

**5 STEPS
TO
EFFECTIVE
CAREER
NETWORKING**

by

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Opening thoughts ...

There is an old adage that says *'love makes the world go 'round'* and there is a lot of truth to that statement. For certain we know that if it isn't love that is at the basis of all human interactions, it is relationships that are the fuel that keep businesses in movement, flux and growth. Think about that fact.

We may mistakenly believe that it is ideas, or money, or new products and services that constitute the engine of business. But beneath each of those truths lies a deeper one: without relationships nothing happens. The best ideas require relationships between people to become taken up and used. New products and services are only developed through networks of relationships and are only successful in the marketplace because people either have to develop relationships with suppliers or have existing ones. Corporations have finally figured this out and invest much time, money and effort in Customer Relationship Management these days.

Even money only has value because it is passed around amongst people who are in relationship with one another. Indeed, much of the perceived value attributed to goods, services and people is because of the underlying relationship association. How many artists have labored in obscurity and financial despair until they built a relationship with a person who was considered highly valued and suddenly their inherent value was transferred over to the artist whose works suddenly soared in price.

As an employee you might already be someone who has become aware of the importance of maintaining and sustaining great relationships as a critical pathway to success. Or you may still be one of those folks who mistakenly believe that the quality of your ideas and your work is enough to achieve success. This article has been written primarily for the folks in the latter category, especially if you have aspirations to move beyond your current position in work and life. I know the importance of this shift in thinking because I used to be one of those folks who thought that my brilliant results alone were sufficient for on-going and continued career success. In fact, when I look back now, I realize that my 'career' only really became a 'career' when I started thinking I was important enough to have a network. Before that, I was simply doing a job and it reflected in my life.

If you are looking for work this article may become a life-saver for you because in today's world more jobs are found and filled through informal networks than through formal job posting processes. If you aren't proactively networking for career purposes you are denying yourself access to some of the best, most lucrative job opportunities around. And this holds true whether you are looking for work in your existing organization or currently unemployed and searching the marketplace. Failing to career network is a bit like going to a buffet restaurant and only eating one type of food on offer.

*Patterning your life
around other's opinions is
nothing more than
slavery.*

Lawana Blackwell

And like anything else in life, there's a process to networking that you need to master if you want to be successful at it. This article will help you become familiar with networking basics in just 5 steps. Some of them may seem obvious and easy to you, others may require a bit more attention and diligence. But a bit of effort on your part can make all the difference to you in terms of the quantity, quality and speed of job searches. In my experience, if you aren't paying attention to the right things, networking can seem like a total waste of time so even if you've tried networking before with poor results, it may simply be that you were focusing on things that don't make a difference.

Before we explore the key steps for making career networking work, let's make certain that we are talking about the same thing.

What is networking anyhow?

One dictionary contains the following two relevant definitions:

Network: An association of individuals having a common interest, formed to provide mutual assistance, helpful information or the like;

***Network:* To cultivate people who can be helpful to one professionally.**

From a career networking perspective, the second definition is the important one. Notice the language used. Cultivate, people, can, helpful, professionally: five important words that you'll find parallels to in the following 5 steps, although not in this particular order.

My background in telecommunications has taught me that a network is about connection: things connected to one another in such a way that information passes both ways, or like links in a chain, so that information eventually returns to the starting point. This is a key concept to keep in mind when thinking about human networking ...a connection between two people that allows for information flow.

Please note that nowhere in these two definitions do the words 'sell' or 'selling' appear. One of the biggest mistakes that novice networkers make, in my experience, is that they try to use networking for direct sales (whether selling themselves to a potential employer or selling their products or services to a potential buyer). **If you are 'selling' yourself and calling it networking - stop - immediately.** You are turning people off and alienating the very people you hope to be attracting to yourself.

Let me give you an example of the difference between a 'sales' approach and a 'networking' approach. Let's say you are cold or warm calling for a project management job and you manage to reach someone (or you get their voicemail). If you say, "*Hi Fred. I'm Sam and I'm looking for work as a project manager. I was wondering if there were any openings in your organization.*" That's a sales call. You've just put Fred on the spot. If you leave this as a voice mail, it is highly unlikely that you'll get a call back. If you happen to get him directly, you can be guaranteed that you'll listen to him squirm for some time before he reluctantly agrees to accept your resume on the off chance that there's an opening (which is code for I'll chuck it in a pile somewhere), or more likely he'll decline but promise to keep you in mind.

