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Special Issue

The New Rules of *Networking*

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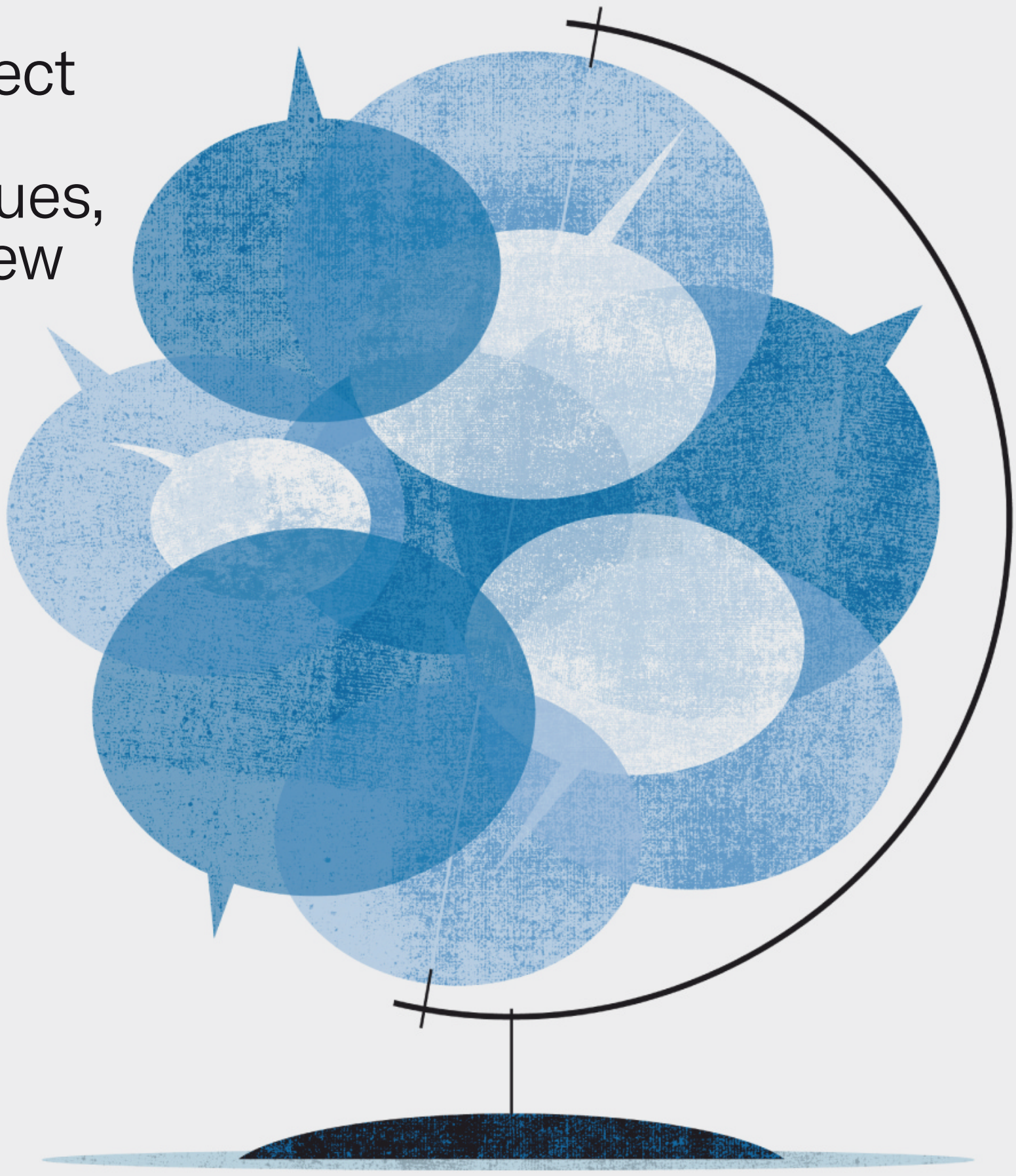
How to reconnect with colleagues, meet new people, and boost your career



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Hi. How are you? It's been a minute.

BUILDING EFFECTIVE RELATIONSHIPS is a requirement of good management and leadership. But research shows that during the pandemic, people's professional and personal networks shrank by close to 16%. (See "We're Losing Touch with Our Networks" in this issue.) Conferences shut down, video calls made it hard to connect and build relationships, and masks made in-person meetings uncomfortable. Whether you've returned full-time to a central office after the Covid lockdowns or gone hybrid or permanently remote, building relationships now takes more deliberate effort and feels more uncomfortable than it did before.

So how do you start reconnecting?

Practical tactics abound and you'll find them throughout this issue. Underlying all of these are a few mind shifts that can help get you beyond the inevitable awkwardness. Don't be embarrassed that you've been out of touch. Rather, focus on the pleasure of reconnecting. Give yourself a break by thinking about it this way: The other person probably hasn't tried to be in touch with you either!

Even more fundamentally, pandemic or no, many of us have always found networking distasteful or energy-sapping. To counter this, think of networking less as a self-promotional chore and more as an opportunity to be curious about others and to give of yourself rather than to receive. (More on this in "Learn to Love Networking.") You're very likely to build your network more effectively—and to create relationships that have real meaning along the way.

– The Editors

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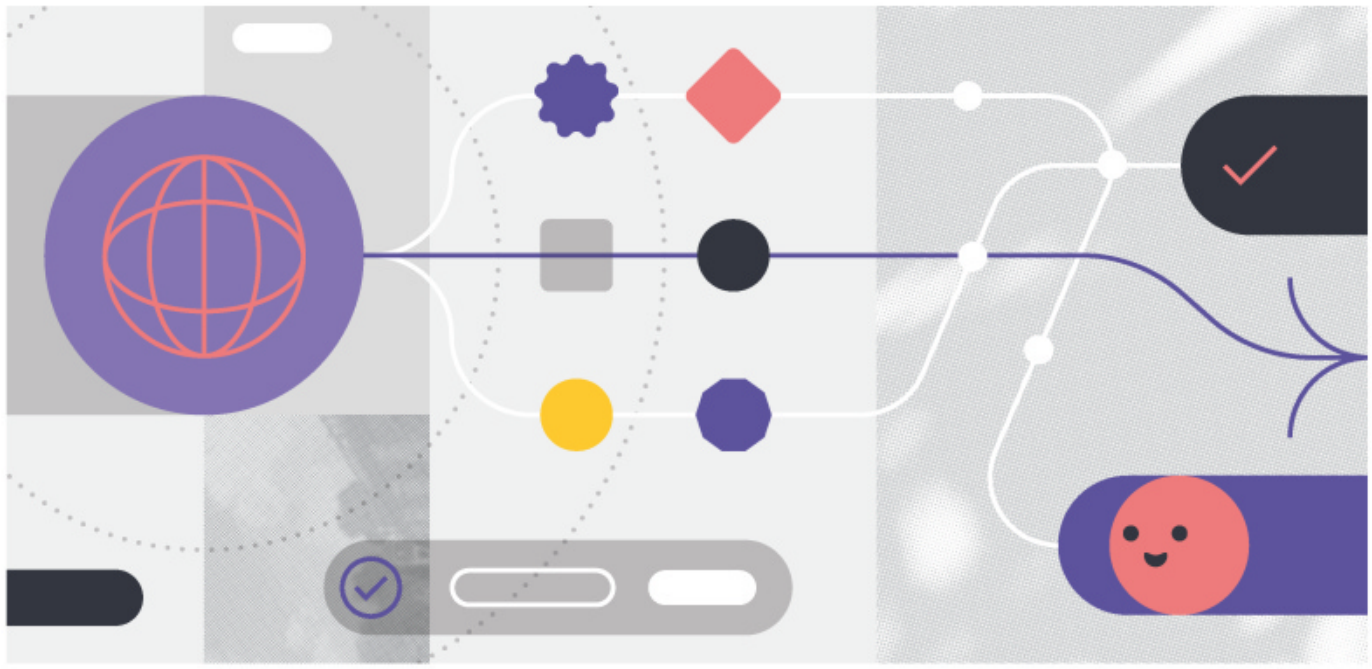

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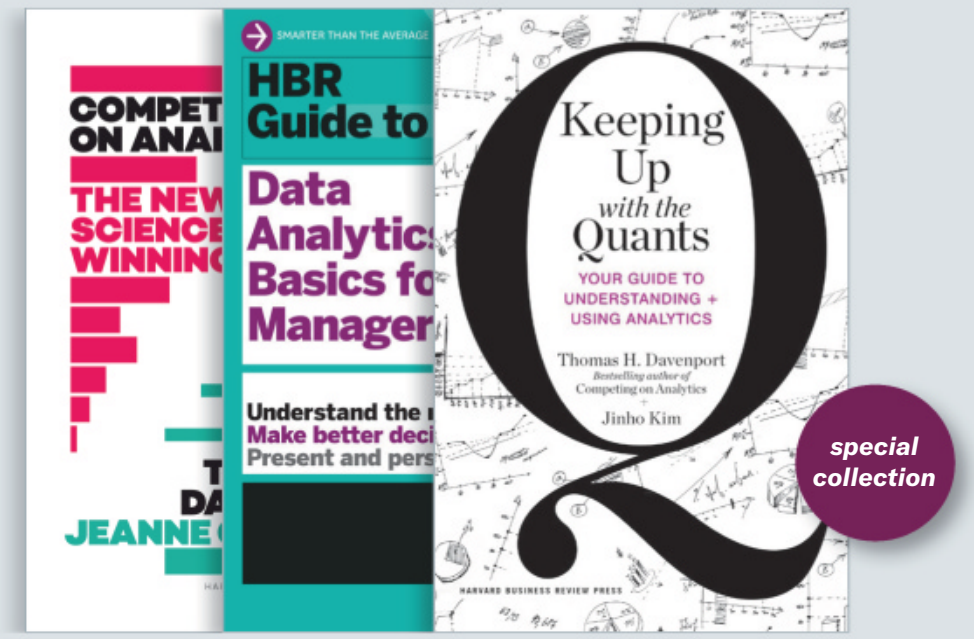

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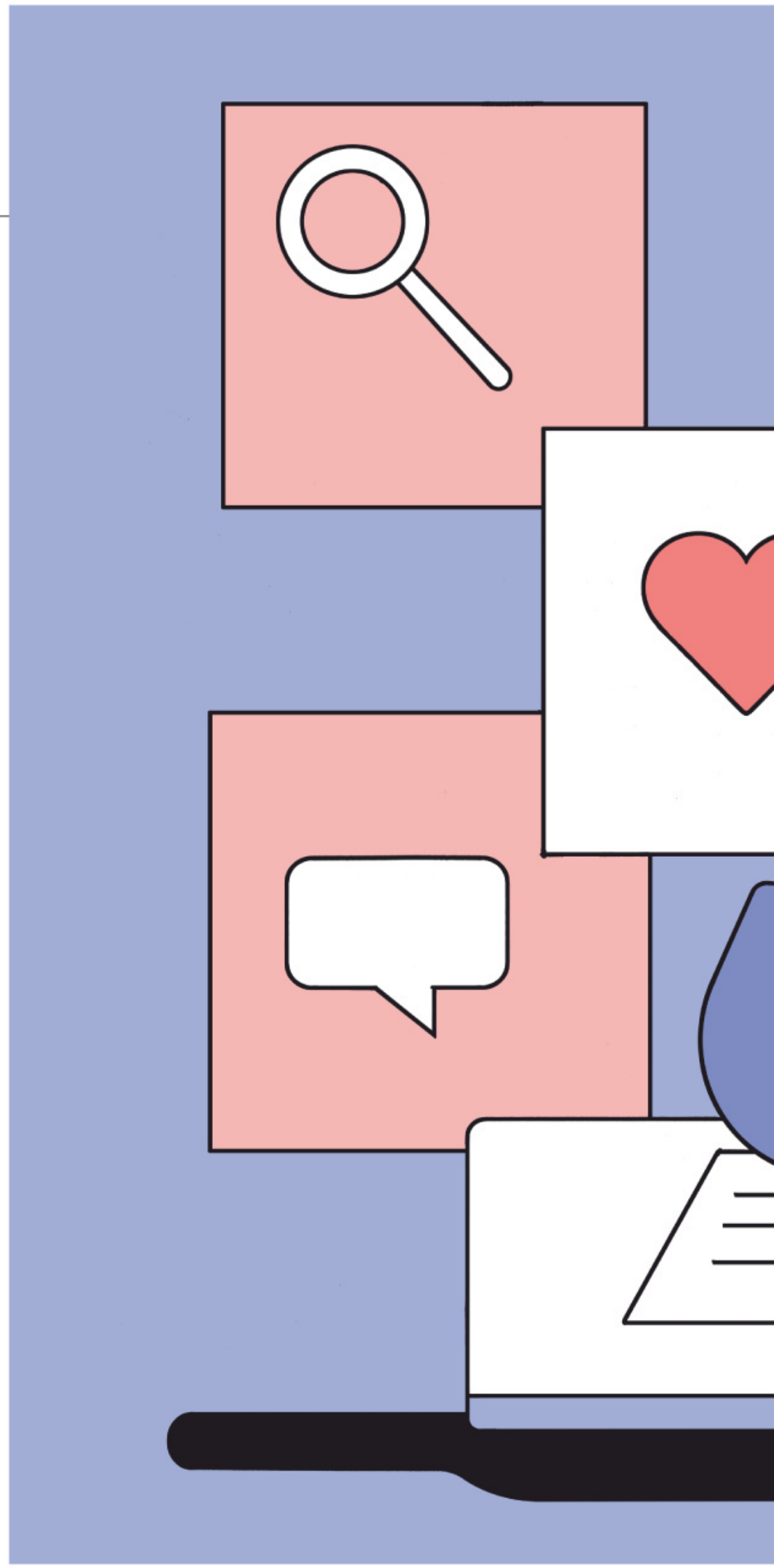

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Learn to Love Networking

Even people who find it repugnant can do it effectively.

→ by TIZIANA CASCIARO, FRANCESCA GINO, AND MARYAM KOUCHAKI

"I HATE NETWORKING." We hear this all the time from executives, other professionals, and MBA students. They tell us that networking makes them feel uncomfortable and phony—even dirty. Although some people have a natural passion for it—namely, the extroverts who love and thrive on social interaction—many understandably see it as brownnosing, exploitative, and inauthentic.

But in today's world, networking is a necessity. A mountain of research shows that professional networks lead to more job and business opportunities, broader and deeper knowledge, improved capacity to innovate, faster advancement, and greater status and authority. Building and nurturing professional relationships also improves the quality of work and increases job satisfaction.

When we studied 165 lawyers at a large North American law firm, for example, we found that their success depended on their ability to network effectively both internally (to get

Illustration by **NADIA HAFID**

themselves assigned to choice clients) and externally (to bring business into the firm). Those who regarded these activities as distasteful and avoided them had fewer billable hours than their peers.

Fortunately, our research shows that an aversion to networking can be overcome. We've identified four strategies to help people change their mindset.

1 Focus on Learning

Most people have a dominant motivational focus—what psychologists refer to as either a "promotion" or a "prevention" mindset. Those in the former category think primarily about the growth, advancement, and accomplishments that networking can bring them, while those in the latter see it as something they are obligated to take part in for professional reasons.

In laboratory experiments we conducted in the United States and Italy with college students and working adults, and in an additional sample of 174 lawyers at the firm we studied, we documented the effects of both types of thinking. Promotion-focused people networked because they wanted to and approached the activity with excitement, curiosity, and an open mind about all the possibilities that might unfold. Prevention-focused people saw networking as a necessary evil and felt inauthentic while engaged in it, so they did it less often and, as a result, underperformed in aspects of their jobs.

Thankfully, as Stanford University's Carol Dweck has documented in her research, it's possible to shift your mindset from prevention to promotion, so that you see networking as an opportunity for discovery and learning rather than a chore.

Consider a work-related social function you feel obliged to attend. You can tell yourself, "I hate these kinds of events. I'm going to have to put on a show and schmooze and pretend to like it." Or you can tell yourself, "Who knows—it could be interesting. Sometimes when you least expect it, you have a conversation that brings up new ideas and leads to new experiences and opportunities."

If you are an introvert, you can't simply will yourself to be extroverted, of course. But everyone can choose which motivational focus to bring to networking. Concentrate on the positives—how it's going to help you boost the knowledge and skills that are needed in your job—and the activity will begin to seem much more worthwhile.

2 Identify Common Interests

The next step in making networking more palatable is to think about how your interests and goals align with those of people you meet and how that can help you forge meaningful working relationships. Northwestern University's Brian Uzzi calls this the shared activities principle. "Potent networks are not forged through casual interactions but through relatively high-stakes activities that connect you with diverse others," he explains. (See "How to Build Your Network," HBR, December 2005.) Numerous studies in social psychology have demonstrated that people establish the most-collaborative and longest-lasting connections when they work together on tasks that require one another's contributions. Indeed, research that one of us (Tiziana) conducted with INSEAD's Miguel Sousa Lobo showed that this "task interdependence" can be one of the biggest sources of positive energy in professional relationships.

Consider the approach taken by Claude Grunitzky, a serial entrepreneur in the media industries, when he set out to meet Jefferson Hack, founder of the underground British style and music magazine *Dazed & Confused*. As described in a Harvard Business School case study by Julie Battilana, Lakshmi Ramarajan, and James Weber, Grunitzky—then 22 and preparing to found his first business, an urban hip-hop magazine in London—learned everything he could about Hack.

"I read every one of his magazines, noticed what he was writing about and what kinds of bands he reviewed," Grunitzky recalled. "I did so much of this I felt I could almost understand his personality before we met." Armed with that knowledge and convinced that he and Hack had similar worldviews and aspirations, Grunitzky felt much more comfortable approaching the industry elder.

When your networking is driven by substantive, shared interests you've identified through serious research, it will feel more authentic and meaningful and is more likely to lead to relationships that have those qualities too.

When your networking is driven by substantive, shared interests, it will feel more authentic and meaningful.

3 Think Broadly About What You Can Give

Even when you do not share an interest with someone, you can probably find something valuable to offer by thinking beyond the obvious. Of course, this isn't always easy. We've found that people who feel powerless—because they are junior in their organizations, because they belong to a minority, or for other reasons—often believe they have too little to give and are therefore the least likely to engage in networking, even though they're the ones who will probably derive the most benefit from it.

This problem was highlighted in two studies we conducted at the law firm mentioned above, which involved different groups of lawyers at different points in time. We found that senior people were typically much more comfortable networking than junior people were because of their greater power in the organization. This makes sense. When people believe they have a lot to offer others, such as wise advice, mentorship, access, and resources, networking feels easier and less selfish.

A controlled experiment confirmed this finding: People in whom we induced feelings of power found networking less repulsive and were more willing to do it than people assigned to a condition that made them feel powerless.

However, even those with lower rank and less power almost certainly have more to offer than they realize. In their book *Influence Without Authority,* Allan Cohen and David Bradford note that most people tend to think too narrowly about the resources they have that others might value. They focus on tangible, task-related things such as money, social connections, technical support, and information, while ignoring less obvious assets such as gratitude, recognition, and enhanced reputation. For instance, although mentors typically like helping others, they tend to enjoy it all the more when they are thanked for their assistance.

The more heartfelt the expression of gratitude, the greater its value to the recipient. One young professional we know told us that when she turned 30, she wrote to the 30 people she felt had contributed the most to her professional growth, thanking them and describing the specific ways each had helped her. The recipients no doubt appreciated the personalized update and acknowledgement.

When gratitude is expressed publicly, it can also enhance an adviser's reputation in the workplace. Think of the effect you have when you sing your boss's praises to your colleagues and superiors, outlining all the ways you've progressed under his or her tutelage.

People also appreciate those who understand their values and identities and make them feel included. Juan, an Argentinian executive based in the Toronto office of a Canadian property management company, told us about Hendrik, a junior hire from Germany who rallied everyone in the office to join a series of soccer games that he single-handedly organized. His fellow expats—and there were many, because the company's workforce was internationally diverse—finally had something fun to do with their colleagues, and Hendrik's status and connections

Idea in Brief

THE PROBLEM
Networking is a necessity. Building and nurturing professional relationships leads to more opportunities and knowledge, faster advancement, and greater status. But aside from extroverts who thrive on social interaction, many people say it makes them feel uncomfortable and phony—even dirty.

THE SOLUTION
An aversion to networking can be conquered with four strategies to help change your mindset:

1. Focus on learning, thinking about growth and advancement rather than obligation.

2. Identify common interests that can help you forge meaningful relationships.

3. Think broadly about what you can give instead of only what you have to gain.

4. Find a higher purpose that helps you feel more authentic about networking.

Using these strategies can help you overcome a distaste for networking—and even become more excited about and effective at building fruitful relationships.

If Networking Makes You Feel Dirty, You're Not Alone

Many people find professional networking so distasteful that it makes them feel morally and physically dirty. In a controlled experiment, we asked 306 adults working at various organizations to write about times when they engaged either in networking for professional advancement or in social networking to make friends. We then asked them to complete word fragments, such as **W _ _ H**, **S H _ _ E R**, and **S _ _ P**—a measure of subconscious preferences first used by Chen-Bo Zhong, of the Rotman School of Management, and Katie Liljenquist, of the Marriott School of Management.

Participants who had recalled professional networking wrote **"WASH," "SHOWER,"** and **"SOAP"**—words associated with cleanliness—twice as frequently as those who had recalled social networking, who more often wrote neutral words such as **"WISH," "SHAKER,"** and **"STEP."** In other words, although most participants viewed networking to socialize and make friends as positive, they saw networking to enhance their careers as distinctly negative. Their negativity was not simply dislike or discomfort. It was a deeper feeling of moral contamination and inauthenticity.

immediately shot up. In spite of his low-power position, he had brought something new to the table.

You might also have unique insights or knowledge that could be useful to those with whom you're networking. For example, junior people are often better informed than their senior colleagues about generational trends and new markets and technologies. Grunitzky is a prime example. "I knew I could bring something to [Jefferson Hack], which was expertise in hip-hop," he said. The relationship ended up being a two-way street.

When you think more about what you can give to others than what you can get from them, networking will seem less self-promotional and more selfless—and therefore more worthy of your time.

4 Find a Higher Purpose

Another factor that affects people's interest in and effectiveness at networking is the primary purpose they have in mind when they do it. In the law firm we studied, we found that attorneys who focused on the collective benefits of making connections ("support my firm" and "help my clients") rather than on personal ones ("support or help my career") felt more authentic and less dirty while networking, were more likely to network, and had more billable hours as a result.

Any work activity becomes more attractive when it's linked to a higher goal. So frame your networking in those terms. We've seen this approach help female executives overcome their discomfort about pursuing relationships with journalists and publicists. When we remind them that women's voices are underrepresented in business and that the media attention that would result from their building stronger networks might help counter gender bias, their deep-seated reluctance often subsides.

Andrea Stairs, managing director of eBay Canada, had just such a change in perspective. "I had to get over the feeling that it would be self-centered and unseemly to put myself out there in the media," she told us. "I realized that my visibility is actually good for my company and for the image of women in the business world in general. Seeing my media presence as a way to support my colleagues and other professional women freed me to take action and embrace connections I didn't formerly cultivate."

MANY IF NOT most of us are ambivalent about networking. We know that it's critical to our professional success, yet we find it taxing and often distasteful. These strategies can help you overcome your aversion. By shifting to a promotion mindset, identifying and exploring shared interests, expanding your view of what you have to offer, and motivating yourself with a higher purpose, you'll become more excited about and effective at building relationships that bear fruit for everyone.

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1. We're Losing Touch with Our Networks

→ by MARISSA KING and BALÁZS KOVÁCS

OUR RECENT RESEARCH shows that our professional and personal networks have shrunk by close to 16%—or by more than 200 people—during the pandemic. Network shrinkage has some serious downsides. It can make finding a job more difficult, hinder career progress, and make it harder to get promoted. For companies, it can lead to less creativity and more groupthink. People with fewer connections at work have a decreased sense of belonging and are less likely to identify with the organization, which puts them at higher risk for turnover and possibly even fraud and negligence.

Under normal circumstances, our networks don't simply shrink; they're more likely to churn. Rather than slowly losing friends over time as we move, change jobs, or have kids, we usually forge new relationships to replace the ones we've lost.

What's unusual about the pandemic is that old relationships aren't being replaced by new ones. At a time when many people are struggling with loneliness and feeling disconnected from work, it's more imperative than ever to be intentional about maintaining connections to casual acquaintances.

Understand How Networks Work

Before the pandemic, researchers Gillian Sandstrom and Elizabeth Dunn asked participants to count how frequently they interacted with a stranger or an acquaintance during the course of a normal day. They found that, between watercooler chats and chance meetings, the average person interacted with between 11 and 16 people they didn't know very well. These interactions with strangers and acquaintances, they found, make us happier and lead to a greater sense of belonging.

During the pandemic, we've shifted our attention away from interacting with strangers toward strengthening relationships with family, friends, and our closest colleagues. If you think of your network as a series of six concentric circles that decrease in emotional intensity as you move toward the larger outer rings, the innermost circle contains the five or so people you turn to in times of severe emotional and financial distress. The outermost ring is made up of the roughly 1,500 acquaintances or weak ties whom you would recognize by sight. When we compared the personal and work networks of hundreds of individuals pre- and post-pandemic, we found that the size of the outermost ring has shrunk, whereas our

CACTUS CREATIVE STUDIO/STOCKSY

Right now, many people are starved for social interaction, and a simple hello can reinvigorate a sense of belonging.

closest relationships have became stronger.

Researchers examining network responses to stress have dubbed this tendency "turtling up." A study that looked at digital interactions in a tech company, led by Harvard Business School's Ethan Bernstein, found a similar pattern. Exchanges between close collaborators increased by 40% post-lockdown at the expense of 10% less communication between more-distant colleagues. Over the long term, turtling up and a dearth of opportunities to interact with strangers are leading to network shrinkage.

But women's networks haven't shrunk nearly as much as men's. In fact, the majority of overall network shrinkage comes from men's networks becoming smaller. When we compared the networks of close to 200 people in June 2019 with the networks of those same people in June 2020, we found that men's networks shrank by more than 450 people, or close to 30%. Women's networks hardly shrank at all.

Given that women are disproportionately carrying the burdens of housework and childcare during the pandemic and are leaving the workforce at alarming rates, this small piece of good news is surprising. It also highlights a key point one of us (Marissa) makes in the book *Social Chemistry*. Too often, people concentrate on growing their networks instead of understanding how networks work and using the time they do have to help fulfill their needs.

It's highly unlikely that women are spending more time networking than men. Instead, women's natural networking style is giving them an advantage during the pandemic. Women connect to maintain emotional closeness. They talk face-to-face, chat on the phone, and message one another. According to a study that compared how men and women maintain emotional closeness, the renowned evolutionary psychologist Robin Dunbar and his collaborator Sam Roberts found that wasn't true of men. Instead of talking, men "do things together." They play sports, drink, fish, and play cards. But they don't talk. The social restrictions brought about by the pandemic have made it difficult for men to stay connected.

Reaffirm What's Important to You

Without face-to-face contact, our emotional attachment to friends and family deteriorates quickly. After two months without an in-person gathering, feelings of closeness between friends and family members drop by more than 30%. After that, friendships go frigid. After five months—far less than the amount of time that has passed since stay-at-home orders were first issued—feelings of closeness between friends plummet by 80%.

During moments of crisis, people think their networks have less reach than they really do. This is particularly true of people with fewer resources. When our world starts to feel smaller and smaller, having a reminder of the true reach of our relationships can help enormously. Social media can be helpful in this regard.

Tanya Menon, a business school professor at The Ohio State University, and Ned Smith, a former business school professor at Northwestern University, found that having a reminder of who you are and what your core values are can help you overcome some of the tendencies to turtle in. Our networks start to focus inward because we feel out of control. Reaffirming who and what is important to you can help create a sense of comfort and control and make it easier to reach out to people you've fallen out of contact with.

Focus on Reconnection

In the remaining months of social distancing and during the transition to virtual work that will last beyond the pandemic for many, it's critical to focus on reconnection. Without an active effort at regenerating lost relationships, the consequences of network shrinkage are likely to be enduring.

Yet people are often reluctant to reach out. There's a misconception that it will feel awkward, or maybe you're just not really sure what to say. In reality, it's as easy as saying thank you, thinking of what you can give, or even asking for help. Is there a former mentor or someone who was instrumental in your career whom you haven't spoken to in a while? Take the time to express appreciation—gratitude is a potent stimulus of connection. Have you seen an article or heard a podcast that reminded you of a colleague or former client? Pass it along and let them know you're thinking of them. Asking for help can also be a powerful way of reconnecting. It allows the other person to be of service and reinvigorates a sense of purpose.

When reaching out, the key to staving off network shrinkage isn't spending time

going to Zoom happy hours or trying to meet people online. In fact, our research shows that videoconferencing isn't helping maintain social connection. Trying to read and convey nonverbal behavior online is more of a distraction than a help. It's impossible to look at the camera and read someone's eyes at the same time, for instance. Picking up the phone may be a better strategy. We're more empathic and better listeners when simply hearing a voice. A phone call can be almost as good as a hug—in one study, it reduced cortisol levels, a biomarker of stress.

The barriers for connecting virtually are often higher for people you haven't seen in a long time or for casual acquaintances from work you may not know that well. But these are the connections you're at risk of losing. A study that compared advice executives received from their current contacts and from people who were at risk of disappearing from their network found that former colleagues who were ripe for becoming the collateral damage of network shrinkage gave better work-related advice than their current contacts. When thinking of these people, it can help to engage in perspective taking. Imagine they asked you for a 20-minute chat. How would you react? Right now, many people are starved for social interaction, and a simple hello can reinvigorate a sense of belonging.

After realizing that he needed to be proactive in maintaining casual relationships, Brendan O'Riordan, who works in data and analytics for Suffolk Construction, began setting aside 30 minutes each week to have virtual coffee and casual conversations with colleagues. "The response has been overwhelming," he says. He has "never had one canceled. Never had someone say, No, I'm too busy. Usually, you get an email back within half an hour with an invite saying: Let's do that."

Maintaining connections to the outer rings of your circle is critical for innovation, creativity, problem solving, and employee well-being. Make a list of three people you haven't seen in a while and reach out. Your day will be better and your work will benefit.

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Marissa King *is the author of* Social Chemistry: Decoding the Patterns of Human Connection *(Dutton, 2021) and a professor of organizational behavior at the Yale School of Management. Over the past 15 years, she has studied how people's social networks evolve, what they look like, and why that's significant.* ***Balázs Kovács*** *is an associate professor of management at the Yale School of Management and in the Department of Sociology. He studies various topics in organization theory, including social networks, authenticity, learning, diffusion, identity, and status. His current work investigates the effects of category spanning and innovation in technological and cultural domains.*

STEVEN PUETZER/GETTY IMAGES

2. How to Email Someone You Haven't Talked to in Forever

→ by REBECCA ZUCKER

AT SOME POINT in our careers, we find ourselves in need of help from others—whether it's to make a direct connection to a hiring manager, gather information on a prospective client company, or learn about a new industry quickly. However, over the years, we often lose touch with people in our network as work, family, and other demands fill our limited time. As if asking for help wasn't hard enough, what do you do when you need assistance from someone you haven't spoken to in over a decade?

As an executive coach, I have seen clients in this situation many times. Building and nurturing our personal and professional networks is essential for career success. Research shows that robust networks lead to better opportunities, faster advancement, and greater

status, among other benefits. When you want to ask for help from someone you've lost touch with, you don't need to feel awkward. Just keep a few things in mind:

Shift your perspective. Nobody wants to be seen as the person who reaches out to someone only when they need something from them. This concern alone can prevent us from getting back in touch. Changing the way you view your outreach to this person can make the initial contact feel a little less uncomfortable. I often remind clients, "Guess what? They also haven't contacted you over the last 10-plus years. They might be really glad to hear from you." Taking the perspective of shared responsibility for the lapse in contact or looking at your outreach as a positive event and a good reason to reestablish a relationship with your contact can help you overcome the mental hurdle to reaching out.

Acknowledge the absence of contact. Calling out the elephant in the room can also ease the awkwardness. If your relationship was less formal, say a college or graduate school classmate, you might use a bit of humor and say something like "Blast from the past" in the subject line. If your relationship was more formal, perhaps a former boss or client, you might say something like "Reconnecting" in the subject line. In my own experience sending these types of emails, and those of my clients, when there is name recognition by the person receiving the email, the response rate has been over 90% with one of these subject lines. Early in the body of your email, you can acknowledge it's been a while since you've been in touch and briefly update them on what you've been doing professionally. This will also provide useful context for your request.

Pay attention to tone. Making requests that sound either desperate or demanding can not only result in your request being denied or ignored but also taint the other person's view of you. You want your tone to appear confident that you believe the other person can say yes to this request. At the same time, you want to make it somewhat tentative by recognizing that they are very likely busy. You can offer to make it easier for them by saying something like, "Please let me know how I can make it easier for you to fulfill this request." They may ask you to draft an email that can easily be forwarded or send additional information.

Give them an out. By recognizing that they may be short on time to fulfill your request, giving the other person an out will help both you and your contact save face if they cannot help you. You might say something like, "I'm sure you are very busy, so if this is not a good time for you (or you feel like you don't know this person well enough to make an introduction), I completely understand."

Offer to reciprocate. When you are focused solely on your own needs, you risk making the request feel transactional. By viewing your request in the context of a larger, reciprocal relationship and asking how you can be helpful to the other person, you help build the relationship. If you say, "Please let me know how I can be helpful to you, either now or in the future," you open the door for them to reach out when they need help. Even better, offer your contact something that would be useful to them—greater visibility for their company, access to potential buyers of their service, or a recently released industry report.

Show appreciation. Regardless of whether your contact can help you, a short note saying that you appreciate their reply and are glad to be back in touch can leave both parties feeling good about the interaction. If they can assist you with your request, sending a follow-up thank-you note and even a small gift like a bottle of wine or a gift card for their favorite coffee shop can be a nice touch. I once reached out to a former colleague to ask for an introduction to the head of talent management at a large company, where I then had the opportunity to propose a sizable engagement. My contact had a stressful job, so I gave her a gift certificate to a day spa even before I knew the outcome of my proposal, letting her know how much I appreciated the opportunity that her introduction created, no matter the outcome.

Stay in contact. Now that you've reconnected with this person after all these years, stay in touch. Include them on your holiday card list, connect on LinkedIn (or other appropriate social media), or invite them to have coffee or lunch when you are in their neighborhood or city.

Reaching out to those we've lost touch with doesn't have to be a huge hurdle to asking for help when we need it. With the above guidelines, you can gracefully bridge these gaps to reengage your network and build mutually beneficial relationships.

