

Howard Rheingold's Advice on Building a PLN

If you were to develop a PLN around digital literacy for learning, Howard Rheingold might well be part of it. An early adopter of web technologies, he has been writing on issues in digital culture and community building for over 30 years.

Below is an excerpt from Rheingold's book, *Net Smart: How to Thrive Online*, with advice on how to build a PLN:

Explore multiple media - blogs, Twitter, Facebook, social bookmarking sites, question-and-answer sites, and people you meet face-to-face. Keep tabs on what you find, but your objective is to explore the space of your interests. PLN candidates will emerge only after sufficient exploration. While you explore, you will meet others. Maintain openness to serendipitous encounter.

Search after you have explored enough to get some sense of the field, community, discipline, and subculture. Use the terms you've discovered to search the Web, blogs, and Twitter for experts. Twitter lists and Twitter list compendiums like Listorious are attention-effective ways to find candidates. If you are looking for scholarly expertise, use [Google Scholar](#) or [Harzing's Publish or Perish](#).

Follow candidates' activity streams through RSS and Twitter, YouTube, Quora, Tumblr, Posterous, Scoop.it, Diigo, Flickr, and so on, if applicable. Ask yourself each time you look at their output why you added them, and whether their posts or tweets, photos, bookmarks, or videos have been worth your attention.

Tune your network by dropping people who don't seem worth spending attention on regularly. Reciprocity is *not* expected in following activity streams. Follow people *only* if paying attention to them increases your knowledge, or inspires or amuses you. Add new candidates frequently. When you value someone's output highly, begin looking at who they pay attention to. Test and prune. Add, observe, keep, or delete. Turn what you've learned about microdecisions and [infotention](#) [discussed earlier in the book] on your PLN.

Feed the people who follow you by sharing value when you find or create it, whether it is informational, social, or entertainment value. Feed the people you follow by directing specific pieces of information their way when you know they will find them valuable.

Engage the people you follow. Be polite as well as careful about making demands on their attention. Retweet them when you think their contributions can provide value to the people who are spending their own attention on you. Comment on their blog or reply to their tweet when you have something helpful, informative, or (this is tricky with people you don't know personally) entertaining to say.

Inquire of the people you follow and those who follow you. Ask engaging questions. It's always a bonus if the answer can be useful to others in your network. A well-tuned, well-fed PLN can be astonishingly, magically, precisely, and promptly useful. But don't ask anything you could find out with a little googling or two minutes on Wikipedia.

Respond to inquiries made to you. It's only polite - which is not only nice but also a signal to others that you are a contributor. Contribute to diffuse reciprocity. Feed the network if you know what someone needs to know, even if you aren't directly reciprocating a similar favor from that person (or expecting direct reciprocation from them)." (228-229)

Rheingold, Howard. *Net Smart: How to Thrive Online*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2012. Print.