A networking approach to that call would sound something like “*Hi, Fred. I’m Sam and I hear that you have a lot of expertise in our mutual field of project management. I was wondering if sometime when you have a few moments I could have a 10-minute chat with you about your experiences so that I can factor that into my job search.*” In this scenario, you have acknowledged Fred as an expert (and who doesn’t like to be acknowledged); you’ve requested information from him and let him know you are looking for work without putting him on the spot to find you a job. Note that it presupposes that you’ve taken enough time to learn something about Fred. If you haven’t done at least that much homework, you shouldn’t even be placing that call!

Now there’s no guarantee that he’ll make himself available, but the likelihood is significantly greater than in the direct sales scenario.

Also note that the term is *network*, not *neteasy* or *netplay*. Now networking can be easy and playful, but it does require some effort, commitment and persistence because truly successful networking is all about investing yourself in building relationships that will be useful to you. Some of these relationships will result in job offers, others will provide you with useful insider information and still others will get you social connections. You have to be awake enough to notice where each person you meets fits into the scheme of things, both in the short term and the long term. People tend to hire people they like and trust. Focus on building that trust and the promotion, new job, or job shift you seek is certain to follow!

Networking of any type can feel like a walk on the wild side to the uninitiated. There can appear to be many false passages and dead ends as you wander through its maze-like engagements. Like all of us, you’ll have moments of self doubt. And there may be times where you make a pig’s foot of it. The good news is that these missteps are seldom fatal! And if you are willing to explore career networking from a skills development perspective, you’ll find that the more you practice and adjust, the better you get at it.

By paying attention to the following few, simple steps you can discover how you can make the process profitable in more ways than simply getting a new job, including having a highly enjoyable experience.

My 5 Key Steps to Successful Career Networking

So listen up folks, here are my top 5 tips to make certain that career networking pays the rewards you’re looking for!

1. Quit ‘doing’ - begin ‘being’

First of all, begin to think about networking less as a thing you do and more as a state of being. Networking is really a way of living, a way of engaging with anyone and everyone because you never know who is connected to whom in this world.

That old notion of 6^os of separation is not just a notion. It is how the world operates! So the kid in the mailroom, the guy who cleans the office, that person who handles your admin work may be connected to exactly the people who are just waiting to hear about you. Do you treat them all with respect and dignity? Do you let them know what you do and what kind of contacts you’re looking for? Treating everyone you meet as potentially important means that you can’t be one person with

your bosses and customers and another person with everyone else. It means that you must be willing to be authentically who you are at all times. It also means that you must get over any rules and hang-ups you have about sharing what's important to you about life with relative strangers.

I can't stress enough how critical to successful networking this step is. I encourage you to be honest with yourself. Are you one of those people who serves upwards and treats your colleagues and service people with disdain or cruelty? Do you give a hoot about anybody but yourself? If you do give a hoot, do you have a 'pecking order'?

If you do care about others do you let them know about yourself and what you are seeking? Are you ever helpful to others in terms of connecting them with information/people that might make their life a bit easier?

*A good name, like
good will, is got by
many actions and
lost by one.*

Lord Jeffrey

Whatever your answers to these questions are, don't delude yourself that people don't know the true essence of who you are. I've seen many manipulative, self serving people get ahead for years only to come crashing down. And in my coaching practice I regularly work with those who appear to be successful on the outside but are consumed by guilt and shame because they are being eaten up from the inside by the practices they engaged to get where they have gotten.

There are no rights or wrongs about this one. But whether you network with a sleazy edge or you network with authenticity and honor, all effective networkers have learned that engaging a broad base of people is important.

If you've been out of contact with someone for a long time and want to reconnect, especially if you are actively looking for work, be honest. I had a man in a workshop one day wonder out loud about connecting with a long-lost friend. He wondered whether the 'friend' he'd had in college, but whom he hadn't been in touch with for 15 years, who was now a successful executive, would respond better if he called and told him he wanted to renew the friendship and, by the way, he was looking for work. Or, should he call his 'friend' up and invite him out for coffee and then a couple of days after the meeting call him back to let him know he was looking for work. The entire class broke out laughing at the second option because it was so patently manipulative. This man was shocked at the response he got and after some thought finally approached his former friend with a direct statement of his job situation. It didn't result in work for him, but he realized after the fact that he'd have felt very cheesy if he'd actually implemented his alternative approach.