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3. How Successful People Network with Each Other

→ by DORIE CLARK

AS YOU ADVANCE in your career, you have more experience and more connections to draw on for networking. But chances are you've also become a lot busier—as have the really successful people you're now trying to meet. How do you get the attention of people who get dozens of invitations per week and hundreds of emails per day? And how do you find time to network with potential new clients or recruit new employees when your calendar is packed?

The typical advice that's given to entry-level employees—*Invite people to coffee! Connect with them on LinkedIn!*—simply doesn't work for people at the top of their careers. Instead, you need to leverage an entirely different strategy, something I call "inbound networking."

In the online world, *inbound marketing* is a term that was popularized about a decade ago by HubSpot cofounders Brian Halligan and Dharmesh Shah. It refers to the practice of creating valuable content, such as articles or podcasts, that draws customers to you directly (as opposed to spending a lot of time on cold calls or paying for advertising to lure them in).

Networking is facing a similar inflection point. Most professionals are constantly bombarded with Facebook and LinkedIn connection requests, not to mention endless requests to "pick their brain." Trying to stand out in the midst of that noise is a losing battle, and you probably don't have time to send a bunch of cold emails anyway.

Instead, you can successfully network with the most prominent people by doing something very different from everyone else: attracting them to you with inbound networking. In other words, make yourself interesting enough that they choose to seek you out. Here are three ways to do that.

Identify what sets you apart. One of the fastest ways to build a connection with someone is to find a

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commonality you share with them (your alma mater, a love of dogs, a passion for clean tech). That's table stakes. But the way to genuinely capture their interest is to share something that seems exotic to them. It will often vary by context: In a roomful of political operatives, the fact that I was a former presidential campaign spokesperson is nice but not very interesting. But at a political fundraiser populated by lawyers and financiers, that background would make me a desirable conversation partner.

The more interesting you seem, the more that powerful people will want to seek you out. And yet it can be hard for us to identify what's most interesting about ourselves; over time, even the coolest things can come to seem banal. Ask your friends to identify the most fascinating elements of your biography, interests, or experiences—then do the same for them. At one recent workshop I led, we discovered that one executive had been a ball boy for the U.S. Open tennis tournament in his youth, and one attorney is an avid and regular surfer in the waters of New York City. Both are intriguing enough to spark a great conversation.

Become a connoisseur. Almost nothing elicits more interest than genuine expertise. If someone is drawn to a topic that you're knowledgeable about, you'll move to the top of their list. Since publishing my books, I've had innumerable colleagues seek me out to get advice about finding an agent or fine-tuning their manuscripts.

But sometimes it's even better when your expertise is outside the fold of your profession. Richard, a financial journalist I profiled in my book *Reinventing You: Define Your Brand, Imagine Your Future* (Harvard Business Review Press, 2013), was able to build better and deeper relationships with his sources after he started to write part-time about food and wine. He discovered that his Wall Street contacts would proactively call him up to get information about hot new restaurants or the best places to entertain their clients.

You can also use nontraditional expertise to build multidimensional connections. Bill Gates and Warren Buffett could certainly have a decent conversation about business. But it's their expert-level seriousness about the card game bridge that cemented their bond, eventually leading to Buffett's decision to entrust billions to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

When you're an expert in a given niche, you can often connect on a level playing field with people who, under other circumstances, might be out of reach. One friend of mine, a corporate executive who produces jazz records on the side, recently got invited to the home of an internationally famous rock star as the Grammy campaign season heated up.

If you know a lot about wine, or nutrition, or salsa dancing, or email marketing, or any of a million other subjects, people who care about that topic are sure to be interested in what you have to say.

Become the center of the network. It's not easy to build a high-powered network if you're not already powerful. But New York City resident Jon Levy took the position that the best way to get invited to the party is to host the party. Nearly six years ago, he started hosting twice-monthly "Influencers" dinner gatherings, featuring luminaries in different fields. Levy's gatherings now attract a guest roster of Nobel laureates and Olympic athletes. But he certainly didn't start there.

Begin by inviting the most interesting professionals you know and asking them to recommend the most interesting people they know, and over time you can build a substantial network. At a certain point you'll gain enough momentum that professionals who have heard about the dinners will even reach out to ask for an invitation. As Levy joked to one publication, "One day, I hope to accomplish something worthy of an invite to my own dinner." When you're the host, pulling together a great event liberates you to invite successful people whom you might not normally consider your peers but who embrace the chance to network with other high-quality professionals.

I've also hosted more than two dozen dinner parties to broaden my network and meet interesting people. But that's certainly not the only way to connect. These days, any professional who makes the effort to start a Meetup or Facebook group that brings people together could accomplish something similar.

The world is competing for the attention of the most successful people. If you want to meet them—and break through and build a lasting connection—the best strategy is to make them come to you. Identifying what's uniquely interesting about you, and becoming a connoisseur and a hub, are techniques that will ensure the people you'd most like to know will seek you out.

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4. How to Ask for an Email Introduction

→ by RUCHIKA TULSHYAN

EMAIL HAS MADE it easier to connect with anyone—and I've benefited professionally from introductions to new contacts around the globe that would've been unimaginable before the digital age. But requesting an email introduction through a current contact isn't without costs, especially for the person lending you their network, so I recommend asking thoughtfully and carefully.

One cost of your request is that it requires your contact to spend precious time crafting an email explaining why you and the other person should connect. One or two infrequent requests don't translate to much effort, but when you're getting multiple asks a week—like many busy people do—it can add up to hours of time spent introducing other people.

This may be especially burdensome for women. We're finally acknowledging the double standard in how women are expected to communicate over email. They are also expected to do more favors, according to a study titled "Dancing Backwards in High Heels: Female Professors Experience More Work Demands and Special Favor Requests, Particularly from Academically Entitled Students." As someone who works both inside and outside academia, I relate to their findings. In comparing notes with other women-of-color faculty, we've noticed a trend in some negative teaching evaluations pointing to delays in email responses—something the male faculty I know don't contend with. Unfortunately, the expectation for women and people of color to readily help behind the scenes can have a damaging impact on our career progression.

Whether you're raising venture capital, looking for a new job, or seeking a friend in the city you just moved to, you can help lessen this burden—and make it more likely that your contact will agree to make the introduction—by including a forwardable email below your note to the person making the introduction. This shows empathy for the person you're making the request of and how busy they are.

A short blurb about yourself and your motivation for wanting to connect also forces you, as the requester, to think through exactly what you need from the connection. As a working mother who wears multiple professional titles, I'm less inclined to respond to a general introduction. I would much rather the person spell out what exactly they're hoping to achieve from the connection. And I'm more likely to respond to a request from someone looking to make a new friend rather than a vague request to "connect over mutual interests."

To write an effective forwardable email, consider the following.

Introduce yourself briefly.

The point of the forwardable email is that it explains everything the person you're looking to be introduced to needs to know about who you are. Begin the email with a few lines—I recommend about three—detailing who you are and the information that's most pertinent to the request at hand. When I'm requesting an introduction

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Make it more likely that your contact will agree to make an introduction by including a forwardable email.

to make a new business connection, I usually don't include that I'm an adjunct professor, for example. When crafting these, think "Twitter summary," not full-length professional bio.

State your motive. Next, be extremely specific about why you want to connect. Again, I recommend no more than three lines. "I'm looking to meet an investor for my food business," or "I've written an Op-Ed that I'd like you to consider for publication," or "I am looking for advice on how to apply to a leadership program at the university where you teach" are all clear motives. This brief paragraph should also include any other information salient to the request—details about your business or background that would be important for the other party to know in context of your request.

Do your homework. Show that you've researched the third party. If you're raising funding for your food business, spell out that you're hoping to meet Sarah because you know that she's an investor in the food industry. Or that Jane is the opinion editor at the local paper. Or that Jamilah handles student advising at the college you're applying to. Try to avoid generalities like "I'm looking to meet people in the field." Also, double-check the spelling of their name. I've had a number of forwardable emails recently refer to me as "Ruckika," "Rachika," and "Rushika," which makes me less inclined to spend time responding to someone who can't take the time to get my name right.

Make it easy for them. Close the forwardable email with an easy way to connect with you and potential meeting times. I usually end with something like, "I'm based in Seattle and would be happy to meet you at your convenience on most weekdays for the next month." If you use an online calendaring software like Calendly, send them a link to your schedule just in case. Also, close the email with a link to your LinkedIn profile and website so that no one involved in the email—the person making the introduction or the person receiving the forwarded email—has to spend more time researching you.

Expect a double opt-in introduction. The forwardable email also allows the introducer to ensure the other party is open to the connection so that they can make a double opt-in introduction. I even include that in my forwardable emails by writing: "Please feel free to use the below forwardable email to check if Sarah is open to connect with me." That way, the introducer has a seamless way to check in with their contact by writing: "Dear Sarah, please see the request from Ruchika below. Would it be OK to introduce you two?"

Send a calendar invite. Once your email has been forwarded and the other party has responded with an affirmative to meet, it's your responsibility to send a calendar invite with dial-in information and ideally a short agenda to outline why you're meeting. This can be the title of the meeting request or a more detailed agenda, if relevant. When sending the calendar invite, write your name first so that's what your contact sees on their calendar. For example, if I was to send a calendar invite, the meeting title would be "Ruchika/Candour to connect with Sally on Op-Ed." This is especially helpful when meetings are being set well in advance.

Most important, express gratitude. I still get a number of requests that don't include a basic "thank you" or "please." Even after fruitful connections are made, I often find out about them on social media. When possible, circle back with the introducer and write a short note letting them know how the connection went. They are more likely to make another introduction if they know you appreciated it.

Close to 300 billion emails are sent and received each day, and that number is only expected to rise. Rather than contribute to the noise, make it easier for those helping you out. This means putting thought and care into introduction requests, which will help you make more meaningful connections and expand your network. And, given the extra burden women shoulder to be helpful, here's hoping forwardable introductions can distribute some of those expectations more equitably.

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5. How to Network with Powerful People

→ by MICHAEL C. WENDEROTH

AFTER TWO YEARS working at a multinational, Alex (not his real name) was ready for a job change and knew networking was critical. But his efforts—reaching out to executives inside and outside his company—had resulted in zero opportunities or meetings. More worrisome, barely anyone had even bothered to respond.

Alex was doing great work and had strong credentials, so his résumé wasn't the problem. He was targeting influential, high-level executives, but the response rate was poor.

When we analyzed his emails and LinkedIn requests, we quickly found the issue: his approach and his wording. His previous 20 inquiries read: "Dear [Name], I am looking for a new job and would love to get your thoughts over a coffee. Do you have an hour when we can meet?"

How do you get the attention of powerful people you want in your network but are the least likely to respond? Senior executives are busy, see less value spending time with someone lower on the hierarchy, and often miss or ignore requests through email or social media.

I turned the tables on Alex: How would he respond to a similar request from someone younger whom he did not know well? If he received 20 requests, which ones would he respond to and which people would he meet?

Putting Alex through this reflection exercise helped him—and numerous students and professionals I coach—better identify the strategies that secure important meetings. Alex ultimately identified five approaches, which are backed by the social science on what leads others to respond and help us. Used strategically, they can also help you.

1. Be Recommended

Alex thought back to the university students who contacted him last year and sheepishly admitted that he blew off the majority of them. "The one I immediately responded to was a student whom my CEO said I should meet."

Lesson: The best way to secure a meeting is to have a respected figure in your industry recommend you. Having friends in high places can move you to the top of the queue, and even positively impact your salary.

In practice: Being recommended can be tricky if you aren't close to someone influential, but when we carefully examine our networks, most of us can identify a few powerful ties. Ask someone influential to put in a good word for you, introduce you, or help arrange a meeting with the person you want to meet.

Alex's team had contracted a consultancy the year before, and he had impressed the consultancy's partner during the engagement. The partner had a wide network of senior contacts at other companies, so Alex asked if the partner could introduce him to a vice president he wanted to meet. The partner was happy to do so and also recommended him to two other executives.

2. Play Up Your Similarities

Alex boasted that he always helps people from his university or who studied in the school's economics department. "I help alumni."

Lesson: We gravitate and help those similar to us. Common ties extend beyond school. Coming from the same hometown, rooting for the same sports team, sharing unique backgrounds (like being a female engineer in marketing or having received a nontraditional degree), or even having the same name or birthday immediately warms people up to one another.

In practice: Do your homework to refine your pitch. Use LinkedIn or Google to research the people you want to meet. Weave similarities you share into your request.

Alex revisited his list and was surprised to learn that five executives he wanted to connect with hailed from his hometown in Philadelphia. He rewrote his email, adding: "I noticed you are also from Philadelphia (I grew up outside Drexel Hill), so I

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imagine you, like me, are still celebrating our long-awaited 2018 Super Bowl victory!"

3. Bring Value

Alex responded to an engineer who contacted him, mainly because of her focus on artificial intelligence. "I thought maybe she knows more about AI than me, and I could learn something."

Lesson: If you have information, skills, or insights that could be useful to the person you want to meet, you are more likely to stand out.

In practice: Highlighting unique skills may be easier for senior professionals, but students can capitalize on their coursework or familiarity with emerging technologies. Consider what your target might be interested in or need help with. Play up special knowledge you may have, framing how that might benefit the person, and highlight credentials that give you credibility, like affiliations with prestigious institutions. But don't write a thesis—drop hints to pique their interest.

Alex realized his work on a social media campaign to generate off-line sales was a compelling story for retail executives, so he highlighted how he had "boosted in-store sales 75% through new media." Alex asked an executive if they could meet so that Alex "could get the executive's C-suite perspective and advice on how I might use this skill to help retailers as I take the next step in my career."

4. Use Flattery

One student employed none of the approaches above, but Alex still responded. He was embarrassed about why: "This guy kissed my butt and told me how awesome I was."

Lesson: The old joke goes that flattery has a law of diminishing returns—but no one has found where it drops off! Tap into the ego. We like people who make us feel good about ourselves, and we find these people more credible.

In practice: No one wants to be a brownnoser, but there is good evidence that ingratiating behavior works. To combat our resistance to using compliments, especially the belief that it won't work across cultures, think about flattery as making the other person feel good about themselves. For example, the very act of seeking someone's sage expertise and advice is a form of flattery. A German executive highlighted key points he liked from the speech of a vice president in another division. The "flattery" was sincere. He secured a coffee meeting and started a relationship that accelerated his career.

Alex revised his generic emails to highlight something specific about each person: "I really appreciated the point you made in your televised interview last week—it made me rethink how I view online privacy."

5. Ask and Be Persistent

For every one person who reached out to Alex the past year, there were two people who did not. Most people are too embarrassed to ask or feel that reaching out won't get a response.

Lesson: The odds of getting a response might feel low, but research shows we significantly underestimate the willingness of others to help us—by more than 50%. When I asked a senior executive why he responds to younger people, he echoed a common refrain: "They simply asked and followed up...most people don't. I find it very hard to say no to a sincere, well-thought-out request, especially when it is about something concrete and simple, like making an introduction."

In practice: Ask and ye shall receive—more than you think you will. Or ask yourself: What do I have to lose by asking? Most busy and senior people are not thinking about you and can't read your mind. Use the approaches above to make a request more compelling, and make requests in person, which are even harder to turn down.

Put It All Together

The market is more competitive than ever. Most jobs are found through connections, and networking has been shown to have a strong impact on career success. But to build that network, you must first make contact.

After we debriefed, Alex revised his requests. He wrote crisp, to-the-point inquiries, employing or combining the approaches above. That took some thought, but relatively little time, and he immediately tripled his response rate. Every few months Alex sharpens his approach on the basis of what's working.

Follow Alex's lead. You'll land more meetings, which will lead to more conversations, which will build your network and advance your career.

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6. Eight Questions to Ask Someone Other Than "What Do You Do?"

→ by DAVID BURKUS

WE'VE ALL BEEN in the awkward situation of meeting someone new and having to build rapport quickly—at networking events, industry conferences, charity events, dinner parties, and other social professional situations. If you're like many people—especially most Americans—you break the awkward silence with a pretty standard question: "So, what do you do?"

But that question might not be the best way to build rapport with someone else. In fact, it may be better to avoid talking about work entirely.

Research findings from the world of network science and psychology suggest that we tend to prefer and seek out relationships where there is more than one context for connecting with the other person. Sociologists call these *multiplex ties*, connections where there is an overlap of roles or affiliations from a different social context. If a colleague at work is on the same nonprofit board as you or takes the same spin class at the local gym, then you two share a multiplex tie. We may prefer relationships with multiplex ties because research suggests that those relationships tend to be richer, more trusting, and longer lasting. We see this in our everyday lives: The work friend who is also a "friend friend" is far more likely to stick with you should one of you change jobs. And it goes the other way, too: People who have at least one real friend at work report liking their jobs more.

Which brings us back to the problem of using "So, what do you do?" as your opener.

Assuming you're already at a work-related networking event or meeting another person in a work context, the question quickly sets a boundary around the conversation that the other person is now a "work" contact. You might possibly discover another commonality and build a multiplex tie, but it's far less likely to happen in that conversation.

Instead, consider beginning your introductory questions with something deliberately non-work-related and trusting that the context of the meeting will eventually steer the conversation back to work-related topics. Toward that end, here are a few questions you could start with that will leave you more likely to find multiple commonalties and turn your new contact into a multiplex tie—and maybe even a friend:

What excites you right now? This question has a wide range of possible answers. It gives others the ability to give a work-related answer or to talk about their kids, or their new boat, or basically anything that excites them.

What are you looking forward to? This question works for the same reason but is more forward-looking than backward-looking, allowing others to choose from a bigger set of possible answers.

What's the best thing that happened to you this year? Similar to the previous two, but reversed: This question is more backward-looking than forward-looking. Regardless, it's open-ended and gives others a wealth of answers to choose from.

Where did you grow up? This question dives into others' backgrounds (but in

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a much less assertive and loaded way than "Where are you from?") and allows them to answer with simple details from childhood or to engage in their story of how they got to where they are right now and what they're doing.

What do you do for fun? This question steers the conversation away from work, unless of course they are lucky enough to do for work what they'd be doing for fun anyway. Even then, it's understood as a nonwork question, and the most likely answers will probably establish nonwork ties.

Who is your favorite superhero? This is one of my favorites. Occasionally, asking this question has led me to bond over a mutual love of a character, but more often you'll find a shared connection or two in the reason for why the other person chose that particular character... or why they're not really into superheroes.

Do you support a charitable cause? Another big, open-ended question (assuming they support at least one charitable cause). It's important to define support as broader than financial donations; it might be in the form of volunteering or just working to raise awareness. You're really likely to either find shared ground or learn about a cause you didn't know about.

What's the most important thing I should know about you? This one is effective for similar reasons as many of the above, plus it gives the broadest possible range from which they can choose. It can come off as a little forthright, so when to use it depends on a lot of contextual clues.

Regardless of which question you choose, the important thing is to ask a question open-ended enough to allow others to select nonwork answers if they choose. Doing so will increase the chances that you didn't just turn a stranger into a new contact on your phone, but that you actually made a new friend.

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7. Networking When You Hate Talking to Strangers

→ by DORIE CLARK

THE POWER OF serendipity is hot in business circles. Silicon Valley campuses have been constructed to foster more "random collisions." These unexpected interactions, many thinkers say, are one key to creativity. "Create spaces where you're wandering around and exposing yourself to new people," John Hagel of Deloitte's Center for the Edge told me in an interview. And according to an expansive survey of entrepreneurs by venture capitalist Anthony Tjan and his colleagues, a quarter of them traced their success to embracing serendipitous encounters.

All that is well and good—for people who don't mind talking to strangers. But as

Having a "wingman" at your side to help highlight your accomplishments at networking events can give you the confidence you need to approach others.

an introvert, I hate making small talk with people I don't know. Here's how I've managed to strike the balance between meeting new people—and being exposed to interesting new ideas—and not having to initiate awkward conversations.

Make them come to you. The best solution I've found for uncomfortable events where you don't know anyone is arranging to be the speaker. That might seem paradoxical, but there's a difference between introversion and shyness—I'm actually far more comfortable on a stage in front of hundreds of people than I am chatting in a small group of folks I don't know. I'm getting ready to launch an 11-city tour for my book *Stand Out: How to Find Your Breakthrough Idea and Build a Following Around It* (Portfolio, 2015), which presents the perfect solution: When you're the speaker, people approach you, and there's a ready-made topic of conversation.

Bring a friend. Having a "wingman" at your side to help highlight your accomplishments at networking events can give you the confidence you need to approach others and break into conversations. In addition, your friend most likely knows people in the room whom you don't, and vice versa, so you can trade "warm introductions" and connect with new people. If you or your company is hosting the event, you can also encourage your friend to bring guests they think you should meet. Just avoid the temptation to use your friend as a crutch and spend the evening talking with them—that defeats the purpose of meeting new people.

Have a few opening lines ready. The hardest part of interacting with a stranger is the opening. How do you get started? What do you say? That was the challenge facing a coaching client of mine, a talented executive from the West Coast. She frequently attended high-powered alumni events but wasn't sure where to begin the conversation. We developed a few questions she felt comfortable asking that didn't sound hackneyed but opened the door to a more substantive discussion. They don't have to be profound; the goal is to kick-start a dialogue. Possibilities include:

- What's the coolest thing you're working on right now?
- How do you spend most of your time?
- How did you hear about the event?
- What year did you graduate/what house or dorm did you live in (when there's a common tie, such as an alumni group)?

And when nothing else works, I've often simply said, "I don't know anyone here. Can I talk to you?" No one has ever said no.

Research in advance. Finally, it's easier to talk to someone if they don't feel like a stranger. Even if you haven't met them in person before, having some background information about them can suggest possible topics of conversation. You don't have to become a stalker; educated guesses and light online research can carry you pretty far. For instance, most fundraisers have a host committee listed on the invitation. If you want to make the experience more pleasant, quickly Google them and see if anyone seems particularly interesting, or look for commonalities you can bring up, such as having attended the same college or living in the same neighborhood. Similarly, if you're attending an event organized by a professional association, many of their board and advisory board members will most likely be in attendance, and you can almost always find that information on the organization's website.

Talking to strangers will probably never be comfortable for me. It's exhausting when an airplane seatmate starts chattering to me or a taxi driver wants to know too much about my day. But with these strategies, it's possible to make just a little more room for serendipity in our lives.

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YONGYUAN DAI/GETTY IMAGES

8. How to Network Across Cultures

→ by ANDY MOLINSKY

PICTURE THIS: You are at a networking event and see across the room a potential employer from a company you're interested in. You walk over to that person, look him in the eye, and say, "Hello, I noticed that you're from IBM. I'm very interested in IBM and would love to give you a sense of my background."

I recently posed this scenario to a group of foreign-born professionals in the United States and then asked whether they believed that, according to American cultural norms, the person's statement was **(a) too direct? (b) not direct enough?** or **(c) appropriately direct?**

I also posed the same question to a group of American-born professionals, and the answers from the two groups were telling.

All the American-born professionals in the room answered (c)—the statement was appropriately direct and a reasonable way to begin a networking conversation in the United States.

The foreign-born professionals, on the other hand, saw the situation quite differently. A few with extensive experience living and working in the United States agreed with the Americans. However, the large majority didn't, answering (a)—the behavior was too direct and assertive for an American-style networking event.

I then posed an additional question:

Imagine that a few minutes later you see another person across the room from a company you're interested in. You walk over to that person and say in a tentative manner:

"Hello, sir. My name is _____. I am so very honored to meet you. Would it be possible for me to introduce myself to you?"

Again, I had seminar participants assess the appropriateness of this statement according to American cultural norms: in particular, whether the statement was:

(a) Appropriately polite. When talking with someone at a networking event, especially someone senior to you in age or professional background, it is important in the United States to be highly deferential.

(b) Too polite. Even when talking with someone senior to you in age or professional background, it is important not to be overly polite and deferential. It makes you appear to lack confidence and professionalism.

Again, all American-born individuals answered (b), whereas a large group of the foreign-born professionals, many of whom were from India, answered (a)—the statement was appropriately polite for the situation.

The ability to network—to develop contacts and personal connections with a variety of people—is a critical skill for any global business leader. The only problem is that global networking can be extremely difficult when the rules for networking vary so dramatically across cultures. In fact, these cultural challenges can be so strong that many of the young potential foreign-born global leaders whom I know often purposefully avoid networking opportunities in the United States—despite how important these opportunities can be for developing their careers.

Consider the words of Ravi (whose name is altered to protect confidentiality), an Indian management consultant, who describes his experience participating at a networking event in the United States.

I feel that I am performing a sin, trying to become something that I am not,

being artificial and fake. For example, while trying to network, I try to sell myself, bragging about my abilities to a stranger. And that feels so weird and selfish to me, making me feel like I am doing things to achieve my objectives at all cost.

So what can be done? How can budding global professionals like Ravi acquire this critical global leadership skill?

In working with young global leaders like Ravi over the past 10 years, I have found three key tools for success in learning to adapt behavior across cultures in a networking situation or in any situation where you need to adjust your cultural behavior to be effective in a new setting.

Learn from those around you. Watch carefully how others operate in networking situations, and learn which behaviors do and don't work in that setting. Customize your own approach from what you observe to develop a style that feels authentic but is also effective in the new setting.

Master the new cultural logic. Learn the rationale for this new behavior from the perspective of the new culture. Find out, for example, why "small talk" is such an important part of networking in the United States. Understand from the American point of view why it's actually appropriate to speak positively about yourself and your qualifications. Master the logic of the new culture, and the behavior will feel much more comfortable to perform.

Finally, practice! Practice multiple times, and ideally in settings that mimic the stress and pressure of real situations. Integrate the behavior so deeply into your psyche that it becomes your "new normal"—something you do naturally and instinctively.

Use these tools and you will master networking in no time. The bonus is that you will also learn a method that you can apply to any global leadership situation you face—which perhaps is the greatest learning of all.

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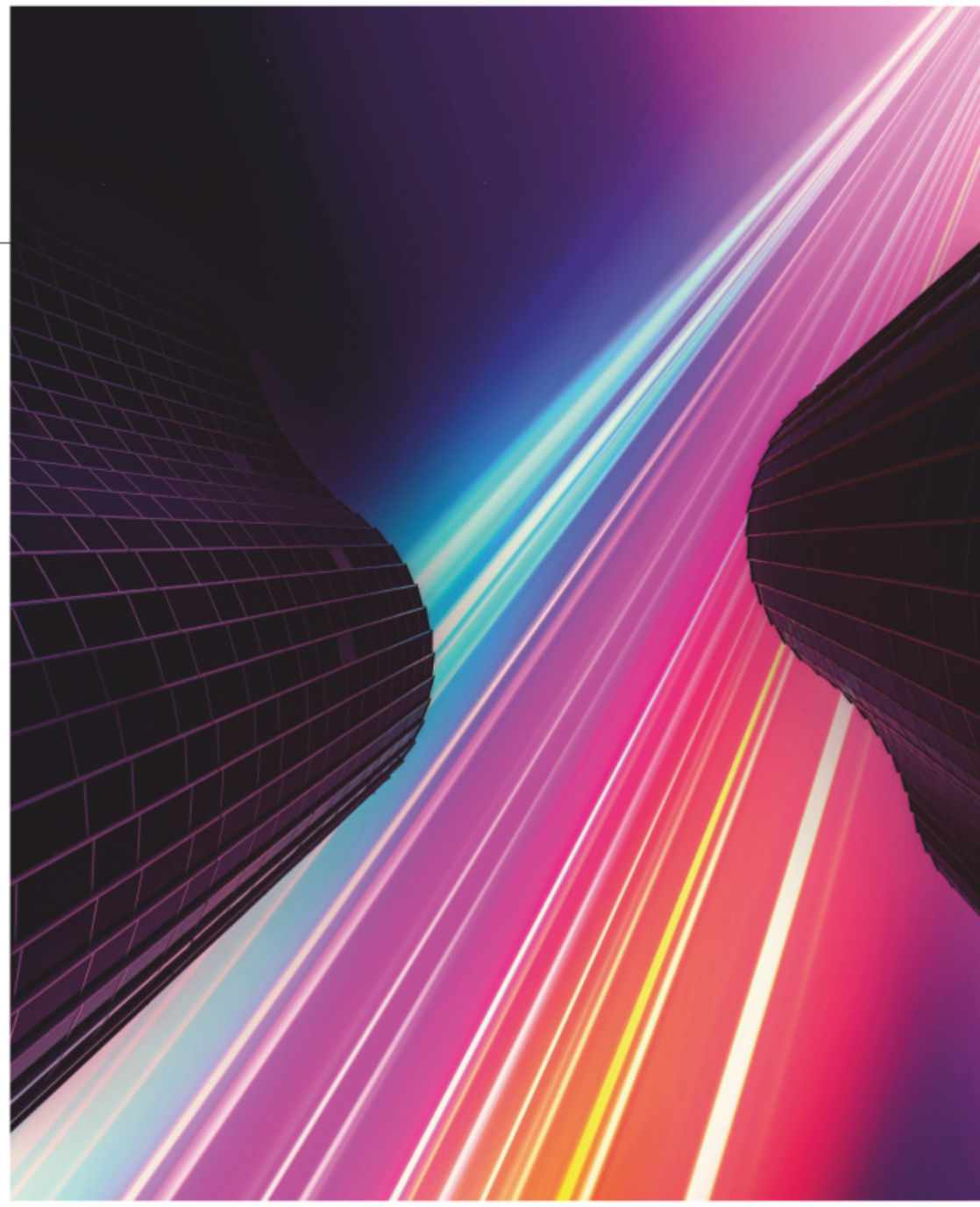

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9. Remote Networking as a Person of Color

→ by LAURA MORGAN ROBERTS and ANTHONY J. MAYO

IN THIS NEW era of remote work and physical distancing, large in-person professional networking events have been put on hold. The same is true for in-person interactions within companies that foster the development of meaningful connections and relationships. Whereas some people are desperately pining away for the return of happy hours, coffee breaks, and professional conferences, others are relieved that they are no longer pressured to network. In fact, many are uncom-

Professionals of color are at higher risk of becoming isolated, struggling to navigate the racial boundaries at social events.

fortable with the seemingly self-promoting, transactional nature of networking, and research finds that some people quite literally find it icky.

In remote work situations, where people cannot rely on impromptu elevator conversations or watercooler chats with coworkers, the answer isn't to turn inward. In fact, the need for networking is even *more* important. During challenging economic times, both external and internal networking can provide energizing social connections, firm and industry insight, personal affirmation, social support, and access to career opportunities. In particular, our interactions with people whose backgrounds and perspectives differ from our own help us become smarter, more creative, and better equipped to solve difficult problems.

Building relationships across differences does not come naturally or automatically, however. According to our research, networking can be especially challenging for professionals of color, who may not only experience general discomfort but also face unique challenges from not being perceived as powerful, credible, or resourceful, which often results in less outreach and relationship building. Professionals of color are also at higher risk of becoming isolated, struggling to navigate the racial boundaries at social events—in particular, they hesitate to share information about themselves, which limits their ability to be authentic at work and to build deep relationships.

The common mantra about working "twice as hard to get half as much" unfortunately rings true in economic data, which suggests that Black men and women must outwork and outperform their white counterparts to be seen as comparably skilled. Our research shows that this extends to activities like networking, where workers who differ from their counterparts report feeling excluded and marginalized, which makes it harder for them to believe that their social capital is valued.

The pandemic, however, may offer new opportunities for professionals of color to network in ways that are more comfortable and authentic. By identifying these strategies, professionals of color can build new relationships that can elevate their careers over the short and long term. One big hurdle, however, is confronting the ways in which they perceive internal and external networking.

How Professionals of Color Perceive Networking

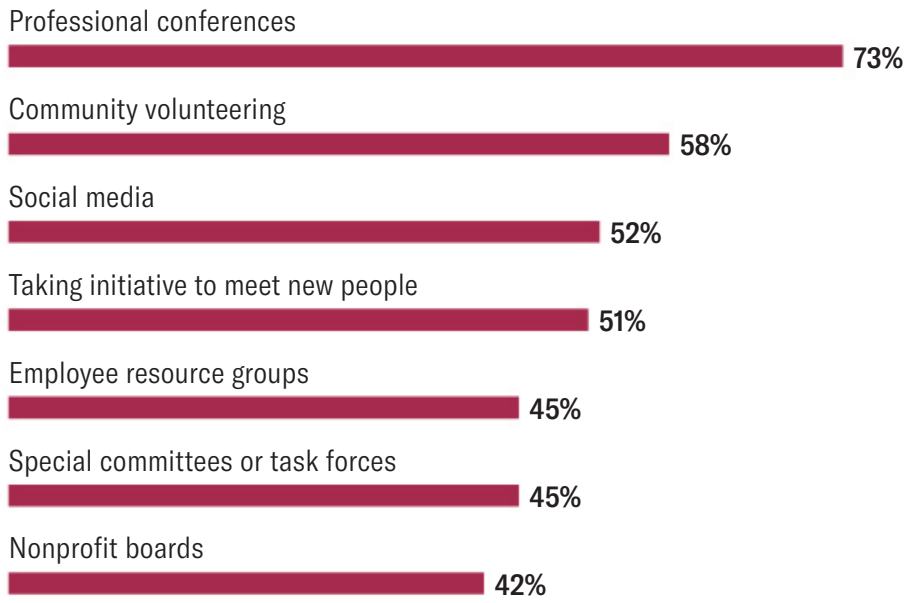
Before the start of Covid-19, and in collaboration with The Partnership, a Boston-based organization that supports multicultural professionals, we surveyed 300 mid-to-senior-level professionals of color in the U.S. about their perceptions of networking and how frequently they engaged in it. More than 50% were "too busy" to participate in networking events, 30% had work-related conflicts, 17% preferred to focus on work, and 17% associated networking with "playing politics."

One professional stated, "My personal cost/benefit analysis suggests that networking events do not reap as much benefit as other professional and personal activities." A Black executive in the financial services sector noted, "I definitely am not a natural networker per se. My relationship building has primarily been through the lens of my work and using that as the basis to build relationships. I'm not comfortable with inorganic interaction. I'm not the 'Let's go to a cocktail reception and strike up a conversation' type of person."

Broadly, networking was not a top priority for the majority of professionals in our study; fewer than half felt it was essential for their careers, and senior executives were even less likely to consider networking essential compared with early-career professionals. (Compare this with a 2017 global LinkedIn survey where 80% of professionals said networking was important for career success—though, interestingly, half of respondents said they were too busy to network, which is similar to our findings.) This head-down approach results in a startling statistic: 82% participated in networking activities less than once per month.

This lack of networking clearly has a cost, one that is often larger for marginalized individuals in an organization. Ultimately, it is not nearly enough for people who are serious about investing in high-quality connections that are essential for well-being and career success. As a Black venture capitalist stated, "We're just not networking, which is hurting us. We're not spending the time to build rapport with the people who are making the decisions about who gets the next job, who gets the next big opportunity. They don't know us. They don't

The Forms of Networking Professionals of Color Prefer



Source: Survey of 300 mid-to-senior-level professionals of color in the U.S., February–March 2018.

have a rapport with us. They haven't heard us talk about what we've accomplished. Then we're not going to come up in the conversation when they decide who's going to get the next high-level job."

