you. Stay plugged in and consistently reevaluate your network.

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Caela is known internationally for her expertise in developing talent management products and services. Her solutions are user-friendly systems that serve the needs of both organizations and individuals. She is frequently quoted in the media regarding her thoughts and advice on changing careers and work patterns in the nation. Hundreds of organizations have implemented talent management solutions from MasteryWorks, Inc. — consulting, workshops, assessment instruments and web-based talent management portals.

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