If you have lost your job, get over your shame that you are somehow a bad person. People pretty much know that job loss, for whatever reason, is a fact of life these days. Spread the word that you're looking for work, without asking directly for a job. I had one client sit in shame for months that she had been downsized. Finally, as life started to get desperate financially for her she shared with another Mom in the hockey arena that she was looking for work. A person nearby overheard her, gave her their business card and suggested she contact their company, using their name. She was hired and working within a week. All because she finally opened her mouth and let someone know that she was looking for work ...without expecting them to find her anything.

Think of networking as enlightened self interest. Even if you aren't brimming with the milk of human kindness, it is a process rather like farming. The seeds you plant today are the crops you'll sow tomorrow. And the more time and effort you put into nurturing the growth of your seedlings,

the more productive your crop is likely to be. It is also much more likely that with a little bit of tender loving care your crop will be robust enough to withstand some rough weather.

Like plants, humans who develop strong social capital tend to withstand more easily and effectively difficult times such as recession, downsizing, corporate mergers, project cancellations, etc.

2. *Be willing to give*

Second, be honest with yourself about what you have to offer to another person. If you are only interested in what you can get out of every interaction it is unlikely that you'll achieve the networking success you seek. ***Great networkers know that they need to give to get.***

What you need to give varies according to the person you are interacting with. Sometimes it is simply recognition that another person exists and makes a difference in your life: a smile, eye contact, really listening as they tell you about themselves. Sometimes it is a willingness to share your knowledge and information. Other times it is a willingness to connect other people with them.

Your willingness to give and share need not be restricted to the specific moment in time you meet someone. I can't tell you how often I've met someone, made a note of a comment they've made in passing and then contacted them weeks later with a relevant article, someone's business card or piece of new, relevant information I've come across. I know that I am building rapport with people and I know that it can pay handsome dividends. Just recently I acquired a new client who came to me through a third-party referral. I've never met this third party but have shared a few supportive e-mails with them and have referred this person to my web-site which I've designed to be full of helpful information other service professionals can use.

*We make a living
by what we get.
We make a life by
what we give.*

Sir Winston Churchill

I am constantly receiving e-mails from folks in my network who are looking to fill existing or new jobs and wondering if there is anyone in my network that I'd suggest they connect with. And for those of you who are contemplating sending me your resume, please don't. If you haven't taken the time or energy to develop a relationship with me, I have no interest in passing your details along to anyone.

If you lack the self confidence to know what you have to offer, I'd strongly recommend that you seek out a career counselor or life coach to help you to discover the gifts that make you special, and to develop the confidence to believe that someone else would be interested in what you have to offer. Frankly, in my experience, this is the biggest hurdle that many people live with.

3. *Get yourself known to a broad base of people*

Thirdly, use networking to as broad a base of people as possible as a key element in your Self marketing strategy.

- a. Attend social events at work and let people know who you are beyond your job responsibilities. Share your hobbies and interests with people. Ask about their lives outside the workplace. People generally love to talk about

- themselves. One of my favorite stories is about the writer Gore Vidal (or was it Truman Capote?). Doesn't really matter. As a celebrity writer, he was invited to attend a lot of cocktail parties which he found really boring but which he knew were important for visibility purposes. He developed a habit of selecting the person in the room that he thought was the most boring person present and then spending enough time in conversation with them so that he could discover them as not boring! What a brilliant approach to always having interesting people to talk to.
- b. Get yourself assigned to committees, task forces, focus groups, special project groups, etc. that involve people up the organizational ladder from you and individuals from outside your immediate work group. Find ways to make yourself known to those people; stay connected with them over time. I was recently interviewed for a Globe and Mail article on Career Proofing Yourself in a Recession. One of my observations was that you need to have more than your immediate supervisors know what you're good for and what you can accomplish because in times of downsizing there's a good chance that if you are tapped to go, your boss will be also.
 - c. Join professional and industry associations and forums that will extend your profile to people outside your existing company. Don't just join. Attend their meetings and events. Not only will you look like someone invested in self improvement, but you will have lots of opportunity to learn the ropes of how your industry or profession operates and you'll vastly increase the number of points of contact you have access to. Even if you don't know an individual, the fact that you are members of the same organization often means that they'll share insider information with you. How many times have I been stumped on a problem, gone to the membership directory of an organization I belong to and started phoning? Invariably the folks I've called have been willing to spare me a few minutes to brainstorm on my issue or they've been very quick to point me to someone in their contact sphere who had the perfect response to my issue, whether they knew me personally or not. It was our joint membership in an organization that was the door opener to someone who had no personal relationship with me.
 - d. Write articles about your area of expertise and have them published in your professional association newsletter or magazine. If you are a generalist, write opinion pieces or offer up a general perspective that may be missing from the specialists; often our gift as generalists is that we have more of a bird's eye view of things. Newsletters and magazines are hungry beasts and editors are usually looking for new material for their publications. Or you can produce a white paper on new directions in technology or service that invites comment from customers, stakeholders, colleagues or special interest groups. Make certain that you include a short bio and contact information in anything you write and publish.
 - e. There are many on-line newsletters, user groups, chat groups, etc. Get involved with ones that will broaden your perspective. Be aware of the fact that everything you publish on-line will be around for a long time, but don't let that stop you. Just ask yourself "does this organization, this posting, this