Changing the Paradigm: How Professionals of Color Can Leverage Networking During the Pandemic

Despite these findings, our research also revealed several networking activities that professionals of color are likely to engage in (see chart above).

In fact, the Covid-19 crisis may be creating new, more attractive opportunities for building relationships with people who can share valuable information about opportunities, provide honest assessments of strengths and weaknesses, and advocate for promotions.

Many of the obstacles our study participants identified can be removed in this time of physical distancing. For example, several reported that the event locations were often too inconvenient for travel or that designated "networking opportunities" conflicted with other work obligations. Other barriers included the cost of events. And while in-person professional conferences may be on hold, less expensive virtual events, community volunteering, and social media interactions are likely to increase in the near future.

Here are some other ways in which professionals of color, or anyone in the current work environment, can stay connected and visible while working remotely.

Reactivate dormant connections. Reach out through social media or direct message to individuals you haven't connected with in some time. When everyone is busy coming and going, these relationships can fall off the radar. But they are especially valuable in helping you feel more connected and authentic during a crisis, reminding you of your core values, goals, and dreams. These people may also be aware of new job opportunities, which can be valuable information as companies shift to meet new economic pressures.

Participate in learning communities. Our survey revealed that the most popular way to network was by participating in professional conferences, most of which have been canceled or postponed until large gatherings are safe. But a host of virtual learning workshops and discussion groups have launched in their place, providing ways to meet new people. Most colleges and universities are offering virtual seminars and other learning opportunities that support education and community building. Social media channels offer interest-based groups where people can share resources and suggestions for dealing with work-related challenges.

Maintain periodic outreach to champions and sponsors. A common thread in the success stories of professionals of color is the support of a champion or sponsor—someone in the organization who not only provides advice but helps create the conditions for new opportunities and increased visibility. It is critical to sustain these connections, especially in light of greater uncertainty in the economic landscape.

Engage in community service. Our survey showed that people are more enthusiastic about networking opportunities that are coupled with organized outreach events. Through these activities, they are more likely to meet people with common

The pandemic offers new opportunities for professionals of color to network in ways that are more comfortable and authentic.

intellectual, business, and/or values-based interests. For professionals of color in our studies, these community service activities often include targeted outreach toward underserved and marginalized communities, such as mentoring youth of color and serving on not-for-profit boards. Community-based networking events are attractive because they tap into a sense of collective identity and higher purpose. They also help counteract the belief that networking is purely motivated by self-interest.

Focus on shared networks and organize group networking. We discovered, through follow-up interviews and case studies of Black executives, that those most likely to invest in networking were able to reframe their perceptions of these activities from self-focused to other-focused. Conversations about networking became livelier when professionals talked about networks to which they *belonged,* rather than networks they *possessed*. A discussion of "my" network can be off-putting, casting one as an instrumentally focused power broker who may put personal advancement ahead of relationship strength. On the contrary, practices that build shared networks, for example, "our" [alumni/community group/professional association] networks, were evident in examples of people who were willing to make time in their busy schedule to field phone calls from strangers, answer informational questions from acquaintances, and help position other people for personal and professional success. As one professional of color stated, "Networking is essential to the soul. It is not about me."

Black alumni associations are useful exemplars of shared networks, which meet regularly in regional groups, facilitate formal service and fundraising events, while also functioning as an insider channel for looping people typically in the margins into promising developmental opportunities. These unique forms of shared networks also provide rich contexts of cultural familiarity, which helps workers and their families create a sense of community in companies and cities where they may be demographically underrepresented. For instance, one Black executive said, "We can speak in shorthand to one another and say, 'How are you going to deal with this issue?' We're all trying to accomplish similar things.... There's an inspirational level to it."

Participate in remote employee resource groups. The value of employee resource groups has been called into question recently, under the rationale that they fail to promote inclusion. However, our findings suggest that ERGs provide an important vehicle for building and sustaining relationships—an especially challenging task for professionals of color—which should be systematically supported for the benefit of the workers and their companies. Now, more than ever, firms should invest in initiatives that support the strategic aims of ERGs to build community and strengthen business leadership.

The networking activities we highlight provide the sustenance needed to withstand this period of dislocation and disorientation. However, the burden of contact should not be borne solely by professionals of color. A lack of physical presence can exacerbate the "invisibility conundrum" that many professionals of color experience as being one of very few people like them in their organizations or fields, which often makes it more difficult to be part of key decisions and can make them feel invisible. Moving to a virtual environment can make matters worse, as it becomes far easier for connections to fracture, even inadvertently. That is why it is so important for professionals of color to ensure regular contact and interaction with their manager and their peers—and why managers and other industry leaders must proactively stay in contact with their colleagues of color as well.

For professionals of color who struggle to be seen and heard even during so-called normal times, it is critical to sustain and cultivate connections inside and outside work. The strategies in this article are especially important now, but they apply to anyone who wants to proactively manage their career.

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The best strategy might be to just stop trying to meet new people.

JUJ WINN/GETTY IMAGES

10. Go Ahead, Skip That Networking Event

→ by DAVID BURKUS

WE'VE PROBABLY ALL been to at least one networking event, those initially promising but inevitably awkward meetups where most people arrive hoping to meet new contacts who can further their career—but end up stirring their drink in the corner of the room chatting with someone they already know.

To an introvert, these events are terrifying, but it turns out that they aren't all that effective for extroverts either. Many people, not just the introverts, leave these meetings feeling like they wasted their time. Some may even wonder what's wrong with them that they keep trying and failing to maximize their time at these events.

But it's not you who's failing. It's the networking event itself.

I reviewed dozens of studies on networking for my latest book, and the overall implications are that these events don't live up to their billing. Most of us, when put into a situation where the only goal is to meet new people, default to staying inside our comfort zones. That means talking to people we know...or at the very least, people who are similar to us. By their very design most networking events are doomed from the start.

In a notable study of networking events, Columbia Business School professors Paul Ingram and Michael Morris organized a networking mixer as part of the school's executive MBA program. Many of those invited were students who had actually been lobbying Columbia to put on more social events as part of the curriculum so that they could benefit from the rich and diverse network of colleagues. About 100 executives, consultants, entrepreneurs, and bankers gathered together for food and drinks on a Friday evening. Before the event, Ingram and Morris surveyed the executives to learn whom among the invited guests they already knew and what their intentions and objectives were for the event. They found that on average each guest knew about a third of the other guests and that most of them planned to use the event to meet new people.

When the guests arrived, the researchers told them to act normally: "Talk to whomever you want to, while enjoying food and drinks." The researchers then used tracking badges to monitor who talked to whom. As you might be able to guess by now, most of the executives talked to people they already knew. Despite 95% of executives expressing a desire to meet new people, the average participant spent half of their time with the one-third of the people they already knew.

The few new meetings that did take place were usually with others who were like themselves: The consultants talked to consultants, and the bankers talked to bankers. In terms of both new conversations and diverse connections, the most successful networker at the event turned out to be the bartender.

If even the best-intentioned executives failed to meet enough new people, clearly the pull of our comfort zone is strong. So how can we avoid that pull? The best strategy might be to just stop trying to meet new people.

Instead, we are more likely to develop new relationships with a diverse set of individuals by focusing on activities to participate in rather than relationships themselves. According to Brian Uzzi, sociologist, network scientist, and Richard L. Thomas Professor of Leadership and Organizational Change at the Kellogg School of Management, "Potent networks are not forged through casual interactions but through relatively high-stakes activities that connect you with diverse others." In other words, schmoozing at a mixer is far less likely to lead you to a powerful network than jumping into projects, teams, or activities that draw a diverse set of people together.

The problem with networking events is that there's no bigger purpose other than just having conversations with people, and without that bigger purpose—that high-stakes activity—there's little incentive to move beyond conversations that make us comfortable. When the stakes are higher, however, we end up needing more than what existing contacts and similar-seeming people can provide. So, we push further to meet more-diverse people.

These types of high-stakes activities come in many sizes. It can be serving on a nonprofit board, organizing a charity drive, playing in an amateur sports league, taking up a new hobby, or anything else that draws a more diverse set of people than normal to come together and work toward something big enough that it can't get accomplished alone.

The return on investment of time in these types of activities is far higher than just attending a social event (and that's before you factor in the health benefits of sports leagues or the societal benefit of working with a charity). So skip the networking events. You have permission to never attend one again... as long as you're reallocating that time to the right kind of shared activity.

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MARTIN BARRAUD/GETTY IMAGES

11. The Power of Your Network Is the "Ask"

→ by DEBORAH MILLS-SCOFIELD

ONE OF THE biggest assets in anyone's life is a generous network. It is a gift that grows simply by sharing it. Think of it as the Law of Accelerating Returns—the more you share your network, the more people share it in return and the more the rate of sharing accelerates. For me, my network has literally and figuratively been a source of survival. For most of us, networks have played a critical role in our lives, whether or not we realize it.

I asked executive and super-networker Vala Afshar if he thought any common traits or patterns could be "taught" or encouraged for networking. We discovered that the people we know who are great connectors are hardworking, humble, and quietly confident that connecting the people they introduce will result in something great even if it's not yet clear. Perhaps most important, they understand the power of the ask. For

Too many of us worry that asking will appear self-serving, even if it's not. We fear rejection. We fear looking stupid.

instance, Vala remembers arriving in America at age 10 after escaping the 1979 Iranian Revolution. He didn't know any English, he wasn't blond and blue-eyed, and he wasn't stylishly clad. He also remembers the few kids who overcame their shyness to ask him to play kickball—and how happy he was to be asked.

Too many of us worry that asking will appear self-serving, even if it's not. We fear rejection. We fear looking stupid. Perhaps some of us actually fear hearing a "yes"—what would we do then? It's tempting to say that asking takes courage. But really, think about it—what's the worst that can happen? You'll hear a "no." No one's going to throw you in jail. Let me share a brief story about a couple of normal (well, in their eyes) people and a kid to illustrate the power of the ask.

I first met Vala, then the CMO and CXO at New Hampshire–based Enterasys, on Twitter and reached out to him because his tweets seemed so spot-on to me. We conversed over email and Twitter, sharing stories of our jobs and of eating lobster, which we both love. We met one September on my way up to Maine for my annual vacation. I was greeted at Enterasys's headquarters like a long-lost relative—and was even given an epicurean delight of lobster salad. Needless to say, we really hit it off. I also learned that Enterasys provides network services to companies like the New England Patriots and the Boston Celtics.

Meanwhile, one of my mentees, Sidney Kushner, had been creating CCChampions, an organization that creates connections between professional athletes and children with cancer to provide a source of inspiration and excitement during a very trying time in the children's lives. To date, CCChampions has worked with over 6,000 professional athletes plus health care professionals, child psychologists, local students, and community partners. Sidney's compassion, drive, and entrepreneurial savvy are contagious.

But let's face it: Providence, Rhode Island, where Sidney lives, is not exactly a professional sports powerhouse city. Yet, Boston is nearby! So, sucking up the courage, I ask Vala if he'd talk to Sidney and, if willing, introduce Sidney to the Celtics. What's the worst Vala could say? No. And I'd perhaps look like a fool...but I'm used to that.

Vala says that after about five minutes of talking to Sidney, he wanted to help. Still, since the Celtics were a fairly new client, Vala was a bit nervous about making the ask. Nevertheless, he did, and a 30-minute discussion ensued in which the Celtics offered to honor Sidney as part of their Heroes Among Us program at an upcoming game in a special in-game presentation. Vala says he had goose bumps, and when he told me, I did too. When the Celtics called Sidney, he was speechless—all he could do was text me; he couldn't even talk.

On January 9, 2013, because Sidney was honored on the famous parquet floor of TD Garden, more kids suffering with cancer had an opportunity for joy, inspiration, and valuable distraction from their pain. As parents, both Vala and I can only imagine what this would mean to our children.

Vala and I have gotten great joy from bringing Sidney and the Celtics together—beyond expression—so perhaps it's selfish of us. And in the end, despite feeling awkward at certain moments, we risked very little to help make this happen.

When we don't use the power of the ask, we are essentially saying "no" before the question has even been asked—no to opportunities that change our businesses, our organizations, ourselves...and actual lives. So even if it feels uncomfortable, look for even just a small way you can use the power of the ask in your network—for someone you work for, work with, or manage. Make this your year of the Law of Accelerating Returns.

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ADAM GAULT/GETTY IMAGES

12. The Wrong Way to Introduce People Over Email

→ by DAVID BURKUS

WHEN I WAS young and just starting out in my career, one of the networking principles I followed was the common advice of "introduce two people every week." So every week, I dutifully fired up my computer and typed out an email introduction to two people I thought could benefit from knowing each other.

A few weeks later, after introducing a friend of mine to a fairly well-known author whom I'd collaborated with, I got an email back from the author. His message was short, but it cut to the bone: "Not cool. Please reach out first for permission to share my contact information." Without checking with him first, I'd given this new person permission to contact him whenever and forever.

When it comes to building your network, introductions play an important role. Your direct contacts are a finite number, but the number of people connected to you through others is almost infinite. Moreover, introducing different people in your network to each other helps transform your network from a list of contacts to a thriving community of people interacting and collaborating with one another.

But if you're making introductions in the most common way—the way I used to—you might need to stop.

For many people, the standard introduction happens over email (a medium full of its own flaws). One person will ask you for an introduction to a contact of yours, and you naturally oblige by composing an email addressed to both parties, including contact information and hopefully the context for making the introduction. The email arrives in the inbox of both people, and most likely the person requesting that you make the introduction quickly follows up with a more direct ask of your contact.

But surprise introductions like this are fraught with dangers. If you're doing them, you're running the risk of a few things going wrong:

Time. Unless you're absolutely sure of a person's schedule, your email might arrive in their inbox at a time when they are out of the office. Or it might get lost in their normal deluge of work emails. In either case, it can be some time before the initial email gets a response, and the sudden start and then long pause of the email exchange can make resuming the conversation awkward.

Responsibility. While making a surprise introduction is helpful to the one asking, you're also asking the receiving party to bear a lot of responsibility. They now have to process who this new contact is but also think through what they can offer, then (most likely) look at their schedule to find a time to take the phone call, grab coffee, or whatever other action is being asked. It's simple for you, but difficult for them.

No "out." While the most empathic surprise intros might include an opportunity for the receiving party to decline, it's really not a true out. Should the receiver want to decline your opportunity to meet, they have to do so by either speaking to both parties or replying solely to you (which would make the requestor feel even more awkward when you pass along that they turned down the opportunity to meet).

Instead of taking the risk of surprise introductions, it's better to practice "permission introductions" (also known as "double opt-in introductions"). Simply put, seek permission from both parties through private individual messages first. (To those who already practice permission introductions, this might sound obvious, but everyone seems to practice their own specific brand of email etiquette—which is to say, there is no commonly accepted email behavior. Let's change that, starting with networking.)

When a request for an introduction comes in, explain to the requestors that you'll reach out to your contact, but also use that conversation to get additional information, such as:

- What's the context or backstory behind their request?
- What's the benefit to both parties (if there is one)?
- What action are they going to ask your contact to take?

Smart requestors will usually state these questions up front anyway, but it's a good opportunity to make sure you have everything you need when you reach out to your contact.

When you do ask your contact for permission, make sure you add your own context to that information, such as:

- Is this a trusted friend or a random LinkedIn connection? (If the latter, you probably shouldn't even pass the request along.)
- Is there an opportunity for mutual benefit that you see but both parties may not?
- How will you stay involved in the new relationship?

You'll also want to ask them about their communication preferences and take that opportunity to provide the out.

If you've got a match and both parties are enthusiastic, then you've made both of their jobs easier and the introduction more valuable. You've also expanded everyone's network. And that's pretty cool.

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David Burkus *is an organizational psychologist and best-selling author of four books, including* Leading from Anywhere: The Essential Guide to Managing Remote Teams *(Mariner Books, 2021) and* Friend of a Friend: Understanding the Hidden Networks That Can Transform Your Life and Your Career *(Harper Business, 2018).*

FUSE/GETTY IMAGES

13. How to Say No to Making an Introduction

→ by JODI GLICKMAN

LAST WEEK I wrote about how to make appropriate introductions on behalf of friends and colleagues—a topic that is often challenging. The flip side can be even worse. How do you decline to make an introduction on behalf of someone else without sounding like a jerk?

The truth is, you should never make an introduction you don't feel comfortable making. If you can't vouch for someone's qualifications or aren't confident that the introduction makes sense, than you owe it to all parties not to move forward—it's never a good idea to waste other people's time or your own political capital. If you can't in good conscience move forward with an introduction, here's what you should do instead:

- Be transparent about why you're declining the request.
- Provide a consolation prize.
- Offer to stay in touch and help at a later date.

Last year, I was approached by an acquaintance who asked for an introduction to my literary agent.

If you don't feel comfortable making a connection, the next best thing you can do is provide guidance on what the person should do differently next time around.

Robert was a Manhattan psychologist working on a self-help book. Initially, I agreed and asked Robert to email me an overview of his project.

Unfortunately, Robert's email to me was vague, lazy, and not at all impressive. He hadn't done his homework nor prepared at all for what was an extremely important first email. He didn't sell himself or his proposed project in any compelling way.

I was in a quandary. Though I didn't want to recommend Robert to Todd, I also didn't want to be dismissive or rude. I had several choices. "Forgetting to respond" would be disingenuous and extremely rude. I could lie and tell Robert that his project sounded great, but Todd was no longer accepting introductions. Or I could, as they say, man up and tell Robert the truth: He wasn't ready for an introduction to anyone's literary agent, let alone through me. I went with the following strategy:

1. Be transparent. I decided to be honest. I told Robert that I didn't feel comfortable putting him in touch with Todd. I politely explained that I couldn't recommend him at this time—his proposal simply wasn't fully baked. I knew he wasn't going to have success reaching out to Todd given the amount of work (or lack thereof) he had done. My introduction would have only served to expedite a rejection that would surely follow.

2. Provide a consolation prize. I couldn't give Robert what he wanted, but I could give him something extremely valuable instead—a template of what a great sample introduction email looked like. I had worked long and hard on my introductory email—and there was no reason I couldn't share my email with Robert as an example of what to do.

If you don't feel comfortable making a connection for any reason, the next best thing you can do is provide some advice or guidance on what the person should do differently next time around (with you or with someone else) to make sure the introduction happens.

My introductory email to Todd had included an overview of my project, my target audience, my competitive advantage, key differentiators of my product, and finally, a media and marketing strategy. (It worked by the way. I had several literary agencies interested in working with me!)

Sharing my introductory email to Todd served as a powerful example for Robert of why I declined his request. The difference between his email and mine was striking. Upon receiving it, Robert immediately thanked me for my generosity in sharing the email and acknowledged he had a long road ahead before reaching out to agents. Moreover, it didn't cost me anything in terms of time or energy.

Other consolation prizes might include referrals to other people to help them with their cause (for example, a proofreader or ghost writer for Robert), vendor recommendations ("I don't think Jon will be interested in partnering with you, but I know you're looking for a web developer as well and I have a good recommendation"), or just additional insight you have into the topic ("I'm sorry I can't put you in touch with Susan, but I'm happy to spend some time thinking through next steps with you"). Or, as in the example above, think about what other high-value pieces of information you have lying around your inbox that might help someone else out.

3. Stay in touch. Finally, after tactfully declining Robert's request, I left the door open for future interaction. I offered to review another draft down the road if or when Robert did more work or advanced his cause. I said I'd be happy to revisit the issue once he had his proposal more fleshed out, and I wished him the best of luck.

In the end, I managed to stay true to myself and decline a request I didn't feel right accepting. I also managed to help Robert by giving him something of value even while not giving him what he really wanted. And finally, I did both Todd and Robert a favor—I spared them an awkward exchange that would have no doubt gone nowhere. I effectively gave Robert another shot by providing some guidance and advice instead of making an ill-fated introduction.

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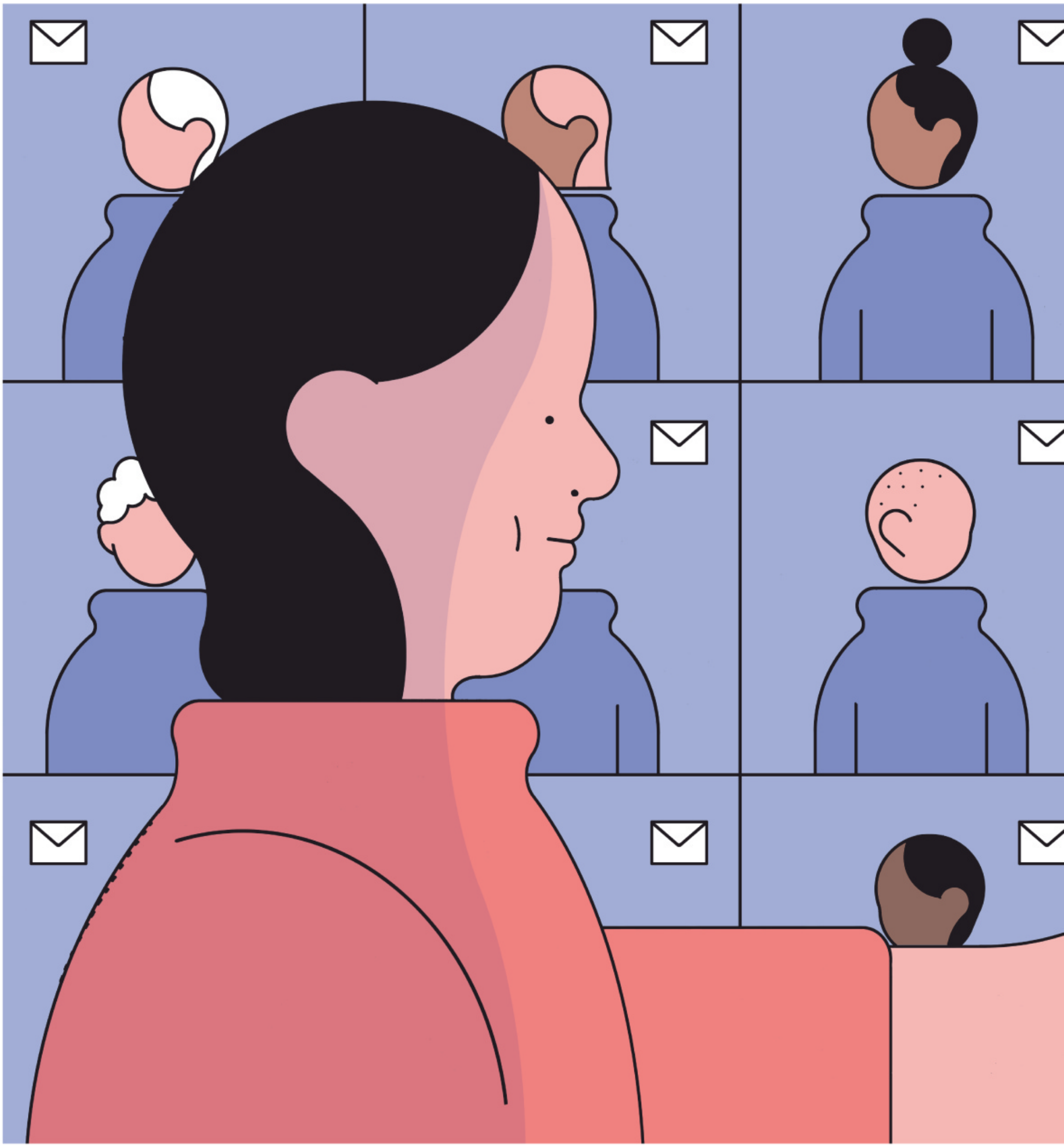

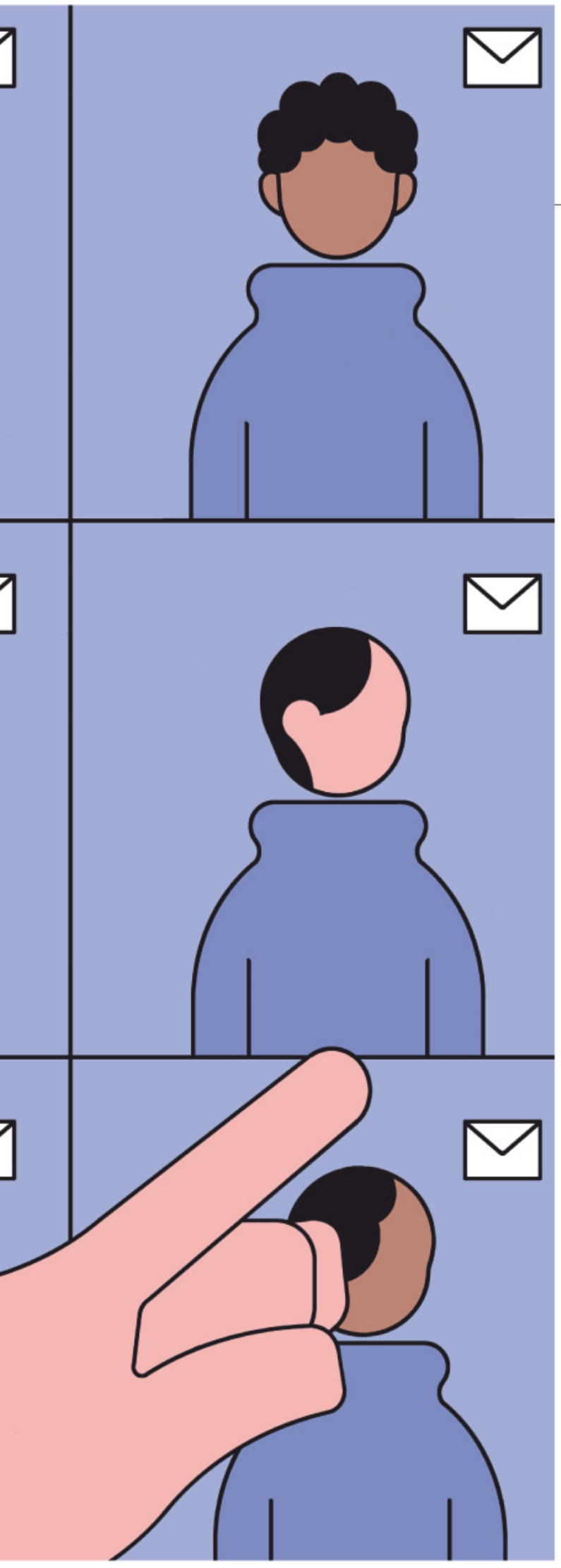

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How to Find a Great Job Using the Strength of Your Weak Ties

Yes, it's possible—with a detailed plan of action.

→ by CLAUDIO FERNÁNDEZ-ARÁOZ

THE LANDMARK RESEARCH on how people find good jobs was conducted in the early 1970s by Mark Granovetter and remains relevant today despite the big changes in roles and recruitment that we've seen since. Studying professional, technical, and managerial job seekers, Granovetter found that most jobs (and especially good ones) were attained not through direct application or other formal means—that is submitting a résumé in response to a listing (which then might have been a print ad but is now online)—but through "personal contacts," who told the applicant about the position or recommended him or her to someone inside the organization.

Illustration by **NADIA HAFID**

Job seekers preferred this approach, noting that they got (and were able to give) better information during the process. Those who secured employment also benefited from higher pay, on average, and were more likely to be "very satisfied" in their roles, some of which, they reported, were even custom-created to suit their skills, knowledge, and experience. Based on more than 30 years of executive search experience, I'm convinced that most employers also prefer to work this way.

It's critical to understand which of your personal contacts are the most useful though. Granovetter also found that you're more likely to find jobs through personal contacts who are *not* too close to you, speak to you infrequently, and work in occupations different from your own. He captured this notion in a wonderful expression—"the strength of weak ties"—and many other researchers have since confirmed that diverse personal networks are the best way to find a new job. These acquaintances might come from your neighborhood, college, high school, fraternal organizations, or sports, recreational, or hobby groups; they might even be people you met once on vacation. In my view, activating these connections is the *only* job-seeking strategy that will allow you to secure a *great* position in truly tough times, though you must go about it in a disciplined way. Here's how.

Creating Your Contact List

During my first 20 years as a search consultant, I tried to find time each day to help one person who was either without a job or keen for a new one. This made for some 4,000 meetings with job seekers, many of which I conducted in Argentina, as its economy was in deep turmoil. In 2001, for example, it suffered the largest sovereign debt default in world history, and annualized GDP fell by 30% coupled with a 300% currency devaluation. My advice during those daunting days: Come up with a list of 100 (yes, *one hundred!*) weak ties without making any contact. The rationale? First, simple statistics: The probability of any one person leading you to the perfect job will be very low, so you have to tap many to improve your odds. Second and even more important: Because of the "weak" nature of these contacts, it won't be immediately obvious who can be most helpful. When you work to expand the list, you add quite unexpected people, including some truly great ones. Natural candidates for your weak-ties list include consultants, lawyers, auditors, suppliers, clients, as well as former bosses, colleagues, and professors, and so on. Some will be potential employers; others, sources. Look for ties in sectors that are likely to be stronger than most in the coming years and in which you would really like to work.

Next, rank everyone you've listed based on two factors: the attractiveness of the possibilities they can offer (given their company, role, and connections) and their willingness to help you (which depends on the quality of your relationship, even if it was limited or distant).

Making Connections

You might assume that I would tell you to first contact the person at the very top of the list. But I won't. Instead, start with number 10 or so. You will be nervous, tight, even shy at the beginning, and you will make mistakes. So gain confidence with a few lower-stakes conversations, and then start contacting your most promising targets. Make sure to rapidly cover the top 30 or so, ideally within a period of no more than a week or two. (If you're lucky enough to find more than one job possibility, it would be ideal to consider all of them at once.)

Of course, each conversation will be different depending on the person, opportunity, and previous relationship. But, with everyone, be candid about your reason for calling, the type of role you're looking for, and what you have to offer. People who have had a positive experience working with you will most likely want to help you, but they can't if they are unaware of or unclear on your need and aspirations.

Closing the List

In deciding when to end this process, you can make two types of mistakes: If you contact too few ties, you might not find any opportunities. If you contact too many, you might waste precious time on less attractive possibilities that will prevent you from properly focusing on the best ones. The key is to stop the calls when you have enough leads to give you a significant chance of landing a job. Consider, for example, that, as a result of your disciplined list-making and contact process, you are down to three potential employers. You estimate you have a 50% shot at getting the first job, 40% for the second, and 30% for the third. The probability of getting at least one offer can be

Gain confidence with a few lower-stakes conversations, and then start contacting your most promising targets.

easily calculated as one minus the product of the complementary probabilities, or 1 – (.5 x .6 x .7) = 79%. If you'd prefer to be 90% certain of getting a job, you'll need to keep calling prospects.

How do you go about estimating these probabilities? Simply use your judgment. If you were one out of three finalists in a search, your chances of landing that job would be one-third, or 33%. On the other hand, some leads might be so weak that only one out of 50 would turn into an offer, a probability of 2%. You should not eliminate these cases at this stage, though! If you contact 100 prospects with a 2% individual chance, the probability of getting at least one offer comes out at 87%, since 1 – .98100 = 87%.

Make your best estimate in each case, and don't worry too much about precision at this stage. Once you start getting answers (or not) from each of your contacts, these probabilities will start moving up (when there's mutual interest) or down. In the end most of them will turn to zero, while just a few will become significant. I've developed a downloadable support tool to help you track this.[1]

Managing Leads

At this point, you will hopefully have several leads. To keep all those balls in the air, even as you reach out to more of your targets, you'll need to proactively follow up on every promising conversation, including contacting new people that your weak ties have recommended you try. This can feel daunting! But, again, the support tool can help. It is a fully automated Excel spreadsheet, which includes a series of intuitive macro commands to easily sort leads by name, status (sources or potential employers), company, pending actions and deadlines, probability of receiving an offer, and priority. It will also automatically calculate the compounded probability of getting at least one offer so that you can more objectively decide when to move from lead generation to closure.

Sealing the Deal

As you talk to potential employers, you'll of course want to follow all standard job-seeking advice. Before you share your résumé, make sure you have updated it and that it stands out. When interviewing—which at this stage is likely to happen virtually—refresh yourself on best practices. Be able to answer open-ended prompts or behavioral prompts like, "Tell me about yourself" or "Tell me about a time when you overcame conflict/led a large team/had to collaborate across silos/managed a change initiative." Prepare and practice, including finding a quiet room with good lighting, and keep in mind the special challenges of virtual interviewing.

Remember to think carefully about your own priorities, preferences, and broader purpose and match them up against all the opportunities. Keep updating the spreadsheet with probabilities and new to-dos as the discussions progress. For your top priorities, create a strong list of references and let those people know that employers might be calling about you. Research

Idea in Brief

THE RESEARCH
Classic research conducted decades ago still holds true today: The best chance of landing a good job is by tapping personal contacts. The most valuable contacts, it turns out, are the ones who aren't too close to you, speak to you infrequently, and work in occupations different from your own—so-called "weak ties."

THE PROCESS
Choose 100 weak ties, and then rank them according to the attractiveness of their possible offers and the quality of your relationship. Begin by connecting with those who fall lower on the list to give you practice. End the process when you have a good chance of landing a job with the leads you have (the author offers an Excel support tool for estimating probabilities). Due diligence on your part is also required: a refresher on best interview practices, for one.

THE RESULTS
This method of narrowing your search to land a great job has helped thousands of job seekers, independent of market conditions.

