



Management and Performance Associates – July 2009 Networking Do's and Don'ts

Surprisingly, many people don't understand what Networking is all about. Picture the scene. You're still trying to find room to place your luggage in the overhead compartment on an airplane, and the guy who's sitting next to you is already handing out his business card. Or you're trying to get a drink at a cocktail reception and someone rushes to you—card in hand. And so on. Is this networking? Simply put, NO. Networking is not about connecting with anyone you meet on a random basis. Effective networking is targeted—it's about building alliances.

Worst of all is people who try to connect with an old acquaintance the moment they get fired. Too late! A network is hard to create and needs to be nurtured over time. It needs to be beneficial to both parties, in other words, it is not about who can help me when I get fired, it's much more than that. It's about how you can help others (and how can they help you), *throughout your career*.

In order to keep a healthy network, you need to have answers to the following questions:

a) Who should my internal contacts be?

At the least, you need to have a decent relationship with your counterparts in the organization. When your computer isn't working, it's a very different experience to call the IT desk and talk to whoever answers the phone rather than calling Joe in tech support. When your client calls to complain about a delivery not made on time, damaged or incorrect, who is your contact in operations that can solve the problem? A contact, once again, is not an extension number or a box in the

organizational chart. A contact in your network is a person with whom you have developed a relationship over the years. It goes both ways, it's about giving and getting help; it's about giving and getting information. The golden rule? Make every effort to maintain a positive balance in these relationship accounts, e.g., offer help and information without *quid pro quo* expectations. Nurture your relationships.

b) Who does my job (inside the organization) in another branch, city or country?

We always find it amazing when we ask this question to our workshop participants and they have no answer to that question. Most have not even thought about it, and see no value in knowing. They are missing a fantastic opportunity to leverage knowledge and innovation that is happening somewhere inside their own organization. Chances are, they're re-inventing the wheel over and over again, as each branch, factory and office is creating their own solution to a problem that is happening all over the world. By not having a contact in other locations, they are not aware of solutions already available.

c) Who does my job at competing businesses?

This is another question that our workshop participants find astonishing. You might be surprised that many people, even at relatively senior levels, don't know the answer. What are they missing? A better understanding of the industry, the market and new products and services which in the end, impact overall performance. Obviously, when dealing with competitors we need to be aware of disclosing confidential information, but even with that restriction, effective networkers find this relationship very enlightening.

d) What is the added value of belonging to professional associations?

Professional clubs or associations are great places to find people with similar interests or careers and to stay informed and updated about your profession. Also, you should attend exhibitions, presentations, workshops, meetings, club gatherings, and shows related to your career or industry. The emphasis should be on valuable contacts versus numbers. Remember, it is not about distributing as many business cards as you can, to everybody in the room. To benefit from networking your mindset should be different from "what can I get from these people." And when you meet people that are valuable contacts, yes, then it's time to give



them your business card, and follow up with a phone call or email within the next few days.

e) Who do I admire, but have lost contact with?

Remember that especially brilliant people move on frequently. An ex boss, a mentor, a mentee, peers, clients, sometimes it's hard to keep track of where they currently are. Some change jobs or industries, others change cities and countries. If you once admired these people, they should continue to be part of your network. They already know you and could be an insightful source of advice. How to find them? Keep reading...

f) How to keep track of people we know and add new contacts to our network?

Professional networking sites, such as LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com) are free to join, and we have found them to be very effective when looking for new targeted contacts, as well as keeping track of contacts' movements. LinkedIn has

groups of alumni from colleges and companies, as well as discussion groups for professionals who share a similar interest. Keep Facebook for your family and personal friends and LinkedIn for your professional relationships.

A telephone conversation or email, from time to time, without anything specific in mind will nurture the relationship. People are more willing to take your calls (or read your email messages) if you are not always selling or asking for favors.

Keep your contacts organized and updated. Use Microsoft Outlook contacts or any similar software. It's hard to find business cards if they are scattered throughout drawers and boxes. We find it useful to include a personal picture or company logo in the outlook contact, as well as personal information in the notes section. It makes it easier for us to remember the person or the company.

A final word. If you still think that networking is only about finding jobs, please remember that most job openings are never advertised. They're filled in by recommendations. To be considered, you need to be in someone's network.

See you next time. We welcome your feedback.

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