*In the business world
the rearview mirror is
always clearer than the
windshield.*

Warren Buffet

- comment reflect well on me as a professional?” When you read an article you especially enjoy, drop the author a line of thanks. As someone who publishes extensively on the Net I always love it when I get a note from someone telling me my writing has touched them. And I can tell from my notes to others just how pleased they are to receive input from me.
- f. Be sure to pick an organization and purpose that has a meeting format that works for you: time of day, approach to information sharing, rules of engagement, etc. Remember that people tend to hire or accept referrals from people they like and trust. Allow several months of regular contact in order to build up a reputation as a reliable, responsible colleague. This is why networking should be an on-going career strategy not simply one you invoke when you’ve lost your job, for whatever reason.
 - g. If you change jobs, get a new job title, are involved in a merger or acquisition, or lose your job, make certain that you let core people in your network know about it. In today’s world of e-mail it is easy to send out a brief announcement, along with a change of e-mail address and contact information. Use your judgment on who should be advised, but I’d say that anyone you receive a newsletter or regular announcements from, as well as folks you meet frequently at meetings and committees should be on your core list.
 - h. Be clear that there are many kinds of networking. Find out the purpose of any networking group you are considering joining. If you’re looking for business referrals and you join a group whose primary purpose is social interaction, you will be disappointed and frustrated. Contrary, if you’re looking for a job and you attend business development networking groups you’ll likely find them to be too aggressive, too structured and not focused on topics of interest to you. Certainly people contact needs to be available in any networking situation but making certain that the group’s priorities and your priorities are aligned will create far greater success for you.

Here’s a short list of places where opportunities abound for those of you who are just getting started as career networkers:

Trade or Industry Groups
Professional Associations
User Groups/Support Groups
Cultural Associations
Sports/Special Interest/Hobby Groups
Conferences/Trade Shows/Job Fairs
Volunteer Organizations

4. Retain control of the process

Fourth, maintain control of the networking process. By that I mean get proactive rather than reactive. When you meet someone, ask for their card and connect with them; don’t wait around for them to contact you. If your organization doesn’t provide you with a business card, get yourself one made up. On-line resources such as www.vistaprint.ca offer great quality cards for free. If you are actively seeking work, you can turn a business card into a mini-resume by highlighting your key

skills or the types of positions you're looking for. One client of mine had 'Your next project manager' written across the bottom of his card.

When you are in a general 'meet 'n greet session' at an event, are at a party or any other sort of event, collect as many business cards as possible. Note the date and event on the card; file them in a binder, you never know when they might come in handy. Connect with that person within 48 hours of the event. Offer them something additional to your initial contact: a simple 'thanks it was great to meet you' is useful, but an article, a connection to someone else, a request to be put on their newsletter list, or a request for a coffee meeting so that you can find out more about them and their work can really solidify a new relationship.

Find a reason for staying in longer term contact so that you can show them your reliability, your range of skills and interests, your willingness to make an effort and your ability to build a case for what you have to offer. Always make it easy for people to opt out of further contact if they don't have an immediate interest in staying actively involved with you. It is amazing how they'll remember you in the long term as their needs change when you've given them a graceful 'out' from the beginning.