Job search tool 1

P (AT LEAST 1 OFFER) = 55%

SORT	SORT	SORT	SORT			SORT	SORT	SORT	SORT
35		0	0	35	0	0	35	0	35
NAME	PRIORITY	NEXT ACTION	DEADLINE	CONTACT	INTERVIEW	SOURCE	COMPANY	EMPLOYER	(P) OFFER
Jones, Peter				1-Feb-21			eRetail startup		10%
Camar, Joao				1-Feb-21			College		5%
Hubler, Eric				1-Feb-21			Former client		5%
Westley, Casey				1-Feb-21			Consulting firm		5%
Gunningham, John				1-Feb-21			Consulting firm		2%
Miles, Fiona				**1-Feb-21**			**College**		**2%**
O'Brian, Caroline				1-Feb-21			Consulting firm		2%
Other				1-Feb-21			College		2%

Job search tool 2

P (AT LEAST 1 OFFER) = 93%

SORT	SORT	SORT	SORT			SORT	SORT	SORT	SORT
35		8	8	35	3	0	35	10	35
NAME	PRIORITY	NEXT ACTION	DEADLINE	CONTACT	INTERVIEW	SOURCE	COMPANY	EMPLOYER	(P) OFFER
Jones, Peter	4	Discussion pay	25-Feb-21	1-Feb-21	15-Feb-21		eRetail startup	1	40%
Smith, Brenda	3	Final interview	1-Mar-21	1-Feb-21	24-Feb-21		Consulting firm	1	35%
Rodriguex, Pablo	1	Deep discussion	5-Mar-21	5-Feb-21	18-Feb-21		College	1	30%
Hubler, Eric	4	Discussion	5-Mar-21	1-Feb-21			Former client	1	25%
Camara, Joao	5	Check location	10-Mar-21	1-Feb-21			College	1	20%
Shakespeare, Joanna	**3**	**Check business**	**15-Mar-21**	**1-Feb-21**			**Former client**	**1**	**10%**
Robbins, Sarah	2	Meet partners	1-Mar-21	1-Feb-21			College	1	10%
Westly, Casey	2	Deep Zoom call	20-Mar-21	1-Feb-21			Consulting firm	1	5%

Job search tool 3

P (AT LEAST 1 OFFER) = 93%

SORT	SORT	SORT	SORT			SORT	SORT	SORT	SORT
35		8	8	35	3	0	35	10	35
NAME	PRIORITY	NEXT ACTION	DEADLINE	CONTACT	INTERVIEW	SOURCE	COMPANY	EMPLOYER	(P) OFFER
Rodriguex, Pablo	1	Deep discussion	5-Mar-21	5-Feb-21	18-Feb-21		College	1	30%
Robbin, Sarah	2	Meet partners	1-Mar-21	1-Feb-21			College	1	10%
Westly, Casey	2	Deep Zoom call	20-Mar-21	1-Feb-21			Consulting firm	1	5%
Smith, Brenda	3	Final interview	1-Mar-21	1-Feb-21	24-Feb-21		Consulting firm	1	35%
Shakespeare, Joanna	3	Check business	15-Mar-21	1-Feb-21			College	1	10%
Jones, Peter	**4**	**Discuss pay**	**25-Feb-21**	**1-Feb-21**	**15-Feb-21**		**eRetail startup**	**1**	**40%**
Hubler, Eric	4	Discussion	5-Mar-21	1-Feb-21			Former client	1	25%
Camara, Joao	5	Check location	10-Mar-21	1-Feb-21			College	1	20%

the organization and its target markets. And, as venture capitalist Jeff Bussgang advises, come bearing gifts, such as proposals or project help, that show your commitment and work product.

A Composite Case Study

Let's consider the case of Juana, a character I've drawn from several professionals with whom I've worked. Born in the United States to working-class parents who emigrated from Mexico, she got her first job while in high school, working at a well-known fast-food franchise. By 19, she was the manager of a restaurant and pursuing her bachelor's

Match your own priorities, preferences, and broader purpose up against all the opportunities.

degree in accounting. After graduation, she joined a Big Three consulting firm, earned her CPA, and rapidly advanced from analyst to manager in a few years. In November 2019, she accepted an offer from one of her clients, a global hotel chain, to join the company and lead its global HR analytics projects. Then the Covid-19 crisis hit. Eventually, Juana's project was canceled, and, on January 25, 2021, she was laid off. As a mother to two little girls, sharing responsibility for a mortgage and aging parents with her husband, she needed a new job. She spent the next week compiling a list of contacts. On February 1, she sent 20 emails to the most obvious sources and potential employers: a few managers and colleagues from the consulting firm, some former professors, an uncle, and several college classmates. She estimated that her probability of getting an offer from each ranged from 10% for her most recent boss at the consulting firm to 2% for most of the contacts. As can be seen in Job search tool 1 on the previous page, the compounded probability of getting at least one offer from this first group was just 55%.

So, on February 5, Juana emailed 15 more people on her list, including several former bosses from the fast-food franchise, all her former clients at the consulting firm, and a few additional personal connections. This included one to Pablo Rodríguez, a former HR leader for Latin America at the fast-food company, whom she had met just once at the company's worldwide convention when she won an award for best restaurant managers. While Juana received no response from most of the contacts she emailed, a dozen replied, including a former manager who was interested in her joining his electronic retail startup (to which she assigned a 40% probability of getting an offer), another manager interested in bringing her back (35% chance), and three other significant leads.

In Job search tool 2 you can see what Juana's process spreadsheet looked like by February 12.

Having reached a compounded probability of 93% of getting a job, Juana decided it was time to move from lead generation to closure. In Job search tool 3 you can see that she sorted the opportunities by priority rather than probability.

The job she thought she'd be most likely to get, a role at the electronic retail startup, was attractive because of her experience working with its founder and its potential financial upside; however, it would be a risky venture, with long and demanding hours. A job at her former consulting firm was second-most likely to come to fruition. She liked the company and her colleagues, but its policy was to put her back into her previous role at the same pay, and she wasn't sure she wanted to return to consulting work.

At the top of her ranking, surprisingly, was an alternative generated by Pablo Rodríguez, who had left the fast-food chain a few years earlier to join a 15-year-old rapidly expanding foundation with the purpose of helping poor, young high school graduates from Latin America prepare for, access, and persevere in quality jobs. He thought Juana could help him lead a digital transformation that would allow the organization to access a much larger population at a fraction of the cost, including to the U.S. Latino population. The role would pay less than the others but would allow her to work from home, reconnect with her roots, and give back to the Latin American community.

Confirming her strong interest in that job, Juana had several Zoom discussions with Pablo and the foundation's CEO and founder, did her own research on the needs of the young poor in Latin America and the U.S. Latino population, and prepared a detailed digital transformation plan. Her final interview was on February 18, and she nailed it. Three weeks after losing her job, she had a new one she could not feel more passionate about.

IF YOU FOLLOW the process above it is not only possible but highly likely you will find a great job suited to your talents, purpose, and ambitions. It has helped the thousands of people I've advised through good times and bad, and I sincerely hope it also works beautifully for you!

HBR Reprint H05OA4

1. You can download the support tool at https://hbr.org/jobsearchtool.

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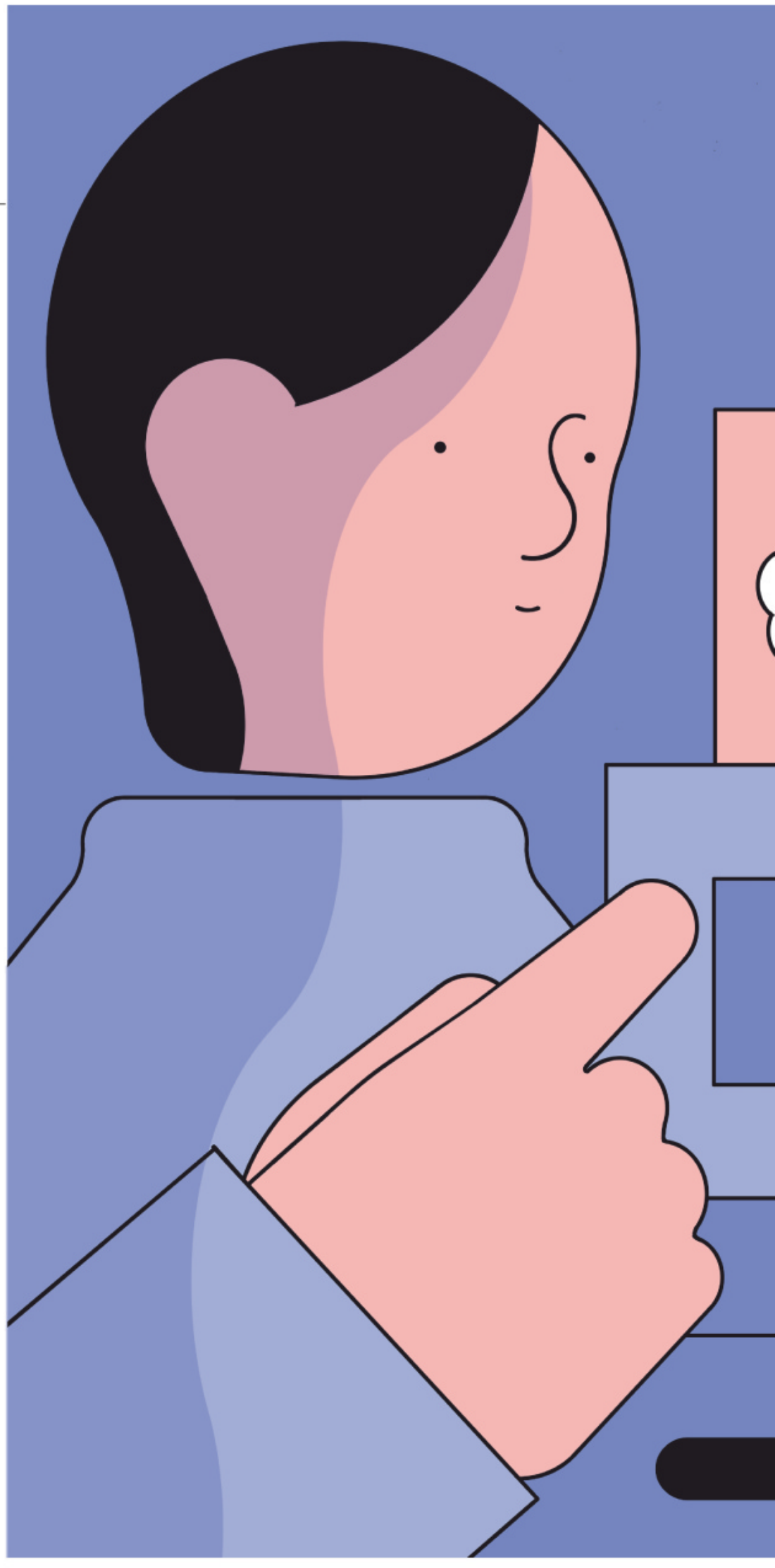

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A Five-Week Guide to Getting a Job

Your competition has increased, but so have your opportunities.

→ by ISAIAH HANKEL

THERE'S NO OTHER way to put it: Finding a job during the Covid-19 pandemic is hard. If you are looking to land a new role, your success depends largely on hiring trends and the economy, both of which are working against you right now. Hiring fell to a seven-year low last fall.

While the economic downturn has tilted the market in favor of employers, many companies are financially strained and lack the resources to survive another lockdown. Nearly 100,000 small businesses have permanently closed since the pandemic began. Together, these factors amount to increased competition for scarce positions and extreme stress for job candidates.

As a job seeker, you may feel powerless right now, but rest assured, this is not entirely true. Yes, your competition has increased, but so have your opportunities. Remote work has expanded talent pools and fostered more diversity in hiring. Before the pandemic, the majority of recruiters were limited to candidates located in their cities. Today, virtual work

Illustration by **NADIA HAFID**

environments have freed up companies to search for talent regardless of location.

Now is the time to embrace these opportunities and form a strategic approach to your application process. Even though you can't control the ebb and flow of the market, you can still make yourself a marketable candidate.

Through my work as the CEO and founder of Cheeky Scientist, a job search training platform for people with PhDs, I have developed a five-week strategy to fast-track the job search—and anyone, at any stage of their career, can use it.

Before you even begin to look, you need to know your odds. Companies hiring top talent often spend the first few months of every year focused on corporate strategy instead of recruitment, which will typically hinder your job search between January and March. After this initial rough patch, the market hits peaks and valleys based on the state of the economy, which explains the increase in unemployment during the pandemic.

Hiring trends, however, tend to surge upward again at the end of the year, between October and December, because companies want to devote any leftover budget to new talent.

The traditional "dead zone" of January through March will likely be exaggerated in 2021 as large companies recover from the effects of Covid-19, so don't be disheartened if you fail to land a job before April. Summer may be the best time to actively search for and interact with potential employers before the September through December hiring surge.

Now, let's begin.

WEEK 1

Update your résumé to highlight transferable job skills.

People talk about the importance of having "transferable skills" on your résumé all the time, but what do they really mean?

Transferable skills are all the things you're good at that can be applied to various roles in various industries. For example, strong writing, time management, and problem-solving are all examples of what would be considered "transferable skills." The fancier definition of this term is "an ability that isn't highly specialized." Nontransferable skills, often called "hard skills," are specific to certain industries, like coding, animation, or graphic design.

You might have been told to tailor your résumé for each role you apply for, but from what I've seen, that strategy won't work in 2021. Many companies are nervous about hiring more-specialized candidates because they're unsure what the business landscape will look like after the pandemic. To show you are adaptable, generalize the skills on your résumé into three main areas: systems-oriented, people-oriented, and self-oriented.

Systems-oriented skills are associated with your areas of expertise. Under each role listed on your résumé, try to phrase these skills in a practical way to show how they can apply to a variety of positions and industries, not just your specified field. For example, suppose you worked as a content creator at a software company. In that case, highlight "business writing" on your résumé and specify what you mean by including more-distinct tasks—like creating blog posts or writing marketing emails—under your role. Doing so will help prove that you can apply this skill to any job rather than just at a software company.

People-oriented skills highlight your ability to communicate with colleagues. Right now, companies value candidates who can collaborate remotely and have the potential to lead virtual teams. On your résumé, be sure to include keywords like "performance management," "virtual training," and "task delegation," either under a particular role or as a separate "skills" section at the bottom of your résumé, to demonstrate your ability to collaborate and lead.

Self-oriented skills tell your potential employer that you can work diligently, learn quickly, and apply new solutions to existing problems, like the ones caused by the shift to remote work (decreasing productivity, burnout, and so forth). You might think of these as "soft skills," but they are in demand and will help you stand out as companies continue to decentralize their workforces. Words like "autonomy," "time management," and "self-starter" show employers you can stay on task, remotely or otherwise.

If you have been using a chronological résumé but are struggling to get responses from employers, or if you are trying to enter an industry you have no previous experience in, mix things up by showcasing your transferable skills first—even before your job titles. Use them as headers under the experience section on your résumé. For instance,

The narrative behind your career path is critical when you're trying to stand out in an employer's market.

sticking with the content creator example, you might put:

Business Writing
Content Creator at [Company]
- *Bullet point about your specific responsibilities.*
- *Bullet point about your successes, including metrics.*

According to our data, listing transferable skills before your experiences can lead to better callback outcomes. When candidates failed to get a response with a chronological résumé, we found that this more functional format was effective 21% of the time. Meanwhile, combination résumé formats (combining a functional skills list with chronological work experiences) and sidebar résumé formats (focusing on scannability) were effective only 3% and 2% of the time, respectively.

Many employers will read only the bolded portions of your work experience section before contacting you, so highlight your transferable skills accordingly.

WEEK 2

Improve your personal brand on LinkedIn and make your profile visible.

The narrative behind your career path is critical when you're trying to stand out in an employer's market. Companies want to know where you've been, what you've learned, and how it has shaped you as a professional. This will help them understand your value even before you land an interview.

Make sure hiring managers see your LinkedIn profile by using keywords to land more search results. Just like you use Google to find specific information, hiring managers use LinkedIn to search for candidates. To start, copy the descriptions of 10 similar jobs that interest you and paste them into a word cloud. The most common words are the ones you should incorporate into the various sections on your profile.

You'll also want to include your desired job location (even if you're targeting remote positions) to catch the attention of recruiters who are searching for candidates using location-based keywords.

In addition, you should upload a professional—but friendly—picture and consider personalizing your banner photo. Profiles with a photo receive 21 times more profile views and nine times more connection requests than those without them. Banners should follow a cohesive color scheme and shouldn't be too complex or busy. If you want to make your banner really pop, list three to five keywords or transferable skills at the top of your image.

You can also grab an employer's attention by engaging with your network. Think of LinkedIn as a way to show off your expertise. Attract more people to your page by liking and commenting on posts related to trends in your industry, publishing text-only posts (which receive 42 times more views), sharing original articles, and regularly searching for connections. Increasing your activity on LinkedIn is a fast way to elevate your Social Selling Index (LinkedIn's metric for success in terms of your personal brand), which helps increase your visibility to employers.

Idea in Brief

CHALLENGING TIMES
Covid-19 is just one of a number of factors responsible for an economic downturn that has made finding a job more difficult. At the same time, the rise of remote work has changed the traditional job-search process—and created new possibilities.

THE OPPORTUNITY
The author's five-week guide for job seekers covers updating your resume and LinkedIn profile to highlight transferable skills; setting up and conducting informal interviews with potential co-workers, starting with your existing network and then tapping into your connections for job search referrals; and preparing for virtual job interviews.

THE PAYOFF
With a strategic, time-based approach to the job seeking process centered around leveraging valuable connections, you'll be able to land that next job, whatever the next economic cycle may bring.

WEEK 3

Conduct informational interviews with potential coworkers.

An informational interview is a conversation you can have with another professional to learn more about their career, company, or industry. Unlike a job interview, the goal isn't to get hired; you're trying to educate yourself. In your job search, this type of interview serves two purposes:

1. It allows you to gather intel on companies that are hiring.
2. It helps you form connections with employees at those companies.

Through those connections, you can learn about open positions before they're advertised. You might even gain referrals to roles you're interested in pursuing.

A great way to start is by reaching out to your existing network. Talk to school alumni, LinkedIn contacts, family members, and friends who might work at or know someone employed by an organization you're interested in. These conversations might land you an informational interview, or they might guide you toward other potential opportunities (like a company or position you hadn't considered before).

If you have your heart set on a certain organization, another option is to use LinkedIn to connect with someone who works there. It's best to choose someone who holds a position similar to or cross-functional to the one you're seeking. The goal is to find someone who can credibly answer the questions you have.

When you reach out, show them that you are a valuable contact by first offering to connect them with someone who could benefit them, professionally or personally (if you can). Keep your request concise and be specific about the topic you would like to discuss and the time commitment you're seeking:

Hello! I noticed your team is looking to learn more about [topic or service]. I deeply admire your organization's work around [mission], so I wanted to reach out and let you know I have a connection to [person], who may be a valuable contact. I don't want to take up too much of your time, but I'd love to jump on a 10-minute phone call to provide you with their information and talk about your company. I'm a big fan of [cite their work] and would love to learn more about [their role]. Are you by chance available to chat in the next couple of weeks.

If you don't have a contact to offer up, then it's best to be up-front about your intentions. Begin your message by saying something specific about their organization—or even better, their personal work—and then go in with your request:

Hello! I saw the recent post you shared on [topic], and I really appreciated your commentary about [cite their work]. I noticed you work in [industry or company], which is an area I'm really passionate about. I was wondering whether you might have time for an informational interview in the next couple of weeks. I'd love to learn more about the work you do and how you got to where you are.

Once the call is scheduled, come prepared with a few questions, and try to keep the tone of the conversation casual. The nice thing about informational interviews is that they are low stakes for both parties. So, while you should be professional, don't treat the process too formally.

Whomever you end up speaking with, be sure to end the call by sincerely thanking them for the meeting:

I just wanted to let you know that I really appreciate the time you spent talking to me about [company]. I learned a lot about [topic]. Please let me know if there's anything else you'd like to talk about that I may be familiar with or if I can connect you to someone professionally.

Depending on how things go, you might also ask whether there is anyone else they might suggest you contact to learn more. Having this conversation will show that you care enough about a position enough to reach out before the application process, which already places you ahead of more-passive candidates.

WEEK 4

Ask for job search referrals from your connections.

If you made any good connections during your informational interviews in week three, ask your contact for a referral before you apply to the role at their organization. This is important because getting a job search referral shows potential employers that another person is confident in your skills, and it's usually a guarantee that your application will be seriously considered—which increases

It's best to follow up with your contact no sooner than one week after your informational interview to avoid bombarding them.

your odds of getting called in for an interview. It's best to follow up with your contact no sooner than one week after your informational interview to avoid bombarding them.

Glassdoor recommends being honest from the start about your goals while providing your contact with ideas for how they can assist you in your professional job search:

Thank you again for talking with me about [company]. Learning about [topic] during our conversation made me realize how much I'd like to work for your company. I'm interested in applying for the position of [title and link to job description], and I wanted to ask whether you could refer me or if you'd be willing to pass my résumé on to the hiring manager.

As *The New York Times* notes, the pandemic has become the great equalizer in today's economy. Job candidates are no longer selected based on location or attendance at live networking events. If you have references who can speak to your experience and abilities, you'll go further than candidates who don't.

WEEK 5

Prepare for your virtual job interview.

Before your interview, conduct plenty of research so that you are up-to-date on recent news surrounding the company you're applying to as well as trends happening in your industry. You can usually find these updates on their website and social media channels, or by setting Google alerts for the company's name and key players. This step is especially important if time has elapsed since you originally applied.

I'd also recommend looking into the person who will be interviewing you, provided you're able to gather that information from your recruiter beforehand. Check out their LinkedIn and Twitter profiles to learn more about their career path and interests.

With the information you gather, craft a few questions catered to the company, the work they do, or projects they've launched that catch your interest. You should also come up with a few questions specifically about your interviewer and their work. This will immediately set you apart from other candidates by showing your genuine passion and curiosity for them and their organization.

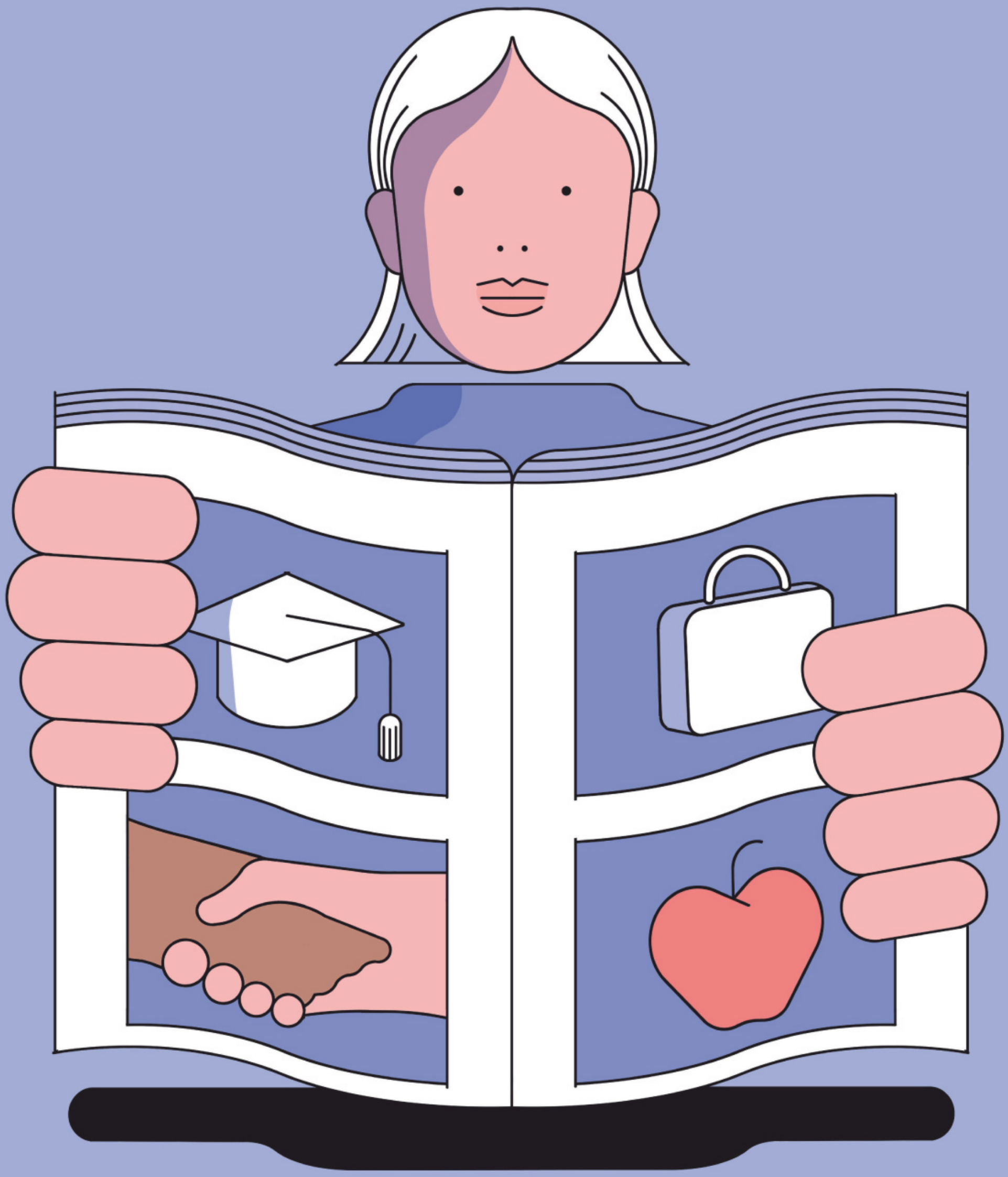
In terms of what you will be asked, know that many employers are concerned about work-life balance in the remote work era. That said, I can almost guarantee queries like "How do you stay productive?" and "What's your daily routine?" will come up. Prepare your answer beforehand to showcase your ability to prioritize tasks and manage time.

Lastly, when it comes to your physical presence, know that you will most likely be interviewing remotely as well. The most common virtual interview tips include downloading the right technology (Zoom, WebEx, Microsoft Teams), having an appropriate environment (go with a plain background), lighting yourself from the front to avoid appearing like a shadow figure (use a ring light), and making eye contact to appear confident (look into the webcam). To this list, I'd add two things:

1. Dress in neutral colors on top and go with a business-casual outfit, even if the company culture seems casual. Your effort will show the interviewer that you're serious about the hiring process.
2. Make it a point to show that you are engaged in the conversation by nodding, raising your brow, saying "yes" in agreement when the other person is talking, and using hand gestures to emphasize important points. Enthusiasm is difficult to communicate on video, so you'll need to make an extra effort.

The sooner you can follow these steps and get started on your search, the better off you'll be in the long run. It's time to take your career to the next level by following this five-week job application timeline.

Isaiah Hankel, *founder and CEO of* Cheeky Scientist, *helps people with PhDs transition into meaningful, high-paying industry careers. Isaiah is also a PhD and an internationally recognized Global 500 consultant.*



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What's Your Story?

All of us construct narratives about ourselves—where we've come from, where we're going. The kinds of stories we tell make an enormous difference in how well we cope with change.

→ by HERMINIA IBARRA and KENT LINEBACK

AT A RECENT networking event, senior managers who'd been downsized out of high-paying corporate jobs took turns telling what they had done before and what they were looking for next. Person after person stood up and recounted a laundry list of credentials and jobs, in chronological order. Many felt compelled to begin with their first job, some even with their place of birth. The accounting was meticulous.

Most people spent their allotted two minutes (and lost the attention of those around them) before they even reached the punch line—the description of what they were seeking. Those who did leave time to wrap up tended merely to list the four or five (disparate) things they might be interested in pursuing next. In the feedback sessions that followed each round of presentations, these "fact tellers" were hard to help. The people listening couldn't readily understand how their knowledge and contacts might bear upon the teller's situation. Even worse, they didn't feel compelled to try very hard.

In our research and coaching on career reorientation, we've witnessed many people struggling to explain what they want to do next and why a change makes sense. One of us, in the context of writing a book, has studied a wide variety of major career shifts; the other has worked extensively with organizations and individuals on the use of narrative to bring about positive change. Each of us has been to enough networking events to know that the one we've described here is not unusual. But we've also seen a lot of people in the midst of significant transitions make effective use of contacts and successfully enlist supporters. What we've come to understand is that one factor more than any other makes the difference: the ability to craft a good story.

Why You Need a Story

All of us tell stories about ourselves. Stories define us. To know someone well is to know her story—the experiences that have shaped her, the trials and turning points that have tested her. When we want someone to know us, we share stories of our childhoods, our families, our school years, our first loves, the development of our political views, and so on.

Seldom is a good story so needed, though, as when a major change of professional direction is under way—when we are leaving A without yet having left it and moving toward B without yet having gotten there. In a time of such unsettling transition, telling a compelling story to coworkers, bosses, friends, or family—or strangers in a conference room—inspires belief in our motives, character, and capacity to reach the goals we've set.

Let's be clear: In urging the use of effective narrative, we're not opening the door to tall tales. By "story" we don't mean "something made up to make a bad situation look good." Rather, we're talking about accounts that are deeply true and so engaging that listeners feel they have a stake in our success. This dynamic was lacking in the event described above. Without a story, there was no context to render career facts meaningful, no promise of a third act in which achieving a goal (getting a job, for instance) would resolve the drama.

Illustration by **NADIA HAFID**

Creating and telling a story that resonates also helps us believe in ourselves. Most of us experience the transition to a new working life as a time of confusion, loss, insecurity, and uncertainty. We are scared. "Will I look back one day and think this was the best thing that ever happened?" we ask ourselves. "Or will I realize that this was the beginning of the end, that it was all downhill from here?" We oscillate between holding on to the past and embracing the future. Why? We have lost the narrative thread of our professional life. Without a compelling story that lends meaning, unity, and purpose to our lives, we feel lost and rudderless. We need a good story to reassure us that our plans make sense—that, in moving on, we are not discarding everything we have worked so hard to accomplish and selfishly putting family and livelihood at risk. It will give us motivation and help us endure frustration, suffering, and hard work.

A good story, then, is essential for making a successful transition. Yet most of us—like those at the networking event—fail to use the power of storytelling in pursuit of our cause. Or, when we do craft a story, we do it badly.

In part, this may be because many of us have forgotten how to tell stories. But even the best storytellers find tales of transition challenging, with their built-in problems and tensions. Not knowing how to resolve these conflicts, we retreat to telling "just the facts."

Your Story Has Inherent Drama

At first glance, it's not obvious why stories of transition should present any problems at all. Almost by definition, they contain the stuff of good narrative. (See the sidebar "Key Elements of a Classic Story.") The protagonist is you, of course, and what's at stake is your career. Only love, life, and death could be more important. And transition is always about a world that's changed. You've been let go, or you've somehow decided your life doesn't work anymore. Perhaps you've reached an event or insight that represents a point of no return—one that marks the end of the second act, a period of frustration and struggle. In the end, if all goes well, you resolve the tension and uncertainty and embark on a new chapter in your life or career.

Not only do transition stories have all the elements of a classic tale, but they have the most important ones in spades. Notice what moves a story along. It's change, conflict, tension, discontinuity. What hooks us in a movie or novel is the turning point, the break with the past, the fact that the world has changed in some intriguing and fascinating way that will force the protagonist to discover and reveal who he truly is. If those elements are missing, the story will be flat. It will lack what novelist John Gardner called profluence of development—the sense of moving forward, of going somewhere. Transition stories don't have this problem.

Think, for example, of the biblical story of Saint Paul's conversion. In his zeal for Jewish law, Saul had become a violent persecutor of Christians. On the road to Damascus, as the story is told in the New Testament, he was surrounded by light and struck to the ground. A voice from heaven addressed him: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" He was unable to see; after he changed his mind about Christians, he saw the light, literally. And thus, Saul became Paul, one of the principal architects of Christianity.

What could be more dramatic? Like the Saul-to-Paul saga, most after-the-fact accounts of career change include striking jolts and triggers: palpable moments when things click into place and a desirable option materializes. The scales fall from our eyes, and the right course becomes obvious—or taking the leap suddenly looks easy.

Here's how that turning point took shape for one manager, a 46-year-old information technologist named Lucy Hartman (names in the examples throughout this article have been changed). Lucy was seemingly on a course toward executive management, either at her current company or at a start-up. Being coached, however, revealed to her an attractive alternative. She began to wonder about a future as an organizational-development consultant, but she wasn't quite ready to make that change. She did move to a smaller company, where she felt she could apply everything she had learned in coaching. "By this time, it was clear that I wanted to move on to something different," she said. "But I needed to build more confidence before taking a bigger chance on reinventing myself. So I decided to stay in the high-tech environment, which I knew well, but also to go back to school. I started a master's program in organizational development, thinking it would at least make me a better leader and hoping it would be the impetus for a real makeover." Still, Lucy agonized

Turning points are more obvious in the telling than in the living.

for months over whether to focus exclusively on school, convinced that it wasn't sane to quit a job without having another one lined up.

Three incidents in quick succession made up her mind. First, she attended a conference on organizational change where she heard industry gurus speak and met other people working in the field. She decided this was clearly the community she wanted to be a part of. Second, her firm went through an acquisition, and the restructuring meant a new position for her, one fraught with political jockeying. Third, as she tells it: "One day my husband just asked me, 'Are you happy?' He said, 'If you are, that's great. But you don't look happy. When I ask how you are, all you ever say is that you're tired.'" His question prompted her to quit her job and work full-time on her master's.

Lucy's story illustrates the importance of turning points. We need them to convince ourselves that our story makes sense, and listeners like them because they spin stories off in exciting new directions. They make listeners lean forward and ask the one question every effective story must elicit: "What happened next?"

The Challenge of the Transition Story

Let's return to that networking event and all the drab stories (actually, non-stories) people told. If transition stories, with their drama and discontinuity, lend themselves so well to vivid telling, why did so many people merely recount the basic facts of their careers and avoid the exciting turning points? Why did most of them try to frame the changes in their lives as incremental, logical extensions of what they were doing before? Why did they fail to play up the narrative twists and turns?

To begin with, it's because they were attempting to tell the story while they were still in the middle of the second act. Look back over Lucy's story, and you'll realize that the turning points she described were not very different from incidents all of us experience daily. They assumed great significance for Lucy only because she made them do so. For most of us, turning points are like Lucy's rather than Saul's; they tend to be much more obvious in the telling than in the living. We must learn to use them to propel our stories forward.

Additionally, stories of transition present a challenge because telling them well involves baring some emotion. You have to let the listener know that something is at stake for you personally. When you're in a job interview or when you are speaking to relative strangers, that is difficult to do.

Another issue that makes life stories (particularly ones about discontinuity) problematic: Not only does a good story require us to trust the listener, but it must also inspire the listener to trust us. A story about life discontinuity raises red flags about the teller's capabilities, dependability, and predictability. Listeners wonder, "Why should I believe you can excel in a new arena when you don't have a track record to point to?" And on a deeper level, even greater suspicions lurk: "Why should I trust that you won't change your mind about this? You changed your mind before, didn't you?"

Idea in Brief

The ability to craft a good story makes all the difference during a significant transition. Offering a dry litany of past experiences and vague hopes for the future won't drum up support for your career change.

What you need is a compelling story that candidly illustrates how you got to be who you are, including turning points, and makes listeners care about your success. To elicit trust, your story should provide a sense of continuity, emphasizing that the person you were yesterday is the same person you are today and will be tomorrow.

By sharing your story with family, friends, and coworkers, you can clarify the meaning and purpose of your life while encouraging others to help you transition effectively.

To tell a life story that emphasizes such juicy elements as transformation and discontinuity is to invite questions about who we are and whether we can be trusted. No one wants to hire somebody who's likely to fly off in an unexpected direction every six months. So we downplay the very things that might make our stories compelling. To earn the listener's trust, we make ourselves appear safe—and dull and unremarkable.

