

Networking: Invest in the right relationships at the right time

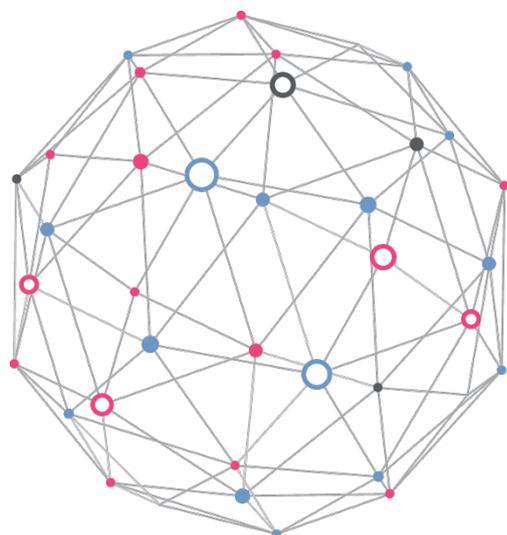
Margaret Beaton 28 July 2014

Do you know that building a high quality network is four times the predictor of performance than other predictors, according to [research](#) published in Harvard Business Review?

My clients and readers all know networking is important. But many more would benefit from recognising precisely why your network matters so much in building your career, and how to network truly effectively.

What a very good network does for you

Recent [research](#) from the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) shows that without the right networks leaders readily derail. You can plateau prematurely, you can be by-passed, you can fail to adjust to new organisational circumstances, and your orientation can remain too narrow, leaving you isolated on the career ladder.



In addition to knowledge and skills, your relationships are central to success. A well-managed network helps you find resources and information outside your day-to-day contacts. The right connections give you the edge as a leader.

Think of your networks as your social capital; as adjuncts to your intellectual and emotional intelligence. As with these other forms of human capital, social capital needs to be nurtured and refreshed. Like all capital, social capital can become lazy. If you allow this, you are on the road to stalling in your career. Great networks are an integral part of your career self-management and leadership development. And all too often, I see people who aren't making the most of their network opportunities and compromising their success.

Is your network strategic?

Test the strategic value of your network against these three criteria from CCL.

First, is your network *open* in the sense that many of the people in it are *not* connected each other? To the degree your network is open, the flow of ideas and contacts that reach you will be rich and varied. You will be exposed to new ideas and many different perspectives, ensuring you are challenged.

Next, productive networks are *deep* in that your relationships are trusting and meaningful. Deep networks allow safe exchanges of 'inside' information that would otherwise elude you and they provide social support in the work place, which is especially important during times of transition. Some of these deep relationships become your sponsors who promote and back you in your career progression.

Finally, effective networks are *diverse*, crossing vertical and horizontal organisational, cultural, industry and other boundaries. The richness of this structural diversity raises your benchmark to what's truly best in the world. Your connections form links across these boundaries and lift the visibility of your personal brand.

Activate the right parts of your network

At different points in your career you need a special types of people in your network. In other words not everyone in your network is equally valuable all of the time, so you need to be strategic in when you activate particular relationships to meet your needs.

Maintaining a network that is comprehensive, creative and unbiased at each stage of your career requires you to add new people and allow others to become dormant. It is necessary that your network relationships shift in importance and intensity across the span of your career.

It's an important skill to know when and how to adjust the composition of your network. A useful way to do this is view your networks as active and dormant.

In an *active* network many two-way relationships are working to generate reciprocity and resources are provided to each other. Trust grows and the benefits accrue.

Parts of your network are *dormant* when there's low frequency of contact and little by way of reciprocity. Of course, when it's necessary a dormant relationship can be reactivated.

By managing the active and dormant components of your network you will get the most from your investment of time and effort and keep a reserve of goodwill for the future.

Last thought

I leave you with this quotation from Herminia Iberra and Mark Hunter in '*How Leaders Create and Use Networks*':

"Leaders must create a 'fabric' of personal contacts who will provide support, feedback, insight, resources, and information."

If you found this post helpful, you may also want to read this one

+ [Three ways relationships shape your career](#)

This post was written by Dr [Margaret Beaton](#), a director of [Beaton Executive Coaching](#) and [Beaton Research + Consulting](#). You can also find Margaret on [LinkedIn](#).