5. Find yourself interesting ...and invested

Finally, be willing to invest yourself in staying connected with a wide variety of people. If you aren't willing to do this, be honest with yourself that networking isn't likely for you and find an approach that is more suited to your temperament. Be realistic about the implications of not networking as a career strategy. You may have more limited access to jobs, you may need to hire others to open doors for you, it may take you much longer than average to find new jobs, either in-house or on the open market.

Getting ahead in a difficult profession requires avid faith in yourself. That is why some people with mediocre talent, but with great inner drive, go much further than people with vastly superior talent.

Sophia Loren

Any form of networking requires that you find yourself interesting. Let's face it, if you don't think you're interesting, why do you think that others will find you so? You also need to find other people fascinating and to temporarily be prepared to step into their world to understand their needs.

As I mentioned earlier, if you don't find yourself interesting or you question why others would be interested in you, you may find that the services of a career counselor, therapist or life coach is what you need. Some of us come from backgrounds where any amount of self promotion was strongly frowned upon and it is difficult for us to speak up about our accomplishments or what we can contribute to a project or company. In my many years of

experience with people searching for work, this is probably the single greatest area of struggle for many people.

The good news is that there are many approaches available to help you overcome low self esteem, an inability to be publicly recognized or discomfort with what feels like 'bragging' about our accomplishments. Not all of them are costly, but they all require a willingness to self reflect and to engage life differently.

The AA folks really got it right when they concluded that “you’ll always get what you’ve always had if you always do what you’ve always done.” Be forewarned: if you want your life to change, you must be willing to change something about yourself!

Great networkers have a way of staying connected to a disparate gang of people and are typically interested in a wide variety of people, even if they don’t share the same worldview. For example, people who know me know that exercise is probably my least favorite activity in the world. But my networking list is littered with people in the fitness industry because as a life and business coach I am always interacting with people for whom fitness and wellness are issues they struggle with in life. Because I stay connected with those folks I keep up to date on trends and I can refer clients and other contacts on to professionals who love stuff that bores me.

Some closing thoughts...

Like anything else in life, career networking takes time and effort if you are to be successful at it. However, if you have a bit of computer savvy and a modicum of authentic interest in other people, you can become a highly effective career networker without exhausting yourself.

I download all sorts of articles I find on the Internet and happily forward them on to people I meet as I go about my life.
I write many articles myself and send them along to people as I come in contact with them.
I maintain a web-site that is resource rich and is always being updated (www.ouicoach.com) as well as a blog about retirement lifestyle issues, one of my favorite topics (www.allaboutretirement.wordpress.com)
I invest in creating a monthly newsletter that contains useful information as well as marketing materials, and
I participate in 5 different networking groups on a regular basis.

The cure for boredom is curiosity. There is no cure for curiosity.

Dorothy Parker

At its roots, successful career networking not only requires a genuine interest in people; it is a way of living. Ask yourself:

Am I willing to give something to get something in return?

Do I know what I have to give?

When I join networking groups do I work their process or complain because my needs aren't being met?

Am I prepared to invest in long-term connections?

Do I know what I'm seeking from other people?

The steps and tips I’ve shared in this article are only as valuable as the clarity you have about what career networking means for you. There are no absolute rights or wrongs to networking; it really all depends on the inner clarity of purpose you have and the amount of effort you are prepared to invest.

Networking as a way of being has been a part of my life for decades. I can’t imagine a life without the large and diverse cast of characters I call into it on an on-going basis. Here’s to successful networking!

Gwen McCauley –Coach, Educator, Author, Artist

I am an ordinary human who lives an extraordinary life full of fulfillment and joy. I coach, train coaches, create workshops and entice folks to spend time on professional development retreats to exotic locales so that they too can discover that a wondrous life is possible. No matter the challenges, disappointments, disasters or successes you've had in life, the future is yours to craft however you wish. I know you can because you are the same as me and I have done it! The big question is: can you move beyond the limits you have set for yourself?

I published *“The Alchemy of Energy ...exploring The CODE Model™”* in 2004 and *“Sekhmet Rising ...the restlessness of women’s genius”* in 2006. I’m currently working on *“Splish Splash ...painting for personal discovery”* and my fourth book about the family prism. I write a monthly lifestyle column for Ottawa Valley Living Visit www.ouicoach.com for workshop and seminar details as well as book reviews, interesting free articles and annotated web links.