Is there a way to tell a lively story *and* inspire others' confidence? Yes, but it requires a deep understanding of what really makes people believe in what we're saying.

Key Elements of a Classic Story

All great stories, from *Antigone* to *Casablanca* to *Star Wars,* derive their power from several basic characteristics:

A protagonist the listener cares about. The story must be about a person or group whose struggles we can relate to.

A catalyst compelling the protagonist to take action. Somehow the world has changed so that something important is at stake. Typically, the first act of a play is devoted to establishing this fact. It's up to the protagonist to put things right again.

Trials and tribulations. The story's second act commences as obstacles produce frustration, conflict, and drama, and often lead the protagonist to change in an essential way. As in *The Odyssey,* the trials reveal, test, and shape the protagonist's character. Time is spent wandering in the wilderness, far from home.

A turning point. This represents a point of no return, which closes the second act. The protagonist can no longer see or do things the same way as before.

A resolution. This is the third act, in which the protagonist either succeeds magnificently or fails tragically.

This is the classic beginning-middle-end story structure defined by Aristotle more than 2,300 years ago and used by countless others since. It seems to reflect how the human mind wants to organize reality.

The Struggle for Coherence

All good stories have a characteristic so basic and necessary it's often assumed. That quality is coherence, and it's crucial to life stories of transition.

This was a challenge for Sam Tierman, a former corporate HR executive one of us coached through a career transition. Sam had spent 18 years running HR in a number of good-sized regional banks, but his last three jobs hadn't ended well. He'd been downsized out of one, he'd quit another in frustration, and he'd been fired from the last—which finally led him to realize he had a career problem. While he was energized by the interplay between individuals and organizations, he hated the mundane, administrative aspects of the work. When he had a boss who considered HR a strategic function and who included the HR head at the executive table, he thrived.

But when he worked for someone who saw HR as a body shop—"Find the bodies, run the benefits, and keep the government off our back"—Sam hated his work. In his last job, his feelings had been obvious, and a minor problem with some personnel analysis was what did him in. Sam, in fact, had taken this job with high hopes. The CEO who hired him considered HR strategic. Unfortunately, that CEO left and was replaced by one who did not.

As a result, Sam gave up on finding or keeping a boss he could work with in a corporate setting. As do so many frustrated executives, he decided he would prefer to work for a start-up. The problem was that he lacked, on the face of it, any of the experience or qualities wanted by people who found and fund start-ups. It was not obvious how Sam could tell a coherent career story that would bridge the chasm between stodgy overhead departments in banks and the high-energy world of start-ups.

Coherent narratives hang together in ways that feel natural and intuitive. A coherent life story is one that suggests what we all want to believe of ourselves and those we help or hire—that our lives are series of unfolding, linked events that make sense. In other words, the past is related to the present, and from that trajectory, we can glimpse our future.

Coherence is crucial to a life story of transition because it is the characteristic that most generates the listener's trust. If you can make your story of change and reinvention seem coherent, you will have gone far in convincing the listener that the change makes sense for you and is likely to bring success—and that you're a stable, trustworthy person.

As important, you will also have gone far in convincing yourself. Indeed, it's the loss of coherence that makes times of transition so difficult to get through. Think of the cartoon character who's run off the edge of a cliff. Legs still churning like crazy, he doesn't realize he's over the abyss—until he looks down. Each of us in transition feels like that character. Coherence is the solid ground under our feet. Without it, we feel as though we're hanging in midair—and we're afraid that if we look down, we'll plummet to our doom.

Coherence is crucial to a life story of transition because it generates the listener's trust and helps convince your audience that you're a stable, trustworthy person.

Charlotte Linde, a linguist who has studied the importance of coherence in life stories, makes clear in her work that coherence emerges in large part from continuity and causality. If we fail to observe these two principles, we create a sense of incoherence, or, in Linde's words, the "chilling possibility that one's life is random, accidental, unmotivated." And what's chilling to us will certainly be off-putting to those listening to our stories.

Emphasizing Continuity and Causality

Now it becomes understandable why so many speakers in that networking meeting failed to do more than recite facts. They were trying to downplay discontinuity; to gloss over how large a professional jump they wanted to make; to avoid appearing wayward, lost, and flailing. It was a misguided strategy, for listeners are particularly sensitive to lapses of coherence in life stories. They actually *look for* coherence in such stories. Failure to acknowledge a large degree of change will put off listeners and undermine their trust.

As storytellers, we must deal explicitly with the magnitude of change our stories communicate. We can do that and still inspire trust if we focus on establishing continuity and causality. The following suggestions can help.

Keep your reasons for change grounded in your character, in who you are. There's probably no rationale for change more compelling than some internal reason, some basic character trait. In its simplest version, this explanation takes the form of "I discovered I'm good at that" or "I like that—it gives me real pleasure." This approach, noted by Linde and found by us in our work to be extremely useful, allows storytellers to incorporate learning and self-discovery into life stories. We can try something, learn from the experience, and use that learning to deepen our understanding of what we want. Many turning points can be used in this way. Note that it's not wise to base the reasons for transformation primarily outside ourselves. "I got fired" may be a fact we must explain and incorporate into our stories, but it's rarely recognized as a good justification for seeking whatever we're seeking. External reasons tend to create the impression that we simply accept our fate.

Cite multiple reasons for what you want. You might, for instance, mention both personal and professional grounds for making a change. (Obviously, these must be complementary rather than mutually exclusive or contradictory.) The richer and more varied the reasons compelling you to change, the more comprehensible and acceptable that change will appear. Sam, the former HR executive, was able to cite a number of unusual projects he had worked on, which indicated, though in a big-company context, his ability to think and act entrepreneurially. Additionally, his undergraduate training in electrical engineering and his MBA in finance from a prestigious school were evidence of the technical and analytical bent preferred by the start-ups he knew.

Be sure to point out any explanations that extend back in time. A goal rooted in the past will serve far better than one recently conceived. Your story will need to show why you could not pursue the goal originally, but here, external causes—illness, accident, family problems, being drafted, and so on—can play a leading role.

Reframe your past in light of the change you're seeking to make. This is not to suggest that you hide anything or prevaricate. We all continually rethink and retell our own life stories. We create different versions that focus on or downplay, include or exclude, different aspects of what has happened to us. Some elements of the jobs we've held probably fit well with our change plans and can be used to link our past experiences with the part of our life that we're advancing toward. The key is to dissect those experiences and find the pieces that relate to our current goals. (For advice on how to do this, see the sidebar "Does Your Résumé Tell a Story?")

Choose a story form that lends itself to your tale of reinvention. Certain forms—love stories, war stories, epics—are as old as narrative itself. There are stories of being tested and stories of being punished. When it comes to describing transition and reinvention, it can be helpful to present the story in a vessel familiar to most listeners. Of the time-honored approaches, two to consider are the maturation (or coming-of-age) plot and the education plot.

The maturation plot was useful to Gary McCarthy, who quit his job as a strategy consultant with no idea of what he would do next. As he told his story at age 35, he looked back over his career and realized he had always responded to social pressure, bending to what others thought was the right thing for him to do.

Stories can be turbulent and dramatic—as long as your life still hangs together.

After receiving a negative performance appraisal, he saw that he needed to be his own man. "You'd better be damn sure when you wake up that you're doing what you want to be doing," he said to himself, "as opposed to what you feel you ought to be doing or what somebody else thinks you ought to be doing."

Lucy Hartman's story is a good example of the education plot, which recounts change generated by growing insight and self-understanding. It was a mentor, her executive coach, who let her glimpse a possible new future, and she continued to learn in her master's program and by coaching others. In her version of events, the more she learned about the human side of enterprise, the more she realized her desire to work in and contribute to this area.

All these suggestions are ways to frame the discontinuity in a transition story and provide the coherence that will reassure listeners. They demonstrate that, at your core, the person you were yesterday is the person you are today and the person you will be tomorrow. And they establish that there are good and sufficient causes for change. If you create the sense that your life hangs (and will hang) together, you'll be free to incorporate the dramatic elements of change and turmoil and uncertainty into your story that will make it compelling.

Telling Multiple Stories

We've noted the challenge of crafting a story, complete with dramatic turning points, when the outcome is still far from clear. The truth is, as you embark on a career transition, you will likely find yourself torn among different interests, paths, and priorities. It wouldn't be unusual, for example, for you to work all weekend on a business plan for a start-up, return to your day job on Monday and ask for a transfer to another position or business unit, and then have lunch on Tuesday with a headhunter to explore yet a third option. This is simply the nature of career transition. So how do you reconcile this reality with the need to present a clear, single life story of reinvention, one that implies you know exactly where you're going?

For starters, keep in mind that, in a job interview, you don't establish trust by getting everything off your chest or being completely open about the several possibilities you are exploring. In the early stages of a transition, it is important to identify and actively consider multiple alternatives. But you will explore each option, or type of option, with a different audience.

This means that you must craft different stories for different possible selves (and the various audiences that relate to those selves). Sam chose to focus on start-ups as the result of a process that began with examining his own experience. He realized that he had felt most alive during times he described as "big change fast"—a bankruptcy, a turnaround, and a rapid reorganization. So he developed three stories to support his goal of building a work life around "big change fast": one about the HR contributions he could make on a team at a consulting company that specialized in taking clients through rapid change; one about working for a firm that bought troubled companies and rapidly turned them around; and one about working for a start-up, probably a venture between its first and second, or second and third, rounds of financing. He tested these stories on friends and at networking events and eventually wrangled referrals and job interviews for each kind of job.

The process is not only about keeping options open as long as possible; it's also about learning which ones to pursue most energetically. In Sam's case, what became clear over a number of conversations was that the consulting firms he respected tended not to hire people of his age and credentials unless they had perfectly relevant experience. Neither did opportunities with turnaround firms appear to be panning out. But Sam did make progress toward some start-ups. After one of them engaged him for a series of consulting assignments, he was able to convert that relationship into a job as chief administrative officer. That position, in turn, exposed him to many contacts in the start-up community. Most important, it stamped him as a bona fide member of that world. Having stripped the stodgy corporate aura from his résumé, he eventually became the CEO of a start-up set to commercialize some technology developed by and spun out of a large company. By this point, four full years had elapsed, and Sam had revised his narrative many times, with each step contributing to a more and more coherent story of change.

Just Tell It

Any veteran storyteller will agree that there's no substitute for practicing in front of a live audience. Tell and retell

Does Your Résumé Tell a Story?

Though the terms are often used interchangeably, there's a big difference between a curriculum vitae and a résumé.

A CV is an exhaustive and strictly chronological list of facts about your professional life. You may need one, but don't expect it to serve your cause in a period of transition. To the extent it tells a story, that story is constructed wholly in the reader's mind.

If you want to give your credentials narrative shape, use a résumé—and understand that you will almost certainly need more than one version. Each will highlight and interpret your experience differently in light of the job or career alternatives you're exploring.

The process of putting together a résumé is as valuable as the product, because it entails drafting your story. Everything in the résumé must point to one goal—which, of course, is the climax of the story you're telling. Build it in three parts.

First, describe the position you want.

Second, create a bulleted list of experience highlights that clearly demonstrate your ability to do that job. Consider every piece of experience you have (don't forget volunteer work or anything else that might apply), and identify which parts support the story you're telling.

Third, summarize your professional work. This section of your résumé has the appearance of a CV, in reverse chronological order, and includes all the relevant positions you've held; for each job, it shows dates of employment as well as your responsibilities and accomplishments. But these descriptions are couched in the same terms as your experience highlights. In fact, every claim in your highlights section (which supports your overall goal) must be supported by your job summaries.

Follow these steps, and your résumé will tell a coherent story. The work you have done, and the skills and interests you have developed and revealed, will point to a clear and desirable resolution: your stated goal.

your story; rework it like a draft of an epic novel until the "right" version emerges.

You can practice your stories in many ways and places. Any context will do in which you're likely to be asked, "What can you tell me about yourself?" or "What do you do?" or "What are you looking for?" Start with family and friends. You may even want to designate a small circle of friends and close colleagues, with their knowledge and approval, your "board of advisers." Their primary function would be to listen and react again and again to your evolving stories. Many of the people we have studied or coached through the transition process have created or joined networking groups for just this purpose.

You'll know you've honed your story when it feels both comfortable and true to you. But you cannot get there until you put yourself in front of others—ultimately, in front of strangers—and watch their faces and body language as you speak. For one woman we know, June Prescott, it was not simply that practice made for polished presentation—although her early efforts to explain herself were provisional, even clumsy. (She was attempting a big career change, from academe to Wall Street.) Each time she wrote a cover letter, interviewed, or updated friends and family on her progress, she better defined what was exciting to her; and in each public declaration of her intent to change careers, she committed herself further.

June's experience teaches a final, important lesson about undergoing change. We use stories to reinvent ourselves. June, like Sam, was able to change because she created a story that justified and motivated such a dramatic shift.

This is the role of storytelling in times of personal transition. Getting the story right is critical, as much for motivating ourselves as for enlisting the help of others. Anyone trying to make a change has to work out a story that connects the old and new selves. For it is in a period of change that we often fail, yet most need, to link our past, present, and future into a compelling whole.

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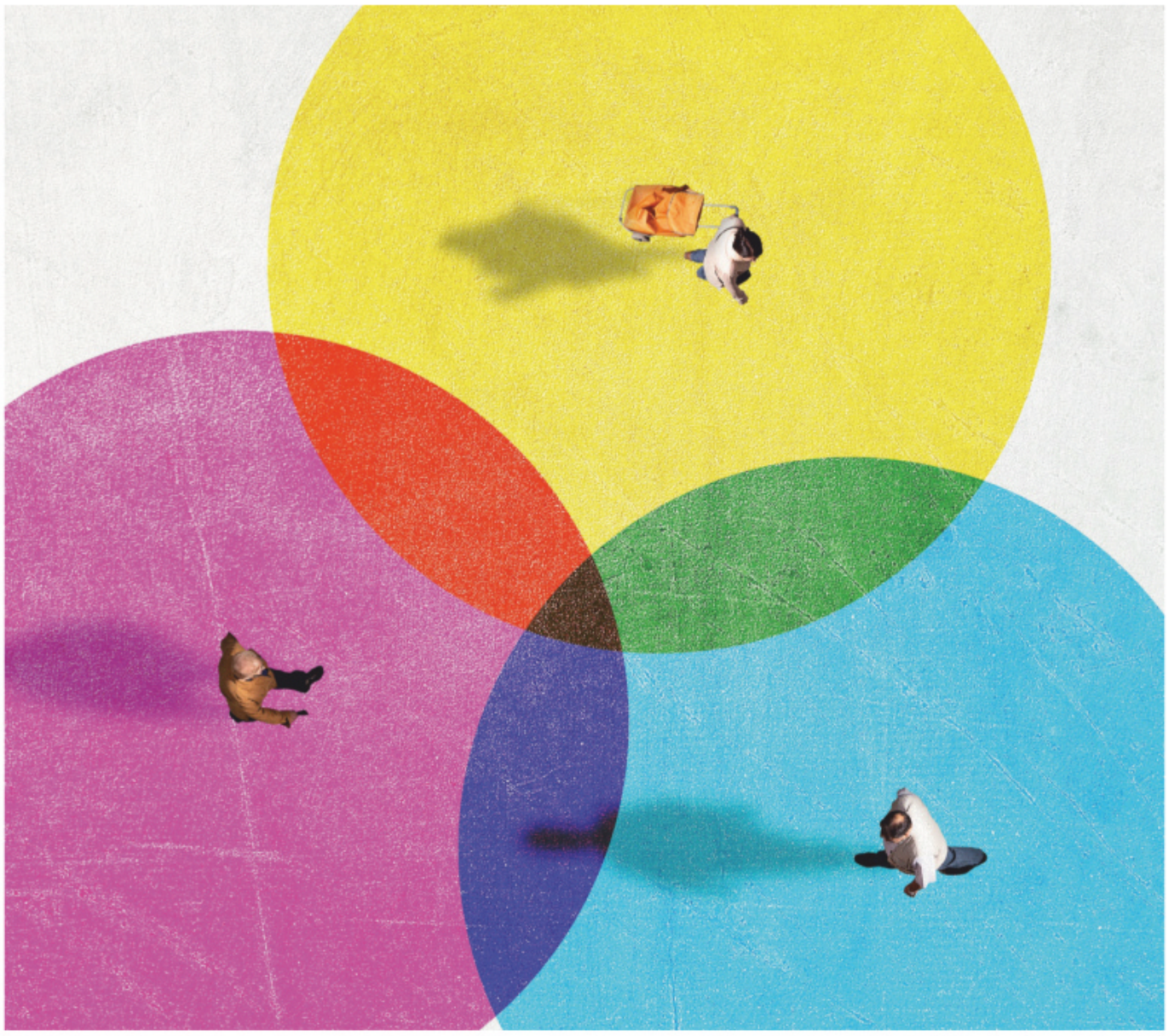

1. "A Friend of a Friend" Is No Longer the Best Way to Find a Job

→ by ILANA GERSHON

HOW DO YOU get a job these days? The answer often involves networking—it isn't what you know; it's whom, we're told. But what does that mean? After all, we're connected to many people, in countless ways. So who can actually help? What kinds of relationships should we try to use when we are looking for a job?

If you go to job-searching workshops—and I went to more than 50 while studying the contemporary hiring landscape in 2013 and 2014—you will be told weak ties are the key. Weak ties are the people you know, but not terribly well: your child's teacher or the friend of a friend you happened to meet at a party. This advice originated in a groundbreaking study by sociologist Mark Granovetter in the early 1970s. He interviewed 100 white-collar workers who had switched jobs in the previous five years and discovered that weak ties helped many of them find out about their next job.

Weak ties were important for one simple reason: Your strong ties (colleagues, family, and friends) probably know about all the same jobs that you do. Granovetter discovered that you were more likely to hear about unknown job possibilities from the second cousin you ran into at a wedding or the former neighbor you saw in the supermarket parking lot. Of the people in Granovetter's study who found out about a job opening through word of mouth, 83.4% said they found out through a weak tie. In the early 1970s it became clear that the most effective way to find a job through networking was to be in touch with as many weak ties as possible.

I set out to learn whether that was still the case. After all, Granovetter's study

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What those hiring value most is a strong recommendation from someone who actually knows the applicant as a worker.

was done decades ago, long before we all started using the internet. If the technologies that help us look for a job have changed significantly, I reasoned, the ways we get information about jobs have also most likely changed. I had to replicate Granovetter's study in some form to see which networking ties matter in today's media ecology.

I located a great source: a weekly meeting held by an organization for white-collar job seekers in the Bay Area, a portion of which was dedicated to successful job seekers telling their stories—on film. While it's not a duplication of Granovetter's study, watching 380 success stories collected from 2012 to 2014 allowed me to conduct a fairly comparable study.

So, are weak ties still the key? No. Of the 141 people who said they thought networking had helped them, only 17% reported that a weak tie did the trick. Workplace ties, however, proved to be more useful. More than 60% of the storytellers reported that someone they had worked with in the past helped them find their next job. These weren't always coworkers—former bosses and former clients helped, too. But what job seekers found most useful were people who could talk knowledgeably and convincingly about what the applicant was like as a worker and colleague.

That's a dramatic change from the 1970s, and the most obvious driver is our wildly altered media ecology. When Granovetter conducted his study, the major challenge in finding a new job was learning that the job existed in the first place. In the 1970s people found out about jobs through newspaper ads, help-wanted signs, or word of mouth. Nowadays, that's the easy part: People can find job ads online, search listings on corporate sites, or be contacted by recruiters. That has led to a new problem: Too many people are applying for the same jobs. The hard part now, as most people know, is standing out from the pack—having your résumé noticed in a large pile or finding some way around a clunky applicant tracking system. Hiring managers face the same problem, having to sort through hundreds of applicants with the limited tools of application software, résumés, and cover letters. In these moments, what those hiring value most is a strong recommendation from someone who actually knows the applicant as a worker and can assure them that the person will be a good hire.

While these connections are important, they may not change one of the most problematic results of networking: relatively homogenous workplaces. Granovetter himself noticed that even if people were getting jobs through weak ties, networking wasn't changing the makeup of companies. After all, if no one of color or from a working-class background was hired into an office, fewer people could spread the word that the job existed in the first place. Today, the problem is more of an implicit bias in how recommendations function—people tend to recommend their former coworkers whom they liked working with. Relying on workplace ties doesn't solve the problem of how networking creates barriers to creating a more diverse workplace; it just shifts the locus of the problem.

Because recommending someone for a job is such an important part of hiring—and a way people with different backgrounds and perspectives can be excluded from workplaces—it has become a significant ethical decision. Everyone involved in hiring decisions should think carefully about who is being recommended and why. And for the job seeker who is networking, don't give up on weak ties entirely—17% of them still have good odds. Ultimately, however, workplace ties may hold more weight. The kinds of networks that your workplace allows you to nurture matter not only to your present working conditions but also to what jobs you can get in the future. The best way to increase the likelihood of getting the job you want later may be to treat your colleagues well at the one you have now.

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ORBON ALIJA/GETTY IMAGES

2. Find a Job with Massive, Structured Networking

→ by BILL BARNETT

WHETHER YOU'RE SEARCHING for your first job, considering a career change, or seeking opportunities while unemployed, finding a job can be one of the toughest challenges you'll ever face. How should you conduct a job search?

You start with a personal value proposition (PVP). Your PVP is the target position and why you're right for that position. Even with a strong PVP, however, attractive opportunities won't land on your doorstep. You must go out and find them. That's the hard part.

The best source of possible jobs is networking. The way to succeed at networking is to reach out broadly to people who can help; the way to fail is to limit your contacts to the few people you know well. Massive outreach is the only reliable path to victory.

Frederick (all names have been changed) showcases structured outreach. He left the company where he was the COO after a disagreement with the founder. From his 20 years in the industry, he had close professional friends and many contacts. He made the most of this network, he says.

"It's a question of how many people I'm touching each week. It takes wide outreach. Discussions to possibilities to offers. I keep an Excel spreadsheet: name, location, industry, prior career, and intensity of relationship. Each week I touch 50 people

The way to succeed at networking is to reach out broadly to people who can help; the way to fail is to limit your contacts to the few people you know well.

and score the quality of touch from one to seven. Is it an email or a meeting? If I touch 50 a week and score 150 a week, then I am going to get a job whether it's in three months or six months."

No kidding. Frederick was communicating with 50 people a week through a large number of emails, a smaller number of phone calls, and some in-person meetings. Frederick asked about possibilities at his contact's company. He asked broader questions about the industry outlook and who else to meet. This led to several opportunities. After four months, he accepted an attractive offer.

Management consultant Isabel provides another example of an active job search. She targeted three fields and built a list of people to contact by talking to her consulting colleagues and searching the alumni databases at her two universities. She added relevant search firm contacts. She used a spreadsheet like Frederick's. She emphasized learning from interviews: "I had 40 or 50 conversations. Thirty-five were informational. I was talking to anyone who seemed close to being relevant. What do you do? What do you like? I was willing to explore any option in my target areas, in some cases if only to learn."

The more she heard, the more she learned. Insights from earlier meetings helped her ask better questions later. She dropped one of her target industries once she realized it didn't match her objectives. People suggested others to contact. Isabel found two good opportunities in three months.

Active outreach isn't easy. It takes commitment and organization. But it is absolutely essential. Take these six steps:

1. **Broadly define your network.** Most people don't realize how many contacts they have. They talk to close friends, but stop there. Consider former classmates, colleagues from earlier employers, business relationships outside your institution, and civic acquaintances. People will be flattered. Few will get to Frederick's scale, but be as broad as you can. Even 23-year-old Sarah, who thought she didn't have a professional network, was able to have quality in-person meetings every week and additional contacts by phone or email. Massive outreach is best practice.

2. **Create a new network along the way.** Ask people who else to call. Imagine people you don't know who are relevant to your search. Cold-call them.

3. **View discussions as learning opportunities, not just job inquiries.** Ask about more than jobs. Ask about the industry, how to succeed, and how to position yourself. Approaching these meetings as conversations breaks the ice. It's disarming. What you learn may lead you to shift your target, like Isabel did, or change the way you present yourself.

4. **Contact people in different ways.** Get in touch with your close professional friends in whatever way is most comfortable. For more-distant acquaintances, and certainly for people you're trying to meet, the best path usually will be an email or a letter, followed up with a phone call, and then hopefully a meeting. Buy coffee or lunch. After a substantive discussion, send a thank-you email or letter. As time passes, go back to people with an update on what you're learning and follow-up questions.

5. **Be systematic with good record keeping.** Staying on top of broad outreach is complicated. After each meeting, write down what you learned and what you'll do as a result. Frederick's spreadsheet and scoring methodology to gauge progress is one excellent example.

6. **Periodically evaluate your progress and whether to change the approach.** View this as conducting a study. Review your notes from different meetings. Look for patterns. Are there better ways to move in the direction you've selected? Are there reasons to shift direction, to change your PVP? You may benefit from confiding in a friend or a spouse, but even if you don't have the right discussion partner, "meet" with yourself.

Massive, structured outreach is the best way to find new opportunities. How can you leverage your network?

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3. What to Say When You're Reaching Out to Someone on LinkedIn

→ by KRISTI DePAUL

IF NETWORKING ISN'T at the top of your to-do list, it should be—unless you're Beyoncé.

For those of us who aren't Queen Bey, cultivating your network offers many benefits: greater learning opportunities, broader career prospects, access to leaders' insights, and more immediate job options, among others.

But what previously took place face-to-face in local meetups, alumni gatherings, industry conferences, and happy hours is now largely confined to video due to the global pandemic. Still, effective networking online is key for young people seeking their next role—possibly a remote job, given broader industry trends and permanent work-from-home (WFH) announcements from major companies like Facebook and Twitter.

LinkedIn may be your best shot at expanding your network while so many people are WFH. Sure, it may lack the lighthearted user experience of other social platforms, but it offers the opportunity to track trends, make meaningful connections, and maintain a curated digital résumé that recruiters and potential employers can easily access and review. The problem is, while LinkedIn shows promise for early-career professionals too, few are using it well—especially when it comes to outreach.

Common Mistakes People Make While Networking on LinkedIn

If you've been hesitant to reach out to people on LinkedIn, or if you've been reaching out and not hearing back, you can use strategies to increase your chances. But first, let's look at five common mistakes you might be making:

1. You don't know what you want. Have you thought about why you're reaching out to someone? Are you seeking more information about a role or company? A relationship that can grow? Or a lifeline to a potential future mentor or employer?

2. You're putting your own needs first. Don't be self-serving. No one will respond to "It would be good to connect with you," unless they know what's in it for them.

3. Your messages are weak. Being specific and sensitive is especially important in 2020, a year of upheaval and loss on many levels. Generic, nonpersonalized messages

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Think deeply about the kind of guidance you want and then identify the most relevant person to approach.

have a low probability of success. As entrepreneur Larry Kim has said: "What are the 11 most boring words in the English language? *'I'd like to add you to my professional network on LinkedIn.'*"

4. You're using an awkward tone. Sometimes even the best messages will be met with silence or ghosting. Still, many continue to approach total strangers in ways they'd never dare in person.

5. You're not being persuasive enough. If you haven't been able to convince the other person why you really want to connect with them, chances are they won't respond.

Craft Messages That Get Responses

Now that you've identified what mistakes you're making, let's look at how you can overcome these and flip the odds in your favor. No, there isn't a simple playbook or shortcut. But you can cut through the noise by employing research-backed approaches such as Cialdini's Principles of Persuasion and by borrowing proven practices from both regular folks and industry leaders.

I recently reached out to experts, entrepreneurs, and authors who specialize in this area—from within my network and a few I wasn't connected to—to learn more about formulating messages that are authentic to your personal brand and will resonate with recipients at any level.

Here's what they told me.

If you are seeking advice on a career path or job change. People aren't employment oracles just waiting for your message soliciting their sage advice. Think deeply about the kind of guidance you want and then identify the most relevant person to approach.

"Clarity is key when you're performing cold outreach," Cynthia Johnson, the author of *Platform: The Art and Science of Personal Branding* (Lorena Jones Books, 2019), says. "Assume that the person you're reaching out to is busy and wants to give you the best advice possible. If you're direct and specific as to what you're asking and why you're asking them, you will have created the perfect environment for a confident and thoughtful response."

Sending a vague (and all-too-common) "Can I pick your brain?" message isn't going to be helpful. Tim Herrera, the founding editor of the "Smarter Living" section of the *New York Times,* recommends being straightforward and transparent to improve your chances of receiving a reply. "Whatever the ask is, the best favor you can do for yourself is not to beat around the bush. You're teeing the recipient up to give you exactly what you want because they know exactly what that is. You've taken away the ambiguity for them, which will save them time and mental effort, and you're also setting up the exchange to be as productive and efficient as possible." Of course, he added, you should always aim to be kind and courteous.

Here's an example of a note that is precise but flexible on timing:

Erica, your professional journey really stood out to me. I'm very interested in building my career as a [role]. Since you've been in that position, would you have some time to offer me a bit of advice on pursuing this? I would really appreciate a brief call at your convenience.

If you want someone to review your résumé or cover letter. When making this kind of request, put yourself in the shoes of the receiver and try to answer this question for them up front: Why is this person contacting me? Acknowledge that you're asking them for a favor.

Here's a persuasive and considerate one that was sent my way:

Hi, Kristi. You've built a really interesting career in thought leadership, and [mutual contact] *mentioned you were a great resource as she revised her résumé. Since I'm hoping to advance from* [my current role], *I'd love to get your brief take on my cover letter if your schedule allows it.*

Receiving a carefully formulated request like this is somewhat rare, as it doesn't make any assumption that I can provide a labor-intensive line edit to someone's application materials. Again, the acknowledgment that I'm using my time to help matters. In cases where I've been referred to job seekers by other people I've helped, I'm even more likely to respond. If someone I help then pays it forward by assisting others in their own circles, that makes the investment worth it. (In other words: Always mention a referral if you have one.)

If you are inquiring about a job posting and/or hiring process. "We all have demanding schedules and are a little burned out," explains

Job seekers should aim to strike up a conversation about their experience, what they're looking for, and who they feel might be helpful to them.

Amber Naslund, principal content consultant at LinkedIn—a role she landed after building a consistent presence on the platform. "Open-ended messages like 'I just wondered if you had any openings...' aren't useful, because all of those details are on a company's career page and that puts the work on the person you're asking."

According to Naslund, it's better to ask about a specific role and see if someone is willing to introduce you to a recruiter, make an internal referral, or answer questions you have about that role or the company. "Being respectful of people's time, expertise, and relationships can go a long way when you're trying to land your next job," she told me. The professional you reach out to could, for example, be a teammate who works closely with the role in question or the person who would be the immediate supervisor.

You could try a message like this:

Hi, Cameron. I saw that your company is recruiting a marketing assistant. Since it seems you'd work directly with this person, it would be wonderful to hear your thoughts on the role. I'm looking to get some clarity on the role and responsibilities before I apply. Do you have a few minutes to speak with me about it in the next week or two?

If you are approaching a potential mentor. Before sending an invitation to connect, investigate whether someone might be interested in serving as a mentor.

Johnson recommends looking for a leader who demonstrates that they are experienced in the areas in which you're seeking mentorship and show signs of having some availability.

Johnson found her long-time mentor on LinkedIn. "I assessed his expertise by doing diligent searches and thorough evaluations of his communications online with others," she says. She identified the groups he had joined on the platform, including some where she noticed that he was very active, and joined them too. "His activity told me that he was interested in discussion and possibly had a bit of extra time to work with me," she says. "You can do this type of assessment, too, and find an amazing mentor."

When writing to a prospective mentor, make sure you've done your homework. Here's an example of a message you could send:

Divya, your posts on edtech in the STEM education forum have been really thought-provoking! I've interned for a few start-ups in this space and am excited about my own next steps—but I definitely could use some guidance from an experienced pro like you. Would you be open to chatting about this?

If you are reaching out for help after a recent job loss. In need of others' assistance? Contextualizing your messages will make all the difference.

Job seekers should aim to strike up a conversation about their experience, what they're looking for, and who they feel might be helpful to them, Naslund says. "It's a great way to warm up the conversation and increase the likelihood that a new connection is willing to make some helpful introductions. People's networks are sacrosanct. Most of us have worked very hard over a number of years to gain the trust of our networks and the people we've worked with, so we're not likely to open that up to just anyone and make cold introductions."

Here's an example of what you could say to let the other person know why you're reaching out to them:

Eitan, I'm looking to join a mission-driven team like yours and just happened to see your colleague's post about the product manager role. Would you be the right person to ask about one of the technical requirements? Let me know if I could send an email your way.

According to an old Chinese proverb, the best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago; the second-best time is now. So if you haven't cultivated your network, you'd better get started. But don't dive into a new relationship with a request straightaway.

Andreas Klinger, a serial entrepreneur and investor in remote-first capital, recommends playing the long game. "Plan to have long-term engagement with someone (for example, in conversation via Twitter) well before you need anything. Or you can engage through content marketing—that is, sharing thoughtful articles on social media that you've written or admire—that will capture others' attention."

It's worth noting that if you want to connect with Klinger, paying attention to the preferred platform counts: In his LinkedIn profile, he advises that you reach out via Twitter. Others may also indicate the

best way for you to contact them, which will up your chances of hearing back.

Now it's time to get started and put these principles into practice. It's understandable that reaching out to people you've never met might feel intimidating—and it means facing possible rejection. Try to remember that not only is rejection normal, but it also indicates you're aiming high enough to achieve even greater success. Growth of any kind involves some risk. The advantage: You'll learn valuable lessons and can continually improve along the way.

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JORG GREUEL/GETTY IMAGES

4. How to Get the Most Out of an Informational Interview

→ by REBECCA KNIGHT

WHEN YOU'RE LOOKING for a job or exploring a new career path, it's smart to go out on informational interviews. But what should you say when you're actually in one? Which questions will help you gain the most information? Are there any topics you should avoid? And how should you ask for more help if you need it?

What the Experts Say

"Informational interviews are essential to helping you find out more about the type of industry, company, or role you're interested in," says Dorie Clark, the author of *Stand Out Networking: A Simple and Authentic Way to Meet People on Your Own Terms* (Portfolio, 2015). "You may think you already know all about a certain position, but speaking to someone directly gives you the opportunity to test your assumptions."

John Lees, a UK-based career strategist and the author of *The Success Code: How Ordinary Habits Can Produce Extraordinary Results* (Dauntless, 2020), agrees. Informational inter-

Your mission is to grasp the reality of the industry and the job so that you can begin to decide if it's right for you.

views "give you exposure—a way to get yourself known in the hidden job market," he says. "The visibility may put you straight onto a short list, even if a job isn't advertised." They can also be a great boost to your self-esteem. "You get to wear smart business clothes and visit places of work, which maintains your confidence levels in a job search," he explains. So whether you're actively trying to change roles or just exploring different professional paths, here are some tips on how to make the most of an informational interview.

