

Building Your Network

Excerpt taken from Brian Tracy's book - *A Treasury of Personal Achievement*

At every crossroad in your life there is usually someone standing there pointing you in one direction or another. The courses you take in school that shape your career are often at the recommendation of a counselor or friend. The occupation you select, the job you take, and the key steps in your career are largely determined by the people you meet and talk to at those critical decision points in your life. The books you read, the audio you listen to, and the seminars you attend are most invariably the result of a suggestion from someone you respect. It is likely that every change in your life is strongly influenced by other people in some way.

According to the Law of Probabilities, the greater the number of people you know, the more likely it is that the right person at the right time and in the right place will be available to give you the help you need to move more rapidly ahead in your life. The more people you know, the more doors of opportunity will be open to you, and the sounder the advice you will get in making the important decisions that shape your life.

Dr. David McClelland did a 25-year research study into the factors that contribute to success. He found that, holding constant for age, education, occupation, and opportunities, the single most important factor in career success is your "reference group." Your reference group is made up of the people with whom you habitually associate and identify. These are the people you live with, work with, and interact with outside of work. You identify with these people and consider yourself to be one of them. They consider you to be one of them as well.

The starting point in the process of assembling a positive reference group is the development of a deliberate and systematic approach to networking, which you can apply throughout your career and life.

People like to do business with people they know. They like to socialize and interact with people with whom they are familiar. And they like to recommend people they trust. Fully 85 percent of the best jobs in America are filled as the result of a third-party recommendation. The best networkers are never unemployed for long.

One of the biggest mistakes that people make when they begin networking is scattering their time and energy indiscriminately and spending their time with people who can be of no help at all. Even if they attend organization or community meetings, they often end up associating with people who are neither particularly ambitious nor well-connected.

When you network, you must be selfish with how you spend your time and apply your energy. You want to become all you can over the course of your career. You want to rise as far as you can. Any success you could ever desire will require the active involvement and help of lots of other people. Your job is to focus your energies and attention on meeting the people who can help you, and the only way you can do this is by not spending time with the people who cannot help you at all.

When you network, your aim is to meet people who are going places in their lives. You want to meet people who are ahead of you in their careers and in their organizations. You want to meet people you can look up to. You want to meet people who can be friends, guides, and mentors. You want to meet people who can help you move into your ideal future more readily. For this reason, you must sort people into categories: helpful vs. unhelpful, ambitious vs. unambitious, goings somewhere vs. going nowhere. Remember, your choice of a reference group in your networking will determine the success of the process.

You begin your networking process at your place of work. Identify the top people in your organization. Make these people your role models and pattern yourself after them. One of the best ways to start networking is to go to someone you admire and ask for his or her advice. Don't be a pest. Don't tie up several hours of his or her time. Initially, you should ask for only a few minutes, and you should have two or three specific questions.

When you talk to a successful person, ask questions like, "What do you think is the most important quality or attribute that has contributed to your success?" and "What advice would you give to someone like me who wants to be as successful as you someday?" You could also ask, "Can you recommend a particular book, audio program, or training program that would help me move along more rapidly in my career?"

There is a Law of Incremental Commitment in networking. According to the law, people commit themselves to helping you, or associate with you, little by little over time. In some cases, the chemistry won't be right, and the person with whom you would like to network will not be interested in networking with you. Don't take this personally. People get into or out of networking for a thousand reasons. However, if there is good chemistry, if you like the person and the person likes you, be patient and bide your time. Don't rush or hurry, just let the networking relationship unfold without over eagerness on your part. If you try to go too fast, you scare people away.

Instead of asking your superiors for more money, ask for more responsibility in your job. Tell your boss that you are determined to be extremely valuable to the organization and that you are willing to put in extra hours in order to make a more important contribution.

There is nothing so impressive to a boss as an employee who continually volunteers for more responsibility. Many people have the unfortunate goal of doing as little as possible for as much money as possible. But not the winners. The winners realize that if all you do is what you're being paid for today, you can never be paid any more in the future. The person who continually volunteers for extra assignments and does more than is expected gains the respect, esteem, and support of his or her boss.

Whenever you do something nice or helpful for others, they feel a sense of obligation. They feel like they owe you one. They have a deep subconscious need to pay you back until they no longer feel obligated to you. The more things you do for people without expectation of return, the more they feel obligated to help you when the time comes.

We have moved from the age of go-getter to the age of the "go-giver." A go-giver is a person who practices Laws of Sowing and Reaping, always looking for opportunities to help others. Unsuccessful people are always asking, "What's in it for me?"

The surprising thing is that the more of yourself you give away with no direct expectation of return, the more good things come back to you in the most unexpected ways. In fact, it seems that the help we get in life almost invariably comes from people whom we have not helped directly. Rather, it comes from others who have been influenced by people whom we have helped directly. Therefore, since you can't control where your help or assistance is coming from, you must establish a blanket policy of giving with complete confidence that it will come back to you in the most powerful ways.

Whatever your job or occupation, there are trade and industry associations, business associations, and service clubs that you can join and network in. Excellent networkers are among the best-known and most respected people in the community. To reach that status, they followed a simple formula. They carefully identified the clubs and associations whose members they can help and support and who can help and support them in return. Then they joined and participated.

When you consider the various organizations you could join, remember that you should select no more than two or three. Target the ones with the members who you think can be the most helpful to you. When you join, your strategy should be to familiarize yourself with the various committees of the organization. Then, volunteer for the committee that engages in the activities that are most important to the organization, such as governmental affairs or fundraising, and get fully involved in it.

You will find that the members of the key committee are usually key players in the business community as well. By joining the committee, you create an opportunity to interact with them in a completely non-threatening way. You give them a chance to see what you can really do outside of the work environment. And you contribute to the committee as a peer, not as an employee or subordinate.

In any committee, 20 percent of the people do 80 percent of the work. In any association, fully 80 percent of the members never volunteer for anything. All they do is attend the meetings and then go home. But this is not for you. You are determined to make your mark, and you do this by committing yourself wholeheartedly to voluntary activities that move the association ahead. And the key people will be watching and evaluating you. The more favorable the attention you attract, the more your fellow members will be willing to help you when you need them.

Networking helps fulfill one of your deepest subconscious needs: getting to know people and being known by them. It helps fulfill your need for social interaction and for friendly relationships. It also broadens your experience and perspective. It opens doors of opportunities for you. It increases the number of people who know and respect you. It makes you feel more in control of your career. And it can be one of the most exciting, fulfilling experiences of your life.