Prepare and practice. Informational interviews are, according to Clark, "a safe environment to ask questions." But that doesn't mean you should go in cold. After all, your goal is to come across in a way that inspires others to help you. So do your homework. Study up on industry lingo. Learn who the biggest players are. Be able to talk about the most important trends. You don't want to waste your expert's time asking Google-able questions. "You will come across as a more serious candidate if you are familiar with the jargon and vocabulary," says Clark. Lees concurs. "Showing that you've done your background research plants the idea of credibility in the other person's mind," he says. Work on your listening and conversation skills too. Lees suggests that you practice "asking great questions and conveying memorable energy [with] people who are easy to talk to, such as your family, your friends, and friends of friends."

Keep your introduction short. "What frustrates busy people is when they agree to an informational interview, and then the person seeking advice spends 15 minutes talking about themselves and their job search" instead of learning from them, says Lees. It's not a venue to practice your elevator pitch; it's a place to "absorb information and find stuff out." Clark suggests preparing a "brief, succinct explanation about yourself" that you can recite in three minutes max: "Here's my background, here's what I'm thinking, and I'd like your feedback." People can't help you unless they understand what you're looking for, but this part of the conversation should be brief.

Set the tone. "You want to leave people with a positive impression and enough information to recommend you to others," says Lees. At the beginning of the interview, establish your relationship by revisiting how you were connected in the first place. "Ideally, this person has been warmly introduced to you"—perhaps you have a friend or colleague in common or you share an alma mater—so remind them, he says. It's also a good idea to state at the outset that "you're interested in talking to 10 or 15 industry experts" during your information-gathering phase. "That way, the person will start to process the fact that you are looking for additional sources early on. If you wait until the end to ask for other referrals, they might be caught off guard." Ask about time constraints up front too, says Clark. "If, at the end of the time allotted, you're having a good conversation, say, 'I want to respect your time. I would love to keep talking, but if you need to go, I understand.' Prove you're a person of your word."

Think like a journalist. Prepare a list of informed, intelligent questions ahead of time, says Clark. "You don't necessarily need to stick to the script, but if you're unfocused and you haven't planned, you risk offending the person." Lees recommends approaching your interview like an investigative journalist: You're not cross-examining your expert, and you certainly don't want to come across as "pushy or difficult," but you should "gently probe through curiosity, then listen." He suggests a framework of five questions along the lines of Daniel Porot's Pie Method:

How do you get into this line of work?

What do you enjoy about it?

What's not so great about it?

What's changing in the sector?

What kinds of people do well in this industry?

You can adapt these questions to your purposes. The idea is to help you "spot the roles and fields that match your skills and experience and give you an understanding of how top performers are described," says Lees.

Deliberately test your hypotheses. Your mission is to grasp the reality of the industry and the job so that you can begin to decide if it's right for you. So don't shy away from sensitive topics. "You want to hear about the underbelly," says Clark. She suggests questions "designed

to elicit the worst information," such as:

What are the worst parts of your job?

What didn't you know before you got into this industry that you wish someone had told you?

Some topics, such as money, may seem taboo but can be broached delicately. "Don't ask, 'How much money do you make?' Instead, say something like, 'I've done some research online, and it seems that the typical salary range is this,' so you're just asking for confirmation of public information," says Clark.

It's also OK to ask for advice on how to position yourself for a job in the industry by making your experience and skills sound relevant. Clark recommends saying something like, "Based on what you know about my background, what do you see as my weaknesses? And what would I need to do to allay the concerns of a potential hiring manager?" If the feedback is negative, consider it valuable information, but get second and third opinions. "One person's word is not gospel," she says. "You may not be qualified, but you also may have spoken to a stick-in-the-mud who discourages everyone. Don't let them limit your career options."

Follow up with gratitude, not demands. While thanking the person for their time via email is a must, Lees recommends also sending a handwritten note to express gratitude right after you meet. "It will help you be remembered," he says. Your thank-you letter needn't be flowery or overly effusive; instead, it should describe how the person was helpful to you and, ideally, that their guidance led to "a concrete outcome" in your job search.

Whatever you do, don't immediately ask for a favor, adds Clark. Not only is it "considered bad manners," but it's also practically "an ambush because you barely know the person." That said, "if, a couple of weeks later, a job opens up at the person's company, you can tell the person you're applying for it and ask if they have any quick thoughts on professional experiences you should play up in your cover letter," Clark says. "If they take the ball and run with it and offer to put in a good word for you, that's great. But do not ask for it."

Play the long game. The real purpose of informational interviews is to build relationships and "develop future allies, supporters, and champions," says Lees. So don't think of them as one-off meetings in which someone gives you 15 minutes of their time. Take the long view and think about ways to cultivate your new professional connection. Forward them a link to a relevant magazine article, for instance, or invite them to an upcoming conference or networking event. In other words, be helpful. "You want to be seen as giving, not constantly taking," Lees says. Clark notes that it can be a tricky proposition when there's a wide age or professional gap between you, but if you focus on keeping the person "apprised of your progress"—perhaps writing them a note saying you read the book they suggested or that you joined the professional association they recommended—"it shows you listened and that their advice mattered."

Principles to Remember

Do:

- Your homework. You should do enough background research before going in that you sound like a credible candidate who's committed to moving into a new sector.
- Prepare a succinct explanation about your background. Include what you're looking for.
- Send a handwritten thank-you note. It's good manners and makes you memorable.

Don't:

- Go in cold. Practice doing informational interviews with friends and family so that you get used to asking great questions and listening.
- Let one negative informational interview sour you on a job, company, or career path. Solicit other opinions.
- Ask for favors—it's unseemly. Instead, ask for advice on how to position yourself in the job market.

Advice in Practice

CASE STUDY 1

Prepare and Be Gracious

Two years ago, Matt McConnell, who lives in southern California, wanted to move from finance to marketing. He wasn't entirely sure of his direction, so he began using informational interviews to learn about other people's careers in the hopes of narrowing his focus. "I was also using the interviews to learn more about other organizations to see whether they might be places I'd want to work for," he says.

His first informational interview didn't go very well, and Matt takes full responsibility. "I didn't prepare," he recalls. "He could tell, and he told me that I was wasting his time."

Matt learned an important lesson. "I've never made that mistake again. I now always overprepare," he says.

To get ready, he reads people's LinkedIn profiles, does a Google search on their careers, and checks out their company's website. He tends to ask the same questions, usually in the realm of how the person got started and how they ended up in their current role. "But I also make notes about particular questions I want to ask so that I have something to reference if the conversation stalls," he says.

Matt also has a post-meeting routine. "I ask for a business card and immediately send a handwritten thank-you note. The thank-you is typically three lines long, and I always mention one specific thing from our meeting that resonated with me so that they know I was listening and found their time valuable," he says. "Early on in my career I worried that I didn't have anything to offer anyone in return. [But] I learned that people enjoyed sharing their experiences and offering advice, so I make sure to communicate my sincere gratitude."

Matt eventually had an informational interview with a marketing head of a quick-service restaurant group that yielded results. "After our meeting, the person called me and said her company was hiring for a role she thought I'd be perfect for," he says. "She'd given my name to the HR department, and they were planning on calling me within the next 30 minutes to do a phone interview. That phone interview led to in-person interviews and eventually a job offer at that company."

He worked at the company for a few years before moving on. He's now the marketing manager for Astrophysics, a company that designs X-ray scanners for security screenings.

CASE STUDY 2

Be Respectful and Don't Let Negative Feedback Discourage You

A few months ago, Susan Peppercorn, a career coach and founder of Boston-based Positive Workplace Partners, decided she wanted to write a book about work satisfaction. Trouble was, she had no experience in the publishing industry beyond blogging. To educate herself, she has been doing a lot of informational interviews.

"Some are with writers, editors, and published authors," she says. "In each case, I think in advance about each person's expertise and focus my questions on the areas where I think they might have the most valuable advice."

Susan makes sure she is respectful of the other person's time, never asking for more than 30 minutes and always meeting at the person's convenience, not hers. Before each interview, she also considers how she might help the person with whom she's meeting: She might have a contact she could introduce, for instance, or she could offer to look over a résumé or cover letter.

One of her recent interviews was with a potential editor. Susan was excited, and she prepared by thinking about what this particular person would look for in taking on a client. She began the conversation with a two-minute description of her book idea. But during the discussion, it became apparent that the editor's goals and hers were quite different. "He told me in a very nice way that I had virtually no chance of having a publisher accept my book proposal. My balloon was burst quickly."

Still, after the initial disappointment, she found value in his advice. "I learned about the importance of having a platform before approaching a publisher, since they want to know in advance that your book will sell well," she says. "That saved me a lot of time and effort trying to pitch to publishers and helped me look at the viability of self-publishing. It also made me realize that I had more work to do with regard to clarifying and communicating the value of my book."

The experience also helped her hone her approach for subsequent informational interviews. Now she shares a brief outline of her book in advance, with a short paragraph on her motivation for wanting to write it.

One of her most recent meetings, with a published author, was extremely helpful. "He explained the concept of a platform and helped me brainstorm potential ones for my work," she explains.

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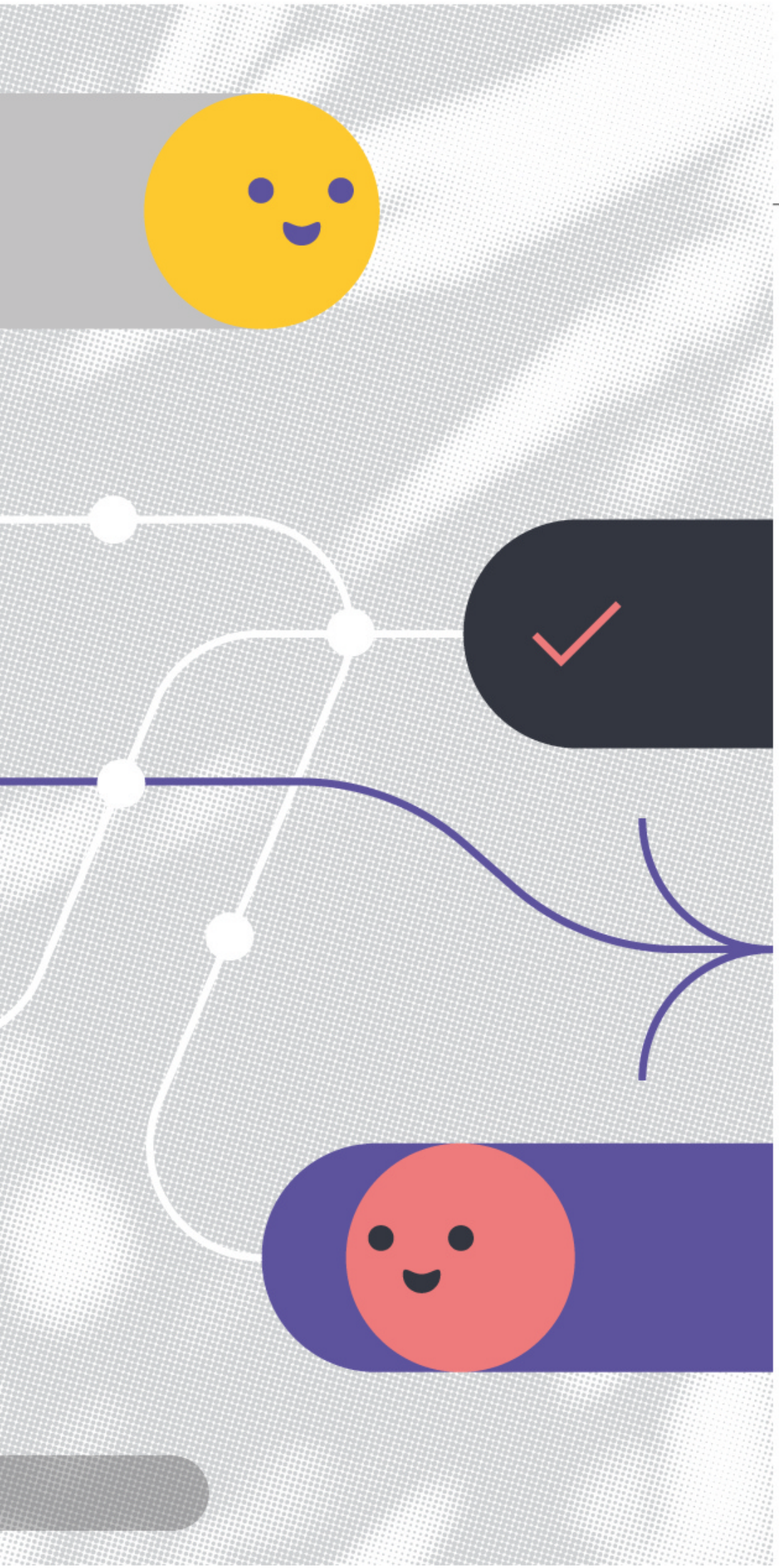

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How to Succeed Quickly in a New Role

Five ways to build a strategic network

→ by ROB CROSS, GREG PRYOR, and DAVID SYLVESTER

A ROLE TRANSITION—whether a promotion, a move to a new organization, or a fresh challenge in your existing job—can be a huge boost to your career and a chance for you to blossom and thrive. You know the drill heading in: Apply your experience and talents to the position, make sure you are accepted by the hierarchy (including your own direct reports), and clinch a few big wins in the first couple of months to demonstrate what you can do.

Illustration by **KEMAL SANLI**

But in today's hyper-collaborative and dynamic workplaces, successful moves aren't as easy as they once were, even for the most qualified and hard-working people. Too often, transitioning managers and employees don't live up to their organizations' expectations. Gartner surveys indicate that a full 49% of people promoted within their own companies are underperforming up to 18 months after those moves, and McKinsey reports that 27% to 46% of executives who transition are regarded as failures or disappointments two years later. They have the right skills and experience. They understand the company's goals. They've been vetted for cultural fit. So why didn't they quickly excel in their new roles?

We analyzed employee relationships and communication patterns across more than 100 diverse companies and interviewed 160 executives in 20 of them. Our research points to one overlooked prerequisite for transition success: the effective use of internal networks. The people who are the most productive, innovative, and engaged in new roles—the "fast movers"—are those who establish extremely broad, mutually beneficial, uplifting connections from the start. Specifically, they surge rapidly into a broad network; generate pull; identify how they add value, where they fall short, and who can fill the gaps; create scale; and shape their networks for maximum thriving.

In most cases, individual managers must do these things on their own. Only 43% of people surveyed in 2021 by the Institute for Corporate Productivity (i4cp) said their organizations ensured that transitioning employees were onboarded with guidance and support. Only about a quarter said their employers encouraged transitioners to build connections early or create networks to address skills gaps. That should not be the case. Organizations and team leaders can help people in new roles work through the five strategies as part of a well-designed program.

In this article we'll explain why successful transitions are so important to both career and company success, describe how rising demands for collaboration have made networks increasingly critical, and give some advice on implementing each of the fast-mover practices.

Many Transitions + Poor Onboarding = Big Problems

In today's organizations, transitions occur all the time and take many forms. Managers and employees—Millennials and Gen Zers in particular—change jobs far more often than previous generations ever did. A January 2021 survey of 14,000 consumers in nine countries by the IBM Institute for Business Value found that about 20% of workers voluntarily changed employers in 2020, citing desires for such things as job-location flexibility and more-meaningful work, and more than 25% were looking to make a move in 2021. And a Microsoft study of more than 30,000 people in 31 countries indicated that 40% of them were considering leaving their employers in 2021.

Internal moves are increasingly common too. For example, research from i4cp shows that 64% of organizations have recently undergone or are currently undergoing some form of deliberate culture change. To support such efforts, nearly half of those companies moved leaders at all levels around or out of the organization. According to Gartner, one in three leaders is in transition at any point in time.

Although many companies tout their onboarding processes, it's not clear that those methods are working. In another i4cp survey, only 44% of respondents said their organizations' efforts to onboard external hires achieved desired outcomes, and 88% said that onboarding programs weren't offered to employees who'd been promoted or transferred into new jobs.

Gallup research shows that the cost of replacing an employee is typically one-half to two times that person's salary, depending on seniority and the sophistication of his or her skills. At pre-pandemic (2017) turnover rates, that translates to nearly $1 trillion a year for U.S. businesses. And that picture may be comparatively rosy, for a few reasons. First, surveys indicate that as workers seek new opportunities and more flexibility post-Covid, voluntary turnover is likely to rise. Second, Gallup's calculations don't factor in the very real network effect of departures. For example, the company suggests that a hypothetical 100-person organization paying an average salary of $50,000 might face staff-replacement costs of $660,000 to $2.6 million a year. But at the Connected Commons—an intentional network dedicated to enabling individuals and organizations to thrive—we've found that the fallout from failed transitions goes beyond

People making transitions today don't have the luxury of allowing their network connections to form serendipitously.

acquisition and compensation, because when people underperform and leave, it hurts their coworkers' productivity. Our research shows that, on average, most employees are relied upon by five to 12 colleagues. Let's say someone leaves and five teammates are affected, all of whom take a 5% hit to performance for six months (three months to locate a replacement and three months to get the new hire up to speed). That conservative estimate adds another $845,000 for inefficiencies in the network. (A free calculator is available at network-toolkit.com/connectedtalent.)

Even transitioners who don't fail so badly that they must leave create negative, often unseen ripple effects. According to Gartner, the direct reports of a struggling transitioning leader perform, on average, 15% worse than people who report to a high-performing manager, and they are 20% likelier to leave the organization or be disengaged. The productivity of peers, too, suffers if their work depends on the transitioning employee.

The Hyper-Collaborative Environment

Just as important as the frequency and impact of transitions is what's going on in day-to-day work. More and more companies have identified collaboration across disciplines and units as a way to meet the new business goal of ever-greater agility.

In a 2017 Gartner survey, 67% of organizations indicated that they were using collaborative business models to focus on digital transformation and ranked collaboration as the second-most-important workforce skill, after innovation. Other Gartner research shows that work interdependence is very high. In one study, 82% of organizations reported that their employees must work closely with colleagues to achieve their objectives. In another, 50% of employees said that in the previous three years they had experienced a greater need to coordinate and collaborate to complete their work. (Only 16% said that such demands had shrunk.)

Our own (pre-pandemic) research showed that collaboration in even the most transactional roles had risen markedly, with most leaders and knowledge workers spending 85% or more of their time in collaborative activities—on the phone, on email, and in meetings. For many kinds of jobs, this figure has since increased by five to eight hours a week as a result of remote working, with collaboration earlier in the morning and later at night as employees struggle to keep up with technologies and always-on expectations.

This environment has changed companies' thinking about what's most valuable in their employees' contributions. Gartner reports that companies now view "network performance"—effectiveness at enhancing and capitalizing on others' performance to improve one's own—as equal in importance to the ability to handle tasks individually. A decade ago the former was seen as one-third as important as the latter. And yet only 20% of companies surveyed by i4cp indicated that helping new hires establish critical organizational networks is an objective of their onboarding process. That needs to change.

Idea in Brief

THE PROBLEM
People who transition to new roles—within their organizations or in other ones—often have a hard time doing so successfully. Surveys indicate that 27% to 49% of them underperform.

THE RESEARCH
Analysis of transitioning employees in 100 diverse companies suggests that the ones who get up to speed and excel most quickly are those who know how to use internal networks effectively.

THE STRATEGIES
These people follow five "fast mover" practices: They surge rapidly into a broad network; generate pull by energizing new connections; identify how to add value and who can help them fill skills gaps; use the network to expand their impact; and prioritize relationships that enhance their workplace experience.

The Fast-Mover Strategies

In our collective study and analysis of networks, collaboration, and transitions in organizations, we noticed that 10% to 15% of movers became well-connected in a quarter to a third of the usual time, even if they started with few or no contacts, and were reaping the benefits: rapid productivity, innovation, higher engagement, and lower risk of departure. These fast movers showed that people making transitions today don't have the luxury of allowing their network connections to form serendipitously. To be successful, you (and those who onboard you) must be intentional. Here's how.

Surge rapidly into a broad network. Fast movers act as quickly as possible to discover the informal org chart of key boundary-spanning, energizing opinion leaders who are able and willing to help them get things done.

Consider a manager we'll call Holly, who took on the challenge of improving workforce planning in her global professional-services firm. This was not a formal promotion, but it was an important transition. She saw that she needed to talk to helpful and passionate experts who had been thinking about the topic for a long time and weren't afraid to float unusual ideas. Within six weeks she met with dozens of people across various groups to understand the business environment, how the groups operated, and each person's most pressing concerns. Importantly, she ended every conversation by asking for the names of others with whom she should meet or work.

For example, after convening members of the HR function to discuss current processes, she asked each of them to name one or two people in the business units who were well-connected, were frequently tapped for help, or seemed to make a real impact in meetings. She then met with each of those individuals to hear their perspectives on workforce needs. She quickly began to build a broad network encompassing her group, the larger HR function, and people in other business units, corporate functions, levels, and locations who might have a disproportionately positive or negative impact on her success in implementation. She set out to ensure that their impact was uniformly positive.

Holly understood that her transition success depended on creating connections to and goodwill with not only key stakeholders and customers or clients, the organization's formal leaders, and her own team and direct reports, but also people who might not necessarily be viewed as important, such as the *deputies of formal leaders,* who can help transitioners learn about the leaders' goals, motivations, interests, schedules, and workloads so that it becomes easier to make the most efficient use of their time; *colleagues in functional and support roles,* who can facilitate the transitioner's work; and *peers,* who can be sounding boards and sources of information about opportunities and others' views.

Generate pull. John Hagel III, John Seely Brown, and Lang Davison addressed "the power of pull" in a 2010 book of that name, describing how people who attract like-minded colleagues and "shape serendipity" benefit themselves and their organizations. Once you've put yourself out there, as Holly did, you want people to come to you, to offer advice, suggest new ideas, and bring you into new projects and your next role.

We noted that while broadening her network, Holly focused on asking questions and listening to better understand others' thinking, needs, and objectives. She also worked to build real relationships, displaying curiosity about others' professional and personal interests and looking for points of commonality. And she left people feeling good, by making it clear that she recognized their status, value, and contributions and by showing that she cared about what she could do for them as much as what they could do for her.

Holly and other fast movers also understand the value of modesty. When transitioning and meeting new people, many of us are tempted to oversell ourselves—to describe our skills and experiences and immediately explain how we'll add value. But heed the adage: "Show, don't tell."

Consider Meredith, an executive who transitions frequently in her industrial-packaging company because others want her, rather than because she requests a transfer or a promotion. She told us that before relating any experience or sharing how her expertise might be relevant, she asks herself whether it will help the person she's speaking to or just cast herself in a better light. If the latter, she keeps it to herself.

Successful transitioners also adjust their approaches and ideas to mesh with new members of their networks. For example, in one new role, Meredith saw that her colleagues were much more

Fast movers get clarity on their value add and then work to improve in the areas where they're weak or find people whose knowledge and skills fill the gaps.

consensus-oriented than she was. So when she wanted to move forward on a plan to begin sourcing paperboard from Brazil, which involved weighing cost, quality, and sustainability concerns, she diligently worked to bring everyone on board, rather than making a unilateral decision or settling for a majority vote.

Of course, the fastest way to generate pull is through mutual wins that benefit new contacts as much as they do you. One of the people with whom Meredith linked up was the company's sustainable development officer, who at first opposed her idea because of the rampant falsification of Forest Stewardship Council certification in Brazil. While acknowledging that reality, Meredith made the case that a newly developed grease-barrier coating on the Brazilian paperboard would eliminate the need for plastic liners for food applications. The SDO saw this as a big win for him, so he reversed his position and supported her plan. Impressed by her knowledge and flexibility, he became a friend and an adviser, frequently coming to her with questions, information, and ideas for new initiatives.

Much transition advice focuses on how people should present their own stories and define themselves in others' eyes. We found that fast movers do it differently: They engage with collaborators to cocreate a joint narrative of success.

Identify how you add value, where you fall short, and who can fill the gaps. Whether your main contribution is your knowledge of a key technology, your ability to inspire people, or other skills and intangibles, you can use traditional connections, such as bosses, direct reports, and internal clients, to help you pinpoint exactly what others are expecting you to bring to the table. One executive we interviewed felt completely out of her depth in a new C-suite role that involved meetings on highly technical issues. "I had no idea what to say," she told us. "I didn't think I'd ever be able to speak in those terms." But the CEO reassured her. She recalls his saying, "The reason I picked you for this role was your ability to build momentum and communicate success. You don't have to know all of this."

He also noted that she would need to rely on her network for help. Transitions invariably create skills gaps like this. Most of us either fail to see them or try to bluff our way through. But fast movers get clarity on their value add and then work to improve in the areas where they're weak or find people whose knowledge and skills fill the gaps—which is often a faster and more effective way to come up to speed.

Consider Gary, a manager in an industrial firm, who was promoted to an executive role for his knowledge of a particular product line. He was a 20-year veteran of the organization who was staying within his area of expertise, and yet he soon realized that he was out of touch with some of the terminology being used in his unit. Instead of pretending to understand, he made a list of 33 terms he'd heard but didn't know and asked his team for help. One phrase in particular—"But is it A and K?" which meant "But is it awesome and kewl [cool]?"—opened his eyes to a new way of thinking about the production line. It was said half in jest, but it reflected very real concerns about the company's ability to make its factories more appealing to young workers.

Create scale. Fast movers can not only quickly integrate into their new roles but also get big things done by harnessing the power of those they know. They tap their networks for both *ideation* and *implementation*—that is, they seek help from innovators across the organization who can offer novel solutions to pressing problems and from influencers who can help execute on, spread, and sell those ideas.

A physician we'll call Calvin, who led a palliative-care group in a teaching hospital, illustrates how ideation within a transitioner's network can help achieve scale. When his hospital was integrated into a larger health care system that had little understanding of his field—the discipline of providing relief rather than aggressive treatment for seriously ill patients—Calvin feared that his group might be disbanded, so he started working to broaden his network in the newly merged organization. One contact led to another, and he was soon connected with doctors from specialties such as oncology and geriatrics, who were intrigued by his work, and with people in the health system's communications department. Those conversations sparked an idea: He could use internal publications, speeches, news-media interviews, and other tools of the PR trade to help more colleagues understand palliative care. Because he'd cultivated his new relationships with deliberation, generating pull just as Holly and Meredith did, those new communications-savvy contacts also helped him with implementation. They enthusiastically took up his cause,

lending their time and talents to write press releases, edit his blog posts, set up interviews with media outlets, and coach him on public speaking.

Calvin and the other fast movers we've studied make a point of connecting with four types of influencers to achieve scale: *central connectors,* who have big, informal networks that help them socialize ideas and garner support from specific groups; *boundary spanners,* who have ties across groups and geographies and can bridge silos; *energizers,* who create passion and enthusiasm in their interactions, thereby amplifying ideas and engaging the broader organization; and *resisters*—those contrarians and naysayers whose viewpoints must be taken into consideration early, both to improve the idea and, ideally, to get them on your side.

Working through his network, Calvin not only saved his team but established its members as go-to consultants for doctors throughout the hospital system.

Shape the network to maximize personal and professional well-being. Despite the stress inherent in taking on a new role, and all the networking they're doing, fast movers also manage to prioritize their physical and mental health. They don't allow the breadth of their networks to undermine the quality of their relationships or overwhelm them with too many demands for collaboration. They find people who understand, energize, adapt to, and create mutual wins for them just as they did for others. They rely on people who can fill their skills gaps and free them up for more valuable, meaningful, and scalable work.

A carefully crafted, supportive network shields them from some of the pressures of their new roles. As Jerome, a consumer-products marketing-analytics expert tasked with a new initiative, explains, "If I get stuck on one thing, I have six or seven people I can talk to....If the problem is more cerebral, more strategic, there are other people I reach out to." Another transitioner told us that because he has created a larger circle of people "who know me, who I have shared my story with...almost like an advisory board," he knows it's always "OK to pick up the phone and talk to somebody."

Some of your new connections should be role models—contacts who show you a path to better work/life balance. An engineer and project manager we'll call Barry told us that his networking efforts in a new role led him to people whose successful management of career and family gave him the confidence to rethink his own patterns of behavior. "When I see them, it gives me a clear understanding that I can have that too, if I take actions to make it happen," he said. He now leaves work early to avoid a traffic-clogged commute, stays offline on weekends, and serves on the board of a local charter school.

If organizations want to ensure that everyone who transitions has a reasonable shot at becoming a fast mover, leaders must develop a networks-first mindset—an understanding of the prime importance of connections in today's highly mobile workforce and how they really function. Many companies pay lip service to supporting networking for new hires and promoted employees. But then they simply provide social hours, urge involvement in external associations, or assume that the bigger your network, the better. Not so. Some of the most effective fast movers make a point of engaging more intentionally with smaller subsets of super helpful people.

Organizations can further help transitioners by thoughtfully establishing norms for sharing expertise in meetings, pairing newcomers with veterans, and continuing onboarding programs well into the first year. They can develop leadership training that intentionally cuts across silos, conduct "connections audits" to help employees build their networks, and flag ineffective networking practices. And they can deploy coaches and mentors to spread best practices.

Networking for transition doesn't have to be a do-it-yourself exercise. Employers can lead the way in showing people how to quickly build the connections that will help them thrive.

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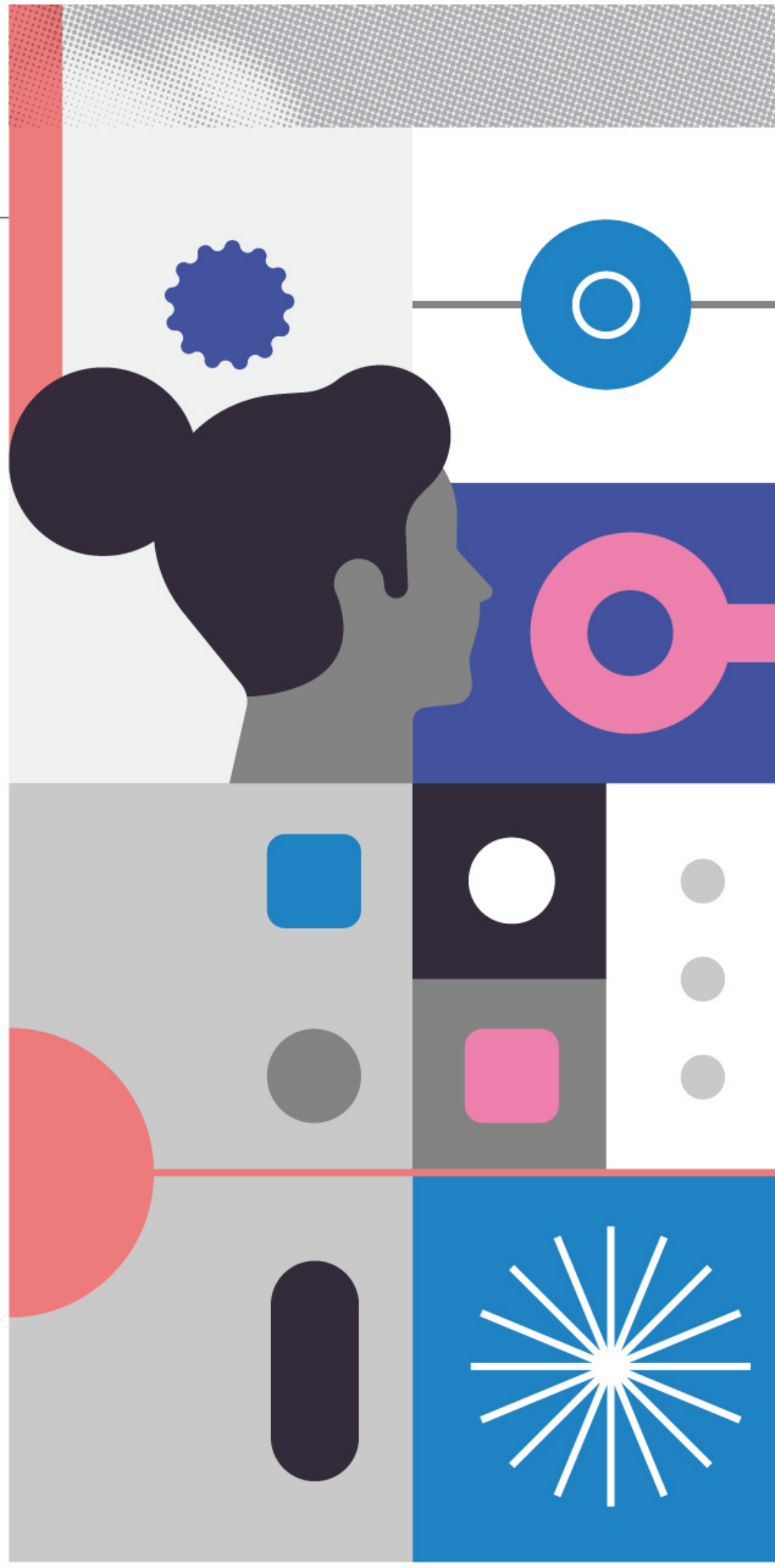


ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED DECEMBER 2005

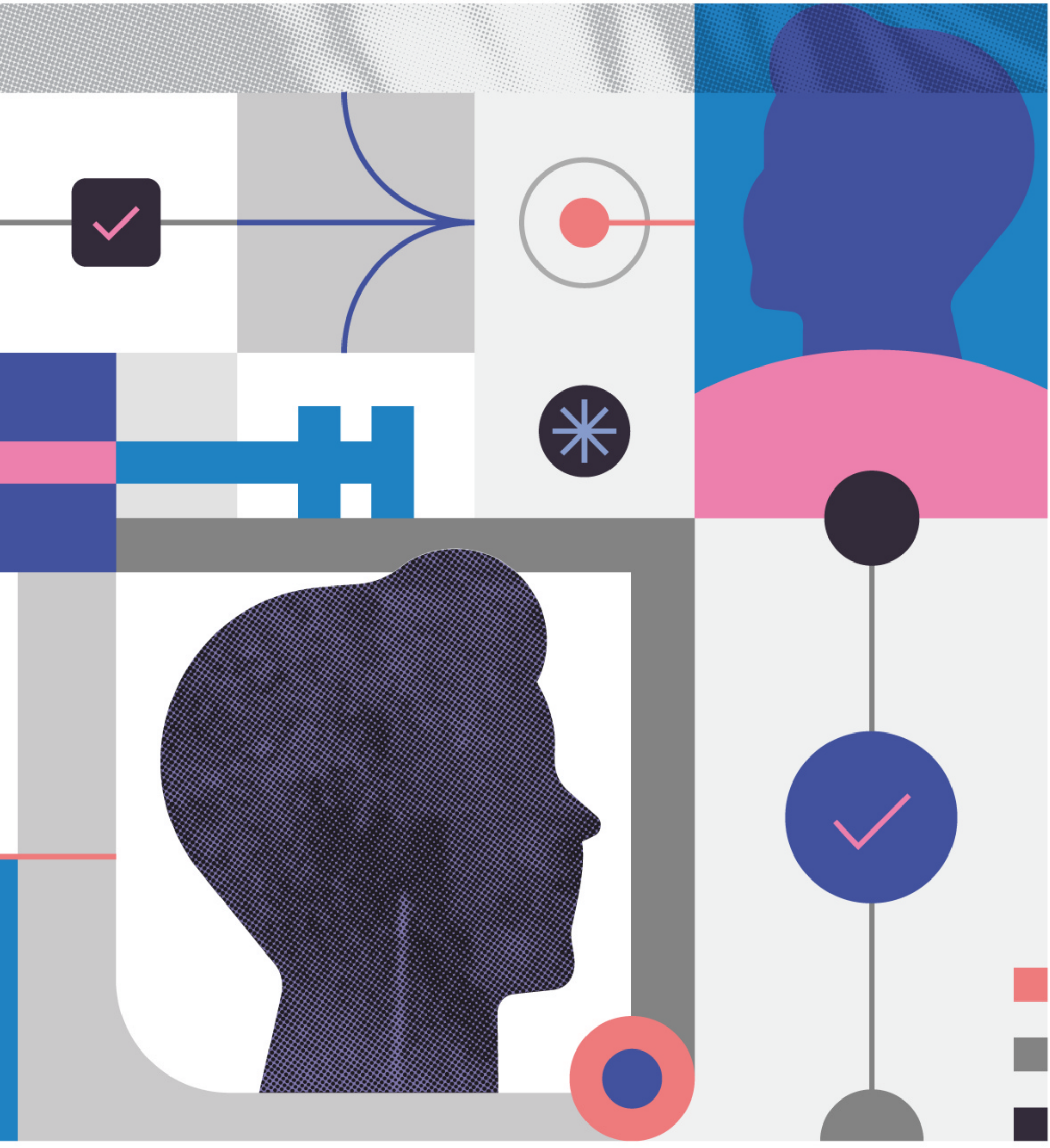
How to Build Your Network

Strong personal networks don't just happen at the watercooler. They have to be carefully constructed. Here's how to strengthen your connections.

→ by BRIAN UZZI and SHANNON DUNLAP

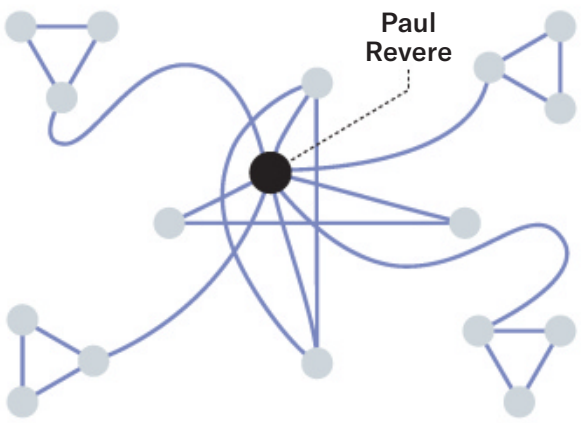
IF YOU WERE to ask your colleagues, "Who was Paul Revere?" most would probably know the answer. He was, after all, immortalized in the Longfellow poem that begins, "Listen, my children, and you shall hear of the midnight ride of Paul Revere." Yet how many of your colleagues, students of American history aside, would be familiar with William Dawes? Both men rode on horseback from Boston on the night of April 18, 1775. Both sounded the alarm that the Revolutionary War had begun. Dawes rode south while Revere rode north, but the towns they traveled through were demographically similar. Both men came from the same

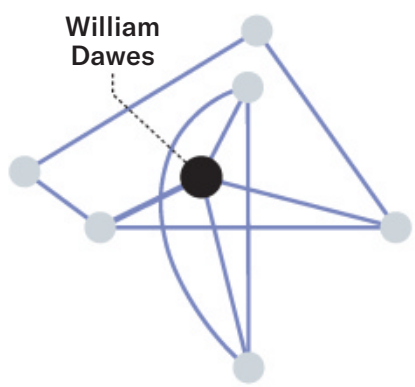
Illustration by **KEMAL SANLI**



The Networks of Paul Revere and William Dawes

Paul Revere's social network connects multiple clusters of people who are linked through Revere himself, while William Dawes's network is just one big cluster. It's easy to see why news carried by Revere would reach a wider audience than news carried by Dawes.





social class and had similar educational backgrounds. But only Revere raised a militia, and only Revere's name became famous. What accounts for the difference? In large part, the type of social network each man cultivated.

Paul Revere was an *information broker,* a person who occupies a key role in a social network by connecting disparate groups of people. Because Revere targeted other well-connected people during his ride, his news spread widely and quickly, as explained in Malcolm Gladwell's *The Tipping Point,* for example. William Dawes was not an information broker, so he didn't know which doors to knock on when he entered a new town. As a result, the information he carried was circulated within a small group of people instead of expanding outward. (See the exhibit "The Networks of Paul Revere and William Dawes.")

Now imagine that the information being ferried by messengers isn't about redcoats but about a new product idea or a different way to manage a team. If that information isn't delivered to the right people, it will wither and die. For example, before Microsoft was a household name, Bill Gates had a singular distinction in his network—his mother, Mary Gates, who sat on the board of United Way with John Akers, a high-level IBM executive. At the time, Akers was helping to lead IBM into the desktop computer business. Mary Gates talked to Akers about the new breed of small companies in the computer industry, which she felt were underappreciated competitors of the larger firms with which IBM traditionally partnered. Maybe she changed Akers's vision of who to go to for the new IBM PC's DOS, or maybe her comments confirmed what he already knew. In either case, after their conversation, Akers took proposals from small companies, one of which was Microsoft. The rest is history: Microsoft won the DOS contract and eventually eclipsed IBM as the world's most powerful computer company. Without Bill Gates's potent network, a sensational new operating system might have faded into obscurity just like William Dawes.

Studies have shown the same correlations between networks like Paul Revere's and success in various commercial ventures. Networks determine which ideas become breakthroughs, which new drugs are prescribed, which farmers cultivate pest-resistant crops, and which R&D engineers make the most high-impact discoveries. In a monumental 1998 study of innovations in science, art, and philosophy, sociologist Randall Collins of the University of Pennsylvania showed that breakthroughs from icons such as the seven sages of antiquity, Freud, Picasso, Watson and Crick, and Pythagoras were the consequence of a particular type of personal network that prompted exceptional individual creativity. In fact, Collins could find only three exceptions in all of recorded history: Taoist metaphysician Wang Chung, Zen spiritualist Bassui Tokusho, and the Arabic philosopher Ibn Khaldun.

In this article, we'll take a close look at the inner workings of networks. We'll also show you how to diagnose your current network, create a more potent one, and then actively manage it.

If you've introduced yourself to your key contacts more than 65% of the time, then your network may be too inbred.

A Powerful System

Networks deliver three unique advantages: private information, access to diverse skill sets, and power. Executives see these advantages at work every day, but might not pause to consider how their networks regulate them.

When we make judgments, we use both public and private information. These days, public information is easily available from a variety of sources, including the Internet; but precisely because it is so accessible, public information offers significantly less competitive advantage than it used to.

Private information, by contrast, is gathered from personal contacts who can offer something unique that cannot be found in the public domain, such as the release date of a new product, unpublished software code, or knowledge about what a particular interviewer looks for in candidates. Private information, therefore, can give top executives an edge, though it is more subjective than public information because usually it is not verified by an independent party, such as Dun & Bradstreet. Consequently, the value of your private information to others—and the value of others' private information to you—depends on how much trust exists in the network of relationships.

Lisa Bristol (not her real name) is the president of a financial institution in the mortgage-lending industry. Historically, her firm had hesitated to share private information with potential alliance partners for fear of appropriation or misinterpretation. Bristol realized, however, that when she began developing trust with them through trade shows and informal shared activities, private information started to flow in both directions. This helped Bristol solve problems and develop financial strategies more efficiently than when she relied solely on public information, which most of her competitors also possessed. For example, the public information concerning her industry indicated that success was based on price points. But, through her network, Bristol became one of the first executives to piece together the features of her industry's new competitive driver: She learned that some companies had been experimenting with value-added services and that they were achieving greater success than companies that relied on price points. By using this information, she was able to position her company at the forefront of this trend and capture market share before other companies attempted to move into the niche.

The next advantage that a network like Paul Revere's confers is access to a diverse array of skill sets. Linus Pauling, one of only two people to win a Nobel Prize in two different areas and considered one of the towering geniuses of the twentieth century, attributed his creative success not to his immense brainpower or luck but to his diverse contacts: "The best way to have a good idea is to have a lot of ideas." While expertise has become more specialized during the past 15 years, organizational, product, and marketing issues have become more interdisciplinary, which means that individual success is tied to the ability to transcend natural skill limitations through others. Highly diverse network ties, therefore, can help you develop more complete, creative,

Idea in Brief

Networks deliver three unique advantages: private information, access to diverse skill sets, and power. If your connections know you and one another through similarities in experience, training, worldview, background, or proximity, trust will be strong and private information will flow—but for your network to work for you, it needs to be more than an echo chamber.

To break through the barriers of self-similarity and proximity, form bonds with people through *shared activities,* such as joining a board or a racing club. Potent networks are not forged through casual interactions but through activities in which you can celebrate and commiserate with a diverse group of others.

To forge more useful connections, identify the *information brokers* and *superconnectors* in your network—people who connect disparate groups and can introduce you to new opportunities.

How to Map Your Network

This exhibit reveals part of coauthor Brian Uzzi's completed work sheet. At the top of his list, for example, is Mark Granovetter, who was Uzzi's graduate school adviser. Granovetter shares his research with Uzzi before it reaches the public domain and reads Uzzi's papers before they're sent out for review. The work sheet also reveals that Uzzi's superconnector is Steve Alltop. He introduced Uzzi to both Greg Duncan and Henry Bienen, who are individually vital to Uzzi's network.

Name of contact	Who introduced you to the contact?	To whom did you introduce the contact?
Mark Granovetter	Me	
Greg Duncan	**Steve Alltop**	
Deb Gruenfeld	Me	
Henry Bienen	**Steve Alltop**	
John Wolken	Mitch Petersen	

Super connector

and unbiased views of issues. And when you trade information or skills with people whose experiences differ from your own, you provide one another with unique, exceptionally valuable resources.

The final advantage of a network like Paul Revere's is power. Traditionally, executive power was embedded in a firm's hierarchy. When corporate organizations became flatter, more like pancakes than pyramids, that power was repositioned in the network's information brokers, who could adapt to changes in the organization, develop clients, and synthesize opposing points of view. These brokers weren't necessarily at the top of the hierarchy or experts in their fields, but they linked specialists in the firm with trustworthy and informative ties.

Most personal networks are highly clustered—that is, an individual's friends are likely to be friends with one another as well. Most corporate networks are made up of several clusters but with few links between them. Brokers are especially powerful because they connect the separate clusters, thus stimulating collaboration and exploiting arbitrage among otherwise independent specialists.

When Bristol actively expanded her network to include people whose expertise and positions differed from her own, she could link with brokers in her own field as well as in other areas that were strategically important to mortgage lending. These ties spurred creative problem solving and prompted invitations for Bristol to speak at industry events that valued and showcased forward thinkers. Soon, she earned a reputation for spotting promising innovations in their preview stages. Informal post-talk discussions spilled over into formal office discussions, and Bristol went on to lead an advisory group made up of ten high-level financial executives. Bristol didn't need to change her work style fundamentally or develop an entirely new expertise to achieve this success. Rather, she used her new network to turn what she already knew into power, both individually and for her firm.

Sometimes, however, the advantages of private information, access to diverse skill sets, and power, can work in opposition to one another. Choosing contacts to maximize a sense of trust in your network, for example, can inadvertently undercut its diversity—that's what thwarted William Dawes's network. You can avoid the pitfalls, but first you must learn how to diagnose your network.

Diagnose Your Network

You can use a work sheet like the one in the exhibit "How to Map Your Network" to determine what type of network you currently have, discover how your networking practices can lead to one kind of network or another, and overcome the key paradoxes of network building. Starting with the left-hand column of the work sheet, fill in the names of the most important contacts in your network—people you rely on for the exchange of private information, specialized expertise, advice, and creative inspiration. A crucial contact could be your former college roommate who has become influential in an area of interest to you and your firm, a current business associate, an old colleague from the first company you ever worked for, or your brother-in-law. As you write in each name, think of the resources you exchange with that person, the quid pro quos, and the strength of your ties.

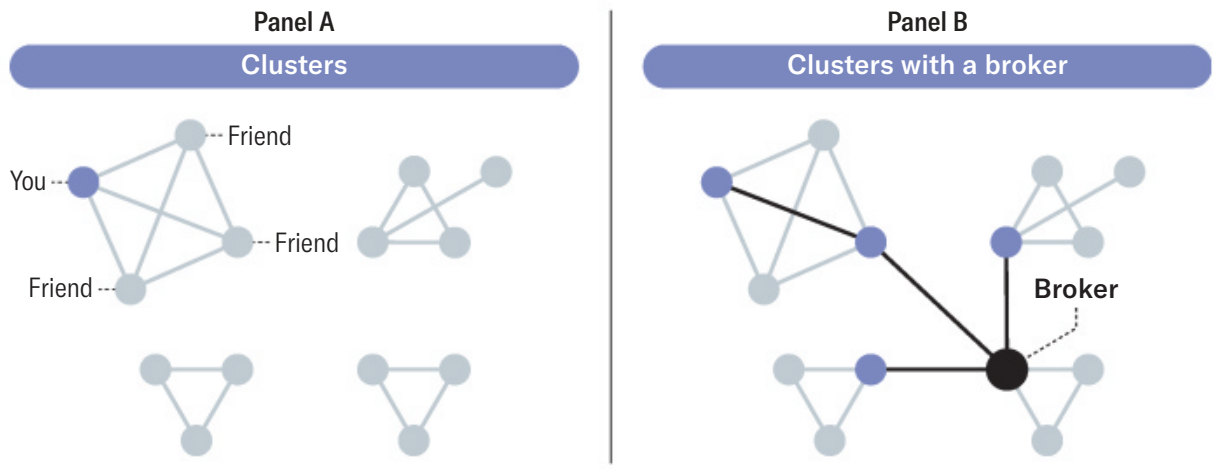
To build a network rich in social capital, cultivate powerful brokers who aren't in positions of formal authority—the places where everyone else looks.

After you identify your key contacts, think about how you first met them. In the center column of the work sheet, write the name of the person who introduced you to your contact (if you met the person yourself, write "me"). This column will reveal the brokers in your network and help you see the networking practices you used to connect with them. In the right-hand column, write the name of someone you introduced to your key contact. This column will demonstrate how you act as a broker for others.

Once your data is filled in, look at the number of times "me" appears in the center column. According to our studies, if you've introduced yourself to your key contacts more than 65% of the time, then you're probably building your network using the *self-similarity principle* and your network may be too inbred. The self-similarity principle states that, when you make network contacts, you tend to choose people who resemble you in terms of experience, training, worldview, and so on. We have found that executives, in particular, disproportionately use the self-similarity principle to build their networks. Obviously, it is easier to trust someone who views the world through the same lens you do; you expect that person to act as you would in ambiguous situations. What's more, working with people who share your background is often very efficient: You both recognize concepts that allow you to transfer information quickly, and you are less likely to challenge one another's ideas. Finally, like-minded people will usually affirm your point of view and, as a result, gratify your ego.

The Importance of Brokers in Companies

Panel A shows that social networks are typically separate clusters—friends of friends are also friends with one another, and they share similarities with the creator of the network, creating what we call an echo chamber. Friendship clusters within companies are no different from friendship clusters outside work. But Panel B shows how brokers within companies can connect the specialized pools of knowledge by linking independent clusters together—giving every member of each cluster better access to other parts of the companywide network.



Our research shows, however, that these benefits offer diminishing returns—and can even turn negative. Too much similarity restricts your access to discrepant information, which is crucial to both creativity and problem solving. If all your contacts think the way you do, who will question your reasoning or push you to expand your horizon? And because, over time, people tend to introduce their contacts to one another so that everyone becomes friends, the similarity of thought and skill reverberates, creating what we call an echo chamber. (See the exhibit "The Importance of Brokers in Companies.")

The self-similarity principle contains pitfalls, however, and even strategic thinkers can be oblivious to them. An excellent illustration comes from Columbia University management professors Paul Ingram and Michael W. Morris. They conducted a study in 2002 to investigate whether executives in the process of making new contacts would fall prey to the self-similarity principle. As part of Columbia's executive MBA program, students were invited to a "business mixer" for a chance to meet new people. At the event, each student wore an inconspicuous electronic device, similar to ones used by a local dating service, that recorded who they talked to and for how long. A survey taken before the event indicated that the executives' primary goal was to meet as many different people as possible. In practice, however, the students formed new ties with others who were most like them—the investment bankers connected with other investment bankers, the marketing executives talked to other marketing executives, and so on. The most successful

In terms of building your network, an independent activity such as running won't help you nearly as much as joining a running club.

networker that evening, in fact, turned out to be the bartender.

Another obstacle to diversity in networks is the *proximity principle,* which holds that workers prefer to populate their networks with the people they spend the most time with, such as colleagues in their department. The reason this principle works against building efficient networks is that the world is organized by like things—people with the same training tend to be in the same department, just as people with similar backgrounds tend to live in the same neighborhood. If you follow your natural tendencies and build networks according to the proximity and self-similarity principles, you will create echo chambers in your network and reduce opportunities to enrich your networks with greater diversity.

Forge Better Connections

The best way to break through the barriers created by the self-similarity and proximity principles is by using the *shared activities principle.* Potent networks are not forged through casual interactions but through relatively high-stakes activities that connect you with diverse others. Think again about Bill Gates. Schmoozing didn't connect Mary Gates with IBM's Akers; rather, their trust, exchange of private information, and access to each other's diverse skills were by-products of their work on the same nonprofit board—a shared activity. Any executive can participate in and benefit from a variety of shared activities, including sports teams, community service ventures, interdepartmental initiatives, voluntary associations, for-profit boards, cross-functional teams, and charitable foundations.

The secret to understanding the power of shared activities in building networks begins with recognizing that not all shared activities are equally potent. Like Gates and Akers's work on a nonprofit board, activities that evoke passion in participants, necessitate interdependence, and have something at stake are more likely to produce networks like Paul Revere's. Someone who cares passionately about an activity will find a way to fit it into his or her busy schedule. And reliance on others to get the job done can build trust quickly, even among diverse individuals. Finally, having something at stake—competing for a prize, breaking a personal record, or achieving a long-term goal—provides opportunities for celebration and commiseration, both of which generate bonds of loyalty that sustain a relationship over time. Consequently, in terms of building your network, an independent activity such as running won't help you nearly as much as joining a running club. And you'll form the strongest ties with other runners in a club when you train with them for a race.

Shared activities bring together a cross-section of disparate individuals around a common point of interest, instead of connecting similar individuals with shared backgrounds. They let you observe your contacts in a wide range of situations. Participation in a shared activity allows for unscripted behaviors and natural responses to unexpected events—things that rarely show up during business lunches or office meetings, where impressions are managed and presentations are carefully rehearsed. Moreover, because these responses are spontaneous, they are more likely to be perceived as genuine, stable attributes of character that apply not only to the current activity but to other pursuits as well, including commercial endeavors. And because the opportunities for celebration and commiseration generate bonds of loyalty, these diverse individuals can enjoy close working relationships that they might not otherwise have formed.

Todd Reding, a client development executive for nonprofit firms, has witnessed the benefits of shared activities firsthand. Whenever he can, he meets with potential donors through shared activities that are outside a typical business setting. In one instance, Reding expressed interest in a potential donor's passion for competitive waterskiing. The donor invited Reding to try it himself, then spent several hours coaching him through a challenging slalom course, shortening the rope to the boat after each run so that Reding's turns became sharper and faster. Despite the differences in their backgrounds, the men quickly began to trust each other as they observed their reactions to unexpected events and shared the emotional roller coaster of failing—and then getting it right.

Shared activities also forge ties between diverse individuals by changing their usual patterns of interaction, letting them break out of their prescribed business roles of subordinate, relationship manager, aide, finance whiz, cognoscente, or president and stand out from the crowd. Reding's "I can

CASE STUDY

How to Fix a Networking Slump

Everyone experiences a lull at some point in his or her career. One way to jump-start your resurgence is to examine your social network for clues about how to get back on track.

Margy Stratton had hit her slump and knew something had to change. A vice president at a manufacturing company, Stratton had been logging more and more hours in her office, but didn't feel like her career was improving. In fact, things seemed to be getting worse. She had stopped getting calls about the kind of projects that she cared deeply about and that energized her creativity at work. She felt disconnected from the community.

When Stratton filled out our network work sheet, she saw interesting patterns emerge. First, she recognized that many of the names in the left-hand column were board members from nonprofit organizations she had been involved with. However, she had stepped down from two of her three board positions 18 months ago, to be more visible at work.

One look at the center column revealed Stratton's broker; Corina Johnson's (not her real name) name appeared in nearly one-third of the spaces. Johnson was dynamic and seemed to know everyone. She was the kind of person it was impossible to say no to—which is how she recruited Stratton for the fine arts board. She had introduced Stratton to lots of people, from members of other boards to the best nanny that Stratton had ever hired. Furthermore, Johnson was a broker of quality as well as quantity, introducing Stratton to business associates who could truly help her career. But it had been more than a year since they had spent time together; Stratton realized that she'd been neglecting her most powerful superconnector.

The right-hand column of Stratton's work sheet showed that she had also served as a broker for others. Stratton had often introduced people to one another across boards, and her key shared activity, her involvement in several boards, had made her feel well connected. That confidence had made her more resourceful in creating links among the people she knew and in winning their gratitude. Now that Stratton understands the importance of her shared activities, she is planning to revitalize her network and galvanize her career.

step up to a challenge" actions distinguished him from other development executives, and the potential donor was able to see aspects of Reding's character that he felt were critical for putting his investment to proper use. Similarly, the donor's increased trust in Reding prompted the donor to reveal personal experiences that helped Reding revise his original proposal and secure a contribution.

Benjamin Weeks (not his real name), an executive at a life insurance company, has learned how to turn work situations into shared activities to manage upward relationships. Weeks, originally trained as a litigator, used his communication skills to write speeches for one of his company's more senior executives. Through this shared activity, Weeks and the executive moved away from the standard superior-subordinate relationship and formed a closer bond, sharing the highs and lows of their work. As they collaborated on the speeches, they learned about each other's "blind spots and boundaries," as Weeks says, perhaps without even realizing what they were revealing. The interaction made them both more vulnerable but also generated opportunities to demonstrate their trustworthiness to each other. Soon Weeks found himself mediating between the executive and others in the company. "They know I'm the one who understands how he works," Weeks concluded.

In essence, the shared activities principle offers the benefits of the self-similarity and proximity principles without their downside—creating a redundant and inefficient network.

Go for Broke(rs)

Returning to your work sheet, take a look at the names of your brokers in the center column. It's important to determine who your brokers are so you can discover what activities bring you into contact with them and how you can further develop those ties. Perhaps the individuals you listed are not obviously powerful broker candidates like CEOs or partners at law firms, but you can reach them and they are well connected to clusters outside your current circles.

Now examine the people listed multiple times in the first column and think

about how you met them. The exhibit "How to Map Your Network" displays a partial list of coauthor Brian Uzzi's personal networks and suggests that Steve Alltop is an important broker; he connected Uzzi to Northwestern University's Greg Duncan and Henry Bienen. How did Alltop and Uzzi meet? Not in a business setting but as partners in an unexpected pickup game of squash—a shared activity. After that first encounter and a couple of follow-up rounds, Alltop asked Uzzi to substitute for him in other squash games. That's when Uzzi met Bienen and Duncan, both of whom now figure largely in Uzzi's career.

Indeed Alltop, who is a senior lecturer of music and who also conducts the Northwestern University symphony orchestra, turned out to be a *superconnector*—a powerful broker who shares his diverse contacts. As conductor, he attends most major university events, from professional-school graduations to welcoming events for important donors and celebrity guests. Essentially, Alltop's occupation is one big shared activity, and this—not his level of formal power in the organization—accounts for his broad, diverse network.

To build a network rich in social capital, cultivate powerful brokers who aren't in positions of formal authority—the places where everyone else looks. For example, a crucial superconnector in Todd Reding's network was Pete Barnette (not his real name), an attorney he met through their joint links to a nonprofit board. Barnette was responsible for many of Reding's important business contacts in various locations, such as Chicago, Iowa, and Arkansas.

We've often been asked if a broker should be told of his or her role once an executive is aware of it. On one hand, telling a person that he is disproportionately important to your network could alter the relational dynamics. The broker might feel used or might want something in return that you cannot give. On the other hand, a disclosure could deepen the relationship by revealing gratitude and sincerity, which, in our estimation, is the best principle of action in a network.

When Reding meets brokers like Barnette, he openly tells them that he appreciates their assistance in making new contacts. The brokers are always flattered and willing to help, he says. Similarly, Uzzi's revelation to Alltop that he was a superconnector turned into concrete business implications for Alltop. With new knowledge about how networks operate, Alltop decided to accept an offer to become conductor of the Cheyenne Symphony Orchestra in Wyoming. He took the position not only because it was a great opportunity for him, but also because many of the CSO's musicians worked for other major orchestras in the off-season. Alltop realized that the connections he could make through the CSO could get his name on those other groups' radar screens. After two years in Cheyenne, Alltop's network paid off. Though he hadn't learned special new pieces of music or become more musically talented, he was invited to conduct a weeklong classical music festival in Bologna, Italy—a festival that attracts journalists, photographers, and radio and TV coverage—thus extending his reach even farther.

Research shows that if you create your networks with trust, diversity, and brokerage, you can raise your level of information from *what* you know to *who* you know.

MORE THAN 100 years ago, Ralph Waldo Emerson reportedly declared during a lecture, "If a man can write a better book, preach a better sermon, or make a better mousetrap than his neighbor, though he build his house in the woods, the world will make a beaten path to his door." But Emerson was only half right. Creativity and insight are certainly important, but without an effective network, you may never spark your imagination, reinvent yourself, or declare your sensational news to the world.

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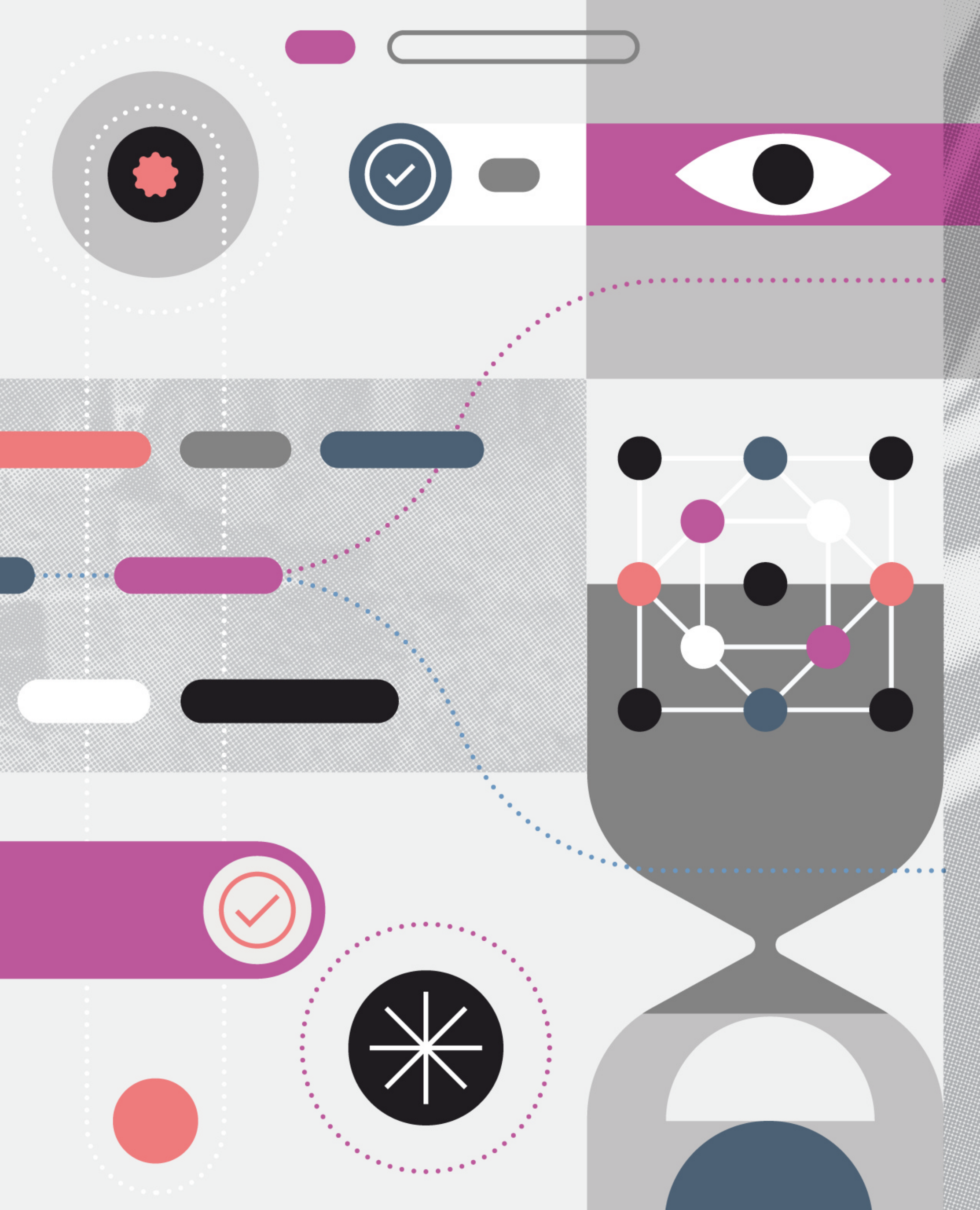

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How Leaders Create and Use Networks

Successful leaders have a nose for opportunity and a knack for knowing whom to tap to get things done. These qualities depend on a set of strategic networking skills that nonleaders rarely possess.

→ by HERMINIA IBARRA and MARK HUNTER

WHEN HENRIK BALMER became the production manager and a board member of a newly bought-out cosmetics firm, improving his network was the last thing on his mind. The main problem he faced was time: Where would he find the hours to guide his team through a major upgrade of the production process and then think about strategic issues like expanding the business? The only way he could carve out time and still get home to his family at a decent hour was to lock himself—literally—in his office. Meanwhile, there were day-to-day issues to resolve, like a recurring conflict with his sales director over custom orders that compromised production efficiency. Networking, which Henrik defined as the unpleasant task of trading favors with strangers, was a luxury he could not afford. But when a new acquisition was presented at a board meeting without his input, he abruptly realized he was out of the loop—not just inside the company, but outside, too—at a moment when his future in the company was at stake.

Henrik's case is not unusual. Over the past two years, we have been following a cohort of 30 managers making their way through what we call the leadership transition, an inflection point in their careers that challenges them to rethink both themselves and their roles. In the process, we've found that networking—creating a fabric of personal contacts who will provide support, feedback, insight, resources, and information—is simultaneously one of the most self-evident and one of the most dreaded developmental challenges that aspiring leaders must address.

Their discomfort is understandable. Typically, managers rise through the ranks by dint of a strong command of the technical elements of their jobs and a nose-to-the-grindstone focus on accomplishing their teams' objectives. When challenged to move beyond their functional specialties and address strategic issues facing the overall business, many managers do not immediately grasp that this will involve relational—not analytical—tasks. Nor do they easily understand that exchanges and interactions with a diverse array of current and potential stakeholders are not distractions from their "real work" but are actually at the heart of their new leadership roles.

Like Henrik (whose identity we've disguised, along with all the other managers we describe here), a majority of the managers we work with say that they find networking insincere or manipulative—at best, an elegant way of using people. Not surprisingly, for every manager who instinctively constructs and maintains a useful network, we see several who struggle to overcome this innate resistance. Yet the alternative to networking is to fail—either in reaching for a leadership position or in succeeding at it.

Watching our emerging leaders approach this daunting task, we discovered that three distinct but interdependent forms of networking—*operational, personal,* and *strategic*—played a vital role in their transitions. The first helped them manage current internal responsibilities, the second boosted their personal development, and the third opened their eyes to new business

Illustration by **KEMAL SANLI**

directions and the stakeholders they would need to enlist. While our managers differed in how well they pursued operational and personal networking, we discovered that almost all of them underutilized strategic networking. In this article, we describe key features of each networking form (summarized in the exhibit "The Three Forms of Networking") and, using our managers' experiences, explain how a three-pronged networking strategy can become part and parcel of a new leader's development plan.

Operational Networking

All managers need to build good working relationships with the people who can help them do their jobs. The number and breadth of people involved can be impressive—such operational networks include not only direct reports and superiors but also peers within an operational unit, other internal players with the power to block or support a project, and key outsiders such as suppliers, distributors, and customers. The purpose of this type of networking is to ensure coordination and cooperation among people who have to know and trust one another in order to accomplish their immediate tasks. That isn't always easy, but it is relatively straightforward, because the task provides focus and a clear criterion for membership in the network: Either you're necessary to the job and helping to get it done, or you're not.

Although operational networking was the form that came most naturally to the managers we studied, nearly every one had important blind spots regarding people and groups they depended on to make things happen. In one case, Alistair, an accounting manager who worked in an entrepreneurial firm with several hundred employees, was suddenly promoted by the company's founder to financial director and given a seat on the board. He was both the youngest and the least-experienced board member, and his instinctive response to these new responsibilities was to reestablish his functional credentials. Acting on a hint from the founder that the company might go public, Alistair undertook a reorganization of the accounting department that would enable the books to withstand close scrutiny. Alistair succeeded brilliantly in upgrading his team's capabilities, but he missed the fact that only a minority of the seven-person board shared the founder's ambition. A year into Alistair's tenure, discussion about whether to take the company public polarized the board, and he discovered that all that time cleaning up the books might have been better spent sounding out his codirectors.

One of the problems with an exclusive reliance on operational networks is that they are usually geared toward meeting objectives as assigned, not toward asking the strategic question, "What *should* we be doing?" By the same token, managers do not exercise as much personal choice in assembling operational relationships as they do in weaving personal and strategic networks, because to a large extent the right relationships are prescribed by the job and organizational structure. Thus, most operational networking occurs within an organization, and ties are determined in large part by routine, short-term demands. Relationships formed with outsiders, such as board members, customers, and regulators, are directly task-related and tend to be bounded and constrained by demands determined at a higher level. Of course, an individual manager can choose to deepen and develop the ties to different extents, and all managers exercise discretion over who gets priority attention. It's the quality of relationships—the rapport and mutual trust—that gives an operational network its power. Nonetheless, the substantial constraints on network membership mean these connections are unlikely to deliver value to managers beyond assistance with the task at hand.

The typical manager in our group was more concerned with sustaining cooperation within the existing network than with building relationships to face nonroutine or unforeseen challenges. But as a manager moves into a leadership role, his or her network must reorient itself externally and toward the future.

Personal Networking

We observed that once aspiring leaders like Alistair awaken to the dangers of an excessively internal focus, they begin to seek kindred spirits outside their organizations. Simultaneously, they become aware of the limitations of their social skills, such as a lack of knowledge about professional domains beyond their own, which makes it difficult for them to find common ground with people outside their usual circles. Through professional associations, alumni groups, clubs, and personal interest communities, managers gain new perspectives that allow them to advance in their careers. This is what we mean by personal networking.

Many of the managers we study question why they should spend precious time on an activity so indirectly related to the work at hand. Why widen one's circle of casual acquaintances when there isn't time even for urgent tasks? The answer is that these contacts provide important referrals, information, and, often, developmental support such as coaching and mentoring. A newly appointed factory director, for example, faced with a turnaround-or-close-down situation that was paralyzing his staff, joined a business organization—and through it met a lawyer who became his counsel in the turnaround. Buoyed by his success, he networked within his company's headquarters in search of someone who had dealt with a similar crisis. Eventually, he found two mentors.

A personal network can also be a safe space for personal development and as such can provide a foundation for strategic networking. The experience of Timothy, a principal in a midsize software company, is a good example. Like his father, Timothy stuttered. When he had the opportunity to prepare for meetings, his stutter was not an issue, but spontaneous encounters inside and outside the company were dreadfully painful. To solve this problem, he began accepting at least two invitations per week to the social gatherings he had assiduously ignored before. Before each event, he asked who else had been invited and did background research on the other guests so that he could initiate conversations. The hardest part, he said, was "getting through the door." Once inside, his interest in the conversations helped him forget himself and master his stutter. As his stutter diminished, he also applied himself to networking across his company, whereas previously he had taken refuge in his technical expertise. Like Timothy, several of our emerging leaders successfully used personal networking as a relatively safe way to expose problems and seek insight into solutions—safe, that is, compared with strategic networking, in which the stakes are far higher.

Personal networks are largely external, made up of discretionary links to people with whom we have something in common. As a result, what makes a personal network powerful is its referral potential. According to the famous six degrees of separation principle, our personal contacts are valuable to the extent that they help us reach, in as few connections as possible, the far-off person who has the information we need.

In watching managers struggle to widen their professional relationships in ways that feel both natural and legitimate to them, we repeatedly saw them shift their time and energy from operational to personal networking. For people who have rarely looked outside their organizations, this is an important first step, one that fosters a deeper understanding of themselves and the environments in which they move. Ultimately, however, personal networking alone won't propel managers through the leadership transition. Aspiring leaders may find people who awaken new interests but fail to become comfortable with the power players at the level above them. Or they may achieve new influence within a professional community but fail to harness those ties in the service of organizational goals. That's why managers who know they need to develop their networking skills, and make a real effort to do so, nonetheless may end up feeling like they have wasted their time and energy. As we'll see, personal networking will not help a manager through the leadership transition unless he or she learns how to bring those connections to bear on organizational strategy.

Idea in Brief

What separates successful leaders from the rest of the pack? Networking: creating a tissue of personal contacts to provide the support, feedback, and resources needed to get things done.

Yet many leaders avoid networking. Some think they don't have time for it. Others disdain it as manipulative.

To succeed as a leader, Ibarra and Hunter recommend building three types of networks:

Operational. People you need to accomplish your assigned, routine tasks.

Personal. Kindred spirits outside your organization who can help you with personal advancement.

Strategic. People outside your control who will enable you to reach key organizational objectives.

You need all three types of networks. But to *really* succeed, you must master strategic networking—by interacting regularly with people who can open your eyes to new business opportunities and help you capitalize on them. Build your strategic network, and burnish your own—and your company's—performance.

The Three Forms of Networking

Managers who think they are adept at networking are often operating only at an operational or personal level. Effective leaders learn to employ networks for strategic purposes.

	OPERATIONAL	PERSONAL	STRATEGIC
Purpose	Getting work done efficiently; maintaining the capacities and functions required of the group.	Enhancing personal and professional development; providing referrals to useful information and contacts.	Figuring out future priorities and challenges; getting stakeholder support for them.
Location and temporal orientation	Contacts are mostly internal and oriented toward current demands.	Contacts are mostly external and oriented toward current interests and future potential interests.	Contacts are internal and external and oriented toward the future.
Players and recruitment	Key contacts are relatively non-discretionary; they are prescribed mostly by the task and organizational structure, so it is very clear who is relevant.	Key contacts are mostly discretionary; it is not always clear who is relevant.	Key contacts follow from the strategic context and the organizational environment, but specific membership is discretionary; it is not always clear who is relevant.
Network attributes and key behaviors	Depth: building strong working relationships.	Breadth: reaching out to contacts who can make referrals.	Leverage: creating inside-outside links.

Strategic Networking

When managers begin the delicate transition from functional manager to business leader, they must start to concern themselves with broad strategic issues. Lateral and vertical relationships with other functional and business unit managers—all people outside their immediate control—become a lifeline for figuring out how their own contributions fit into the big picture. Thus strategic networking plugs the aspiring leader into a set of relationships and information sources that collectively embody the power to achieve personal and organizational goals.

Operating beside players with diverse affiliations, backgrounds, objectives, and incentives requires a manager to formulate business rather than functional objectives, and to work through the coalitions and networks needed to sell ideas and compete for resources.

Consider Sophie, a manager who, after rising steadily through the ranks in logistics and distribution, was stupefied to learn that the CEO was considering a radical reorganization of her function that would strip her of some responsibilities. Rewarded to date for incremental annual improvements, she had failed to notice shifting priorities in the wider market and the resulting internal shuffle for resources and power at the higher levels of her company. Although she had built a loyal, high-performing team, she had few relationships outside her group to help her anticipate the new imperatives, let alone give her ideas about how to respond. After she argued that distribution issues were her purview, and failed to be persuasive, she hired consultants to help her prepare a counterproposal. But Sophie's boss simply concluded that she lacked a broad, longer-term business perspective. Frustrated, Sophie contemplated leaving the company. Only after some patient coaching from a senior manager did she understand that she had to get out of her unit and start talking to opinion leaders inside and outside the company to form a sellable plan for the future.

What differentiates a leader from a manager, research tells us, is the ability to figure out where to go and to enlist the people and groups necessary to get there. Recruiting stakeholders, lining up allies and sympathizers, diagnosing the political landscape, and brokering conversations among unconnected parties are all part of a leader's job. As they step up to the leadership transition, some managers accept their growing dependence on others and seek to transform it into mutual influence. Others dismiss such work as "political" and, as a result, undermine their ability to advance their goals.

Several of the participants in our sample chose the latter approach, justifying their choice as a matter of personal values and integrity. In one case, Jody, who managed a department in a large company under what she described as "dysfunctional" leadership, refused even to try to activate her extensive network within the firm when internal adversaries took over key functions of her unit. When we asked her why she didn't seek help from anyone in the organization to stop this coup, she replied that she refused to play "stupid political games....You can only do what you think is the ethical and right thing from your perspective." Stupid or not, those games cost her the respect and support of her direct reports and coworkers, who hesitated to follow someone they perceived as unwilling to defend herself. Eventually she had no choice but to leave.

The key to a good strategic network is leverage: the ability to marshal information, support, and resources from one sector of a network to achieve results in another. Strategic networkers use indirect influence, convincing one person in the network to get someone else, who is not in the network, to take a needed action. Moreover, strategic networkers don't just influence their relational environment; they shape it in their own image by moving and hiring subordinates, changing suppliers and sources of financing, lobbying to place allies in peer positions, and even restructuring their boards to create networks favorable to their business goals. Jody abjured such tactics, but her adversaries did not.

Strategic networking can be difficult for emerging leaders because it absorbs a significant amount of the time and energy that managers usually devote to meeting their many operational demands. This is one reason why many managers drop their strategic networking precisely when they need it most: when their units are in trouble and only outside support can rescue them. The trick is not to hide in the operational network but to develop it into a more strategic one.

One manager we studied, for example, used lateral and functional contacts throughout his firm to resolve tensions with his boss that resulted from substantial differences in style and strategic approaches between the two. Tied down in operational chores at a distant location, the manager had lost contact with headquarters. He resolved the situation by simultaneously obliging his direct reports to take on more of the local management effort and sending messages through his network that would help bring him back into the loop with the boss.

Operational, personal, and strategic networks are not mutually exclusive. One manager we studied used his personal passion, hunting, to meet people from professions as diverse as stonemasonry and household moving. Almost none of these hunting friends had anything to do with his work in the consumer electronics industry, yet they all had to deal with one of his own daily concerns: customer relations. Hearing about their problems and techniques allowed him to view his own from a different perspective and helped him define principles that he could test in his work. Ultimately, what began as a personal network of hunting partners became operationally and strategically valuable to this manager. The key was his ability to build inside-outside links for maximum leverage. But we've seen others who avoided networking, or failed at it, because they let interpersonal chemistry, not strategic needs, determine which relationships they cultivated.

Just Do It

The word "work" is part of networking, and it is not easy work, because it involves reaching outside the borders of a manager's comfort zone. How, then, can managers lessen the pain and increase the gain? The trick is to leverage the elements from each domain of networking into the others—to seek out personal contacts who can be objective, strategic counselors, for example, or to transform colleagues in adjacent functions into a constituency. Above all, many managers will need to change their attitudes about the legitimacy and necessity of networking.

Mind your mindset. In our ongoing discussions with managers learning to improve their networking skills, we often hear, "That's all well and good, but I already have a day job." Others, like Jody, consider working through networks a way to rely on "whom you know" rather than "what you know"—a hypocritical, even unethical way to get things done. Whatever the reason, when aspiring leaders do not believe that networking is one of the most important requirements of their new jobs, they will not allocate enough time and effort to see it pay off.

The best solution we've seen to this trap is a good role model. Many times, what appears to be unpalatable or

unproductive behavior takes on a new light when a person you respect does it well and ethically. For example, Gabriel Chenard, general manager for Europe of a group of consumer product brands, learned from the previous general manager how to take advantage of branch visits to solidify his relationships with employees and customers. Every flight and car trip became a venue for catching up and building relationships with the people who were accompanying him. Watching how much his boss got done on what would otherwise be downtime, Gabriel adopted the practice as a crucial part of his own management style. Networking effectively and ethically, like any other tacit skill, is a matter of judgment and intuition. We learn by observing and getting feedback from those for whom it's second nature.

Work from the outside in. One of the most daunting aspects of strategic networking is that there often seems to be no natural "excuse" for making contact with a more senior person outside one's function or business unit. It's difficult to build a relationship with anyone, let alone a senior executive, without a reason for interacting, like a common task or a shared purpose.

Some successful managers find common ground from the outside in—by, for instance, transposing a personal interest into the strategic domain. Linda Henderson is a good example. An investment banker responsible for a group of media industry clients, she always wondered how to connect to some of her senior colleagues who served other industries. She resolved to make time for an extracurricular passion—the theater—in a way that would enhance her business development activities. Four times a year, her secretary booked a buffet dinner at a downtown hotel and reserved a block of theater tickets. Key clients were invited. Through these events, Linda not only developed her own business but also learned about her clients' companies in a way that generated ideas for other parts of her firm, thus enabling her to engage with colleagues.

Other managers build outside-inside connections by using their functional interests or expertise. For example, communities of practice exist (or can easily be created on the Internet) in almost every area of business from brand management to Six Sigma to global strategy. Savvy managers reach out to kindred spirits outside their organizations to contribute and multiply their knowledge; the information they glean, in more cases than not, becomes the "hook" for making internal connections.

Re-allocate your time. If an aspiring leader has not yet mastered the art of delegation, he or she will find many reasons not to spend time networking. Participating in formal and informal meetings with people in other units takes time away from functional responsibilities and internal team affairs. Between the obvious payoff of a task accomplished and the ambiguous, often delayed rewards of networking, naive managers repeatedly choose the former. The less they practice networking, the less efficient at it they become, and the vicious cycle continues.

Henrik, the production manager and board member we described earlier, for example, did what he needed to do in order to prepare for board meetings but did not associate with fellow board members outside those formal events. As a result, he was frequently surprised when other board members raised issues at the heart of his role. In contrast, effective business leaders spend a lot of time every day gathering the information they need to meet their goals, relying on informal discussions with a lot of people who are not necessarily in charge of an issue or task. They network in order to obtain information continually, not just at formal meetings.

Ask and you shall receive. Many managers equate having a good network with having a large database of contacts, or attending high-profile professional conferences and events. In fact, we've seen people kick off a networking initiative by improving their record keeping or adopting a network management tool. But they falter at the next step—picking up the phone. Instead, they wait until they need something *badly.* The best networkers do exactly the opposite: They take every opportunity to give to, and receive from, the network, whether they need help or not.

A network lives and thrives only when it is used. A good way to begin is to make a simple request or take the initiative to connect two people who would benefit from meeting each other. Doing something—anything—gets the ball rolling and builds confidence that one does, in fact, have something to contribute.

Stick to it. It takes a while to reap the benefits of networking. We have seen many managers resolve to put networking at the top of their agendas, only to be derailed by the first crisis that comes along. One example is Harris Roberts, a regulatory affairs expert who realized he needed a broader network to achieve his

goal of becoming a business unit manager. To force himself into what felt like an "unnatural act," Harris volunteered to be the liaison for his business school cohort's alumni network. But six months later, when a major new-drug approval process overwhelmed his calendar, Harris dropped all outside activities. Two years later, he found himself out of touch and still a functional manager. He failed to recognize that by not taking the time to attend industry conferences or compare notes with his peers, he was missing out on the strategic perspective and information that would make him a more attractive candidate for promotion.

Building a leadership network is less a matter of skill than of will. When first efforts do not bring quick rewards, some may simply conclude that networking isn't among their talents. But networking is not a talent; nor does it require a gregarious, extroverted personality. It is a skill, one that takes practice. We have seen over and over again that people who work at networking can learn not only how to do it well but also how to enjoy it. And they tend to be more successful in their careers than those who fail to leverage external ties or insist on defining their jobs narrowly.

Making a successful leadership transition requires a shift from the confines of a clearly defined operational network. Aspiring leaders must learn to build and use strategic networks that cross organizational and functional boundaries, and then link them up in novel and innovative ways. It is a challenge to make the leap from a lifetime of functional contributions and hands-on control to the ambiguous process of building and working through networks. Leaders must find new ways of defining themselves and develop new relationships to anchor and feed their emerging personas. They must also accept that networking is one of the most important requirements of their new leadership roles and continue to allocate enough time and effort to see it pay off.

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From Functional Manager to Business Leader: How Companies Can Help

Executives who oversee management development know how to spot critical inflection points: the moments when highly successful people must change their perspective on what is important and, accordingly, how they spend their time. Many organizations still promote people on the basis of their performance in roles whose requirements differ dramatically from those of leadership roles. And many new leaders feel that they are going it alone, without coaching or guidance. By being sensitive to the fact that most strong technical or functional managers lack the capabilities required to build strategic networks that advance their personal and professional goals, human resources and learning professionals can take steps to help in this important area.

For example, Genesis Park, an innovative in-house leadership development program at PricewaterhouseCoopers, focuses explicitly on building networks. The five-month program, during which participants are released from their client responsibilities, includes business case development, strategic projects, team building, change management projects, and in-depth discussions with business leaders from inside and outside the company. The young leaders who participate end up with a strong internal-external nexus of ties to support them as their careers evolve.

Companies that recognize the importance of leadership networking can also do a lot to help people overcome their innate discomfort by creating natural ways for them to extend their networks. When Nissan CEO Carlos Ghosn sought to break down crippling internal barriers at the company, he created cross-functional teams of middle managers from diverse units and charged them with proposing solutions to problems ranging from supply costs to product design. Nissan subsequently institutionalized the teams, not just as a way to solve problems but also to encourage lateral networks. Rather than avoid the extra work, aspiring leaders ask for these assignments.

Most professional development is based on the notion that successful people acquire new role-appropriate skills as they move up the hierarchy. But making the transition from manager to leader requires subtraction as well as addition: To make room for new competencies, managers must rely less on their older, well-honed skills. To do so, they must change their perspective on how to add value and what to contribute. Eventually, they must also transform how they think and who they are. Companies that help their top talent reinvent themselves will better prepare them for a successful leadership transition.

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A Smarter Way to Network

Successful executives connect with select people and get more out of them.

→ by ROB CROSS and ROBERT J. THOMAS

ONE OF THE HAPPIEST, most successful executives we know is a woman named Deb. She works at a major technology company and runs a global business unit that has more than 7,000 employees. When you ask her how she rose to the top and why she enjoys her job, her answer is simple: people. She points to her boss, the CEO, a mentor who "always has her back"; Steve, the head of a complementary business, with whom she has monthly brainstorming lunches and occasional gripe sessions; and Tom, a protégé to whom she has delegated responsibility for a large portion of her division. Outside the company, Deb's circle includes her counterparts in three strategic partnerships, who inspire her with new ideas; Sheila, a former colleague, now in a different industry, who gives her candid feedback; and her husband, Bob, an executive at a philanthropic organization. She also has close relationships with her fellow volunteers in a program for at-risk high school students and the members of her tennis group and book club.

This is Deb's social network (the real-world kind, not the virtual kind), and it has helped her career a lot. But not because the group is large or full of high-powered contacts. Her network is effective because it both supports and challenges her. Deb's relationships help her gain influence, broaden her expertise, learn new skills, and find purpose and balance. Deb values and nurtures them. "Make friends so that you have friends when you need friends" is her motto.

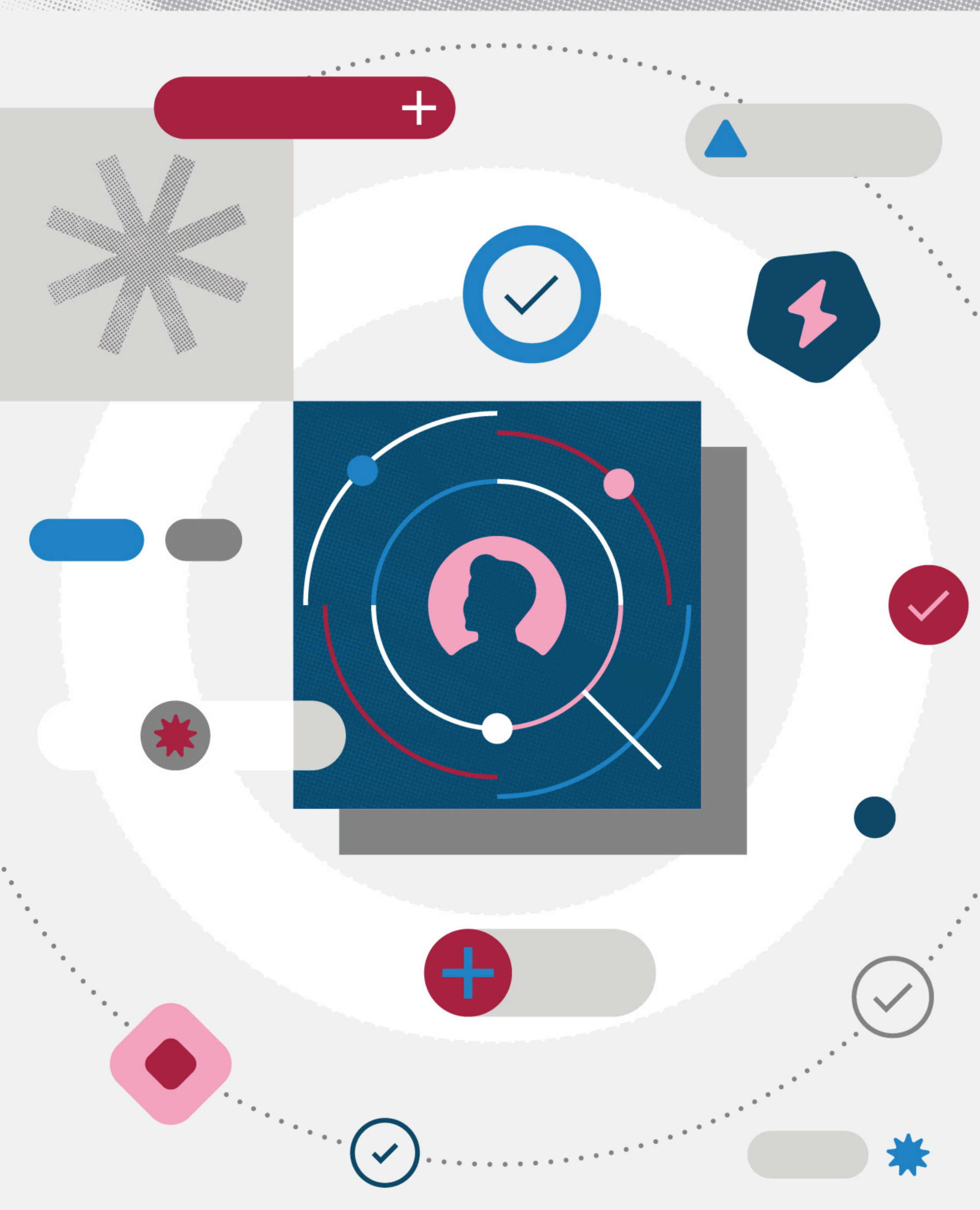
"My current role is really a product of a relationship I formed over a decade ago that came back to me at the right time," she explains. "People may chalk it up to luck, but I think more often than not luck happens through networks where people give first and are authentic in all they do."

Over the past 15 years, we've worked with many executives like Deb, at more than 300 companies. What began as organizational research—helping management teams understand and capitalize on the formal and informal social networks of their employees—has since metamorphosed into personal programs, which teach individual executives to increase their effectiveness by leveraging their networks.

The old adage "It's not what you know, it's who you know" is true. But it's more nuanced than that. In spite of what most self-help books say, network size doesn't usually matter. In fact, we've found that individuals who simply know a lot of people are less likely to achieve standout performance, because they're spread too thin. Political animals with lots of connections to corporate and industry leaders don't win the day, either. Yes, it's important to know powerful people, but if they account for too much of your network, your peers and subordinates often perceive you to be overly self-interested, and you may lose support as a result.

The data we've collected point to a different model for networking. The executives who consistently rank in the

Illustration by **KEMAL SANLI**



Are You Networking Impaired?

In our work, we have identified six common managerial types who get stuck in three kinds of network traps. Do any of the descriptions below fit you?

THE WRONG STRUCTURE

The formalist focuses too heavily on his company's official hierarchy, missing out on the efficiencies and opportunities that come from informal connections.

The overloaded manager has so much contact with colleagues and external ties that she becomes a bottleneck to progress and burns herself out.

THE WRONG RELATIONSHIPS

The disconnected expert sticks with people who keep him focused on safe, existing competencies, rather than those who push him to build new skills.

The biased leader relies on advisers much like herself (same functional background, location, or values), who reinforce her biases, when she should instead seek outsiders to prompt more fully informed decisions.

THE WRONG BEHAVIOR

The superficial networker engages in surface-level interaction with as many people as possible, mistakenly believing that a bigger network is a better one.

The chameleon changes his interests, values, and personality to match those of whatever subgroup is his audience, and winds up being disconnected from every group.

top 20% of their companies in both performance and well-being have diverse but select networks like Deb's—made up of high-quality relationships with people who come from several different spheres and from up and down the corporate hierarchy. These high performers, we have found, tap into six critical kinds of connections, which enhance their careers and lives in a variety of ways.

Through our work advising individual managers, we've also identified a four-step process that will help any executive develop this kind of network. But first, let's take a look at some common networking mistakes.

Getting It Wrong

Many people take a misguided approach to networking. They go astray by building imbalanced networks, pursuing the wrong kind of relationships, or leveraging relationships ineffectively. (See the sidebar "Are You Networking Impaired?") These people might remain successful for a time, but often they will hit a plateau or see their career derailed because their networks couldn't prompt or support a critical transition.

Consider Dan, the chief information officer of one of the world's largest life-sciences organizations. He was under constant pressure to find new technologies that would spur innovation and speed the drug commercialization process at his company, and he needed a network that would help him. Unfortunately, more than 70% of his trusted advisers were in the unit he had worked in before becoming CIO. Not only did they reinforce his bias toward certain solutions and vendors, but they lacked the outside knowledge he needed. "I had started to mistake friendship, trust, and accessibility for real expertise in new domains," he told us. "This didn't mean I was going to dump these people, as they played important roles for me in other ways. But I needed to be more targeted in who I let influence my thinking."

Another overarching mistake we often see in executives' networks is an imbalance between connections that promote career advancement and those that promote engagement and satisfaction. Numerous studies have shown that happier executives are higher-performing ones.

Take Tim, the director of a large practice area at a leading professional services firm. On the surface he was doing well, but job stress had taken its toll. He was 40 pounds overweight, with alarmingly high cholesterol and blood sugar levels, and prone to extreme mood swings. When things went well at work, he was happy; when they didn't, he wasn't pleasant to be around. In fact, Tim's wife finally broke down and told him she thought he had become a career-obsessed jerk and needed to get other interests. With her encouragement, he joined Habitat for Humanity and started rowing with their daughter. As a result, his social network expanded to include people with different perspectives and values, who helped him focus on more healthful and fulfilling pursuits. "As I spent more time with different groups, what I cared about diversified," he says. "Physically, I'm in much better shape and probably staved off a heart attack. But I think I'm a better leader, too, in that I think about

Bring people with positive energy into your inner circle. If those around you are enthusiastic, authentic, and generous, you will be, too.

problems more broadly, and I'm more resilient. Our peer feedback systems are also clearly indicating that people are more committed to the new me."

Getting It Right

To understand more about what makes an effective network, let's look again at Deb. She has a small set of core contacts—14 people she really relies on. Effective core networks typically range in size from 12 to 18 people. But what really matters is structure: Core connections must bridge smaller, more-diverse kinds of groups and cross hierarchical, organizational, functional, and geographic lines. Core relationships should result in more learning, less bias in decision making, and greater personal growth and balance. The people in your inner circle should also model positive behaviors, because if those around you are enthusiastic, authentic, and generous, you will be, too.

More specifically, our data show that high performers have strong ties to

- people who offer them new information or expertise, including internal or external clients, who increase their market awareness; peers in other functions, divisions, or geographies, who share best practices; and contacts in other industries, who inspire innovation;
- formally powerful people, who provide mentoring, sense-making, political support, and resources; and informally powerful people, who offer influence, help coordinating projects, and support among the rank and file; and
- people who give them developmental feedback, challenge their decisions, and push them to be better. At an early career stage, an employee might get this from a boss or customers; later, it tends to come from coaches, trusted colleagues, or a spouse.

Meanwhile, the most satisfied executives have ties to

- people who provide personal support, such as colleagues who help them get back on track when they're having a bad day or friends with whom they can just be themselves;
- people who add a sense of purpose or worth, such as bosses and customers who validate their work, and family members and other stakeholders who show them work has a broader meaning; and
- people who promote their work/life balance, holding them accountable for activities that improve their physical health (such as sports), mental engagement (such as hobbies or educational classes), or spiritual well-being (music, religion, art, or volunteer work).

How does one create such a varied network? We recommend a four-point action plan: analyze, de-layer, diversify, and capitalize.

Analyze. Start by looking at the individuals in your network. Where are they located—are they within your team, your unit, your company, or outside your organization? What benefits do your interactions with them provide? How energizing are those interactions?

The last question is an important one. Energizers bring out the best in everyone around them, and our data show that having them in your network is a strong predictor of success over time. These people aren't necessarily

Idea in Brief

Many people have misguided ideas about what makes a network strong. It's not the size that matters but the quality. Connecting only with people who are similar to you or in high-powered positions is of limited value.

Instead, you should focus on building a select and varied set of connections that will both support and challenge you To create such a network, the authors recommend a four-point action plan:

- Analyze the people in your network.
- De-layer by making conscious decisions to step back from draining relationships.
- Diversify through seeking out people who energize you.
- Capitalize by making good use of your contacts.

Connections that are most beneficial to pursue fall into six basic categories: information, political support and influence, personal development, personal support and energy, a sense of purpose or worth, and work/life balance.

By building a network filled with high-quality relationships with people from different spheres you will increase your effectiveness and well-being.

extroverted or charismatic. They're people who always see opportunities, even in challenging situations, and create room for others to meaningfully contribute. Good energizers are trustworthy and committed to principles larger than their self-interest, and they enjoy other people. "De-energizers," by contrast, are quick to point out obstacles, critique people rather than ideas, are inflexible in their thinking, fail to create opportunities, miss commitments, and don't show concern for others. Unfortunately, energy-sapping interactions have more impact than energizing ones—up to seven times as much, according to one study. And our own research suggests that roughly 90% of anxiety at work is created by 5% of one's network—the people who sap energy.

Next, classify your relationships by the benefits they provide. Generally, benefits fall into one of six basic categories: information, political support and influence, personal development, personal support and energy, a sense of purpose or worth, and work/life balance. It's important to have people who provide each kind of benefit in your network. Categorizing your relationships will give you a clearer idea of whether your network is extending your abilities or keeping you stuck. You'll see where you have holes and redundancies and which people you depend on too much—or not enough.

Let's use Joe, a rising star in an investment bank, as a case study. He had 24 close advisers—on the surface, a more than healthy number. But many of the people he relied on were from his own department and frequently relied on one another. If he eliminated those redundancies, his network shrank to five people. After giving it some thought and observing his peers' networks, he realized he was missing links with several important types of people: colleagues focused on financial offerings outside his own products, who could help him deliver broader financial solutions to customers; coworkers in different geographies—particularly London and Asia—who could enhance his ability to sell to global clients; and board-level relationships at key accounts, who could make client introductions and influence purchasing decisions. His insularity was limiting his options and hurting his chances of promotion to managing director. He realized he would need to focus on cultivating a network rather than allowing it to organically arise from the day-to-day demands of his work.

De-layer. Once you've analyzed your network, you need to make some hard decisions about which relationships to back away from. First, look at eliminating or minimizing contact with people who sap you of energy or promote unhealthful behaviors. You can do this by reshaping your role to avoid them, devoting less time to them, working to change their behavior, or reframing your reactions so that you don't dwell on the interactions.

John, an academic, realized that two university administrators in his network were causing him a great deal of anxiety. This had so soured his view of his school that he was considering leaving. He therefore decided to devote less time to projects and committees that would involve the negative contacts and to avoid dwelling on any sniping comments they subjected him to. Within a year he was much more productive and happy. "By shifting my role and how I reacted to the idiots, I turned a negative situation around," John says. "In hindsight it was an obvious move—rather than leave a place I loved—but emotions can spiral on you in ways you don't recognize."

The next step is to ask yourself which of the six categories have too many people in them. Early-stage leaders, for example, tend to focus too much on information and not enough on personal development and might want to shed some of the contacts who give them the former to make more time for those who give them the latter.

Beyond this, consider which individuals—and types of people as determined by function, hierarchy, or geography—have too much of you, and why. Is the cause structural, in that work procedures require you to be involved? Or is your own behavior causing the imbalance? What can you change to rectify the situation? Too often we see leaders fail because they accept or create too many collaborative demands.

Paul, the head of research in a consumer products company, had a network of almost 70 people just at work. But he got many complaints from people who said they needed greater access to him. His productivity, and his unit's, was suffering. When he analyzed his network, he realized that he was missing "people and initiatives one or two levels out." To address this, he decided to delegate—stepping away from interactions that didn't require his presence and cultivating "go to" stand-ins in certain areas of expertise. He

Four Steps to Building a Better Network

Analyze
Identify the people in your network and what you get out of interacting with them

De-layer
Make some hard decisions to back away from redundant and energy-sapping relationships

Diversify
Build your network out with the right kind of people: energizers who will help you achieve your goals

Capitalize
Make sure you're using your contacts as effectively as you can

also changed his leadership style from extraordinarily accessible to helpful but more removed, which encouraged subordinates to solve their own problems by connecting with people around him. "As a leader you can find yourself in this bubble of activity where you feel like a lot is happening moving from meeting to meeting," Paul says. "You can actually start to thrive on this in some ways. I had to move past this for us to be effective as a unit and so that I could be more forward-thinking."

Diversify. Now that you've created room in your network, you need to fill it with the right people. Simple tools like work sheets can help you get started. For example, you might make a list of the six categories of relationships and think about colleagues who could fill the holes you have in each. Remember to focus on positive, energetic, selfless people, and be sure to ask people inside and outside your network for recommendations.

You should also think about how you could connect your network to your professional and personal goals. Here's another simple exercise: Write down three specific business results you hope to achieve over the next year (such as doubling sales or winning an Asia-based client) and then list the people (by name or general role) who could help you with them, thanks to their expertise, control over resources, or ability to provide political support. Joe, the investment banker, identified counterparts in the Asian and European operations of his company who had relationships with the clients he was focused on and then scheduled regular calls with them to coordinate efforts. "In a couple of cases this helped me identify opportunities I could pitch proactively. In others it just helped us appear more coordinated when we were competing against other banks," he says. One of the big challenges for Paul, the consumer products executive, was managing a new facility and line of innovation in China. Because none of his trusted advisers had ever even been to that country, he reached out to the head of R&D at a major life-sciences organization that had undertaken a similar effort.

Capitalize. Last, make sure you're using your contacts as effectively as you can. Are there people you rely on in one sphere, such as political support, that you could also use to fill a need in another, such as personal development? Could you get more out of some relationships if you put more energy into them? Our research shows, for instance, that high performers at all levels tend to use their information contacts to gain other benefits, such as new ideas. Reciprocal relationships also tend to be more fruitful; the most successful leaders always look for ways to give more to their contacts.

Alan, a top executive at a global insurance company, realized that although he had a good network, he was still making decisions in relative isolation. He failed to elicit insights from others and, as a result, wasn't making enough progress toward his goals. So he started inviting his more-junior contacts, who were informal opinion leaders in his company, to lunch and asking them open-ended questions. These conversations led him to streamline decision making and uncover innovation deep within the firm's hierarchy. "When I met with one lady, I was stunned at a great new product idea she had been pushing for months," Alan says. "But she hadn't been able to get the right people to listen. I was able to step in and help make things happen. To me the right way to be tapping into people is in this exploratory way—whether it is about strategic insights or just how they think I'm doing on some aspect of my job. That's how I get to new ways of thinking and doing things, and I know it makes me much more effective than people who are smarter than me."

A network constructed using this four-point model will build on itself over time. In due course, it will ensure that the best opportunities, ideas, and talent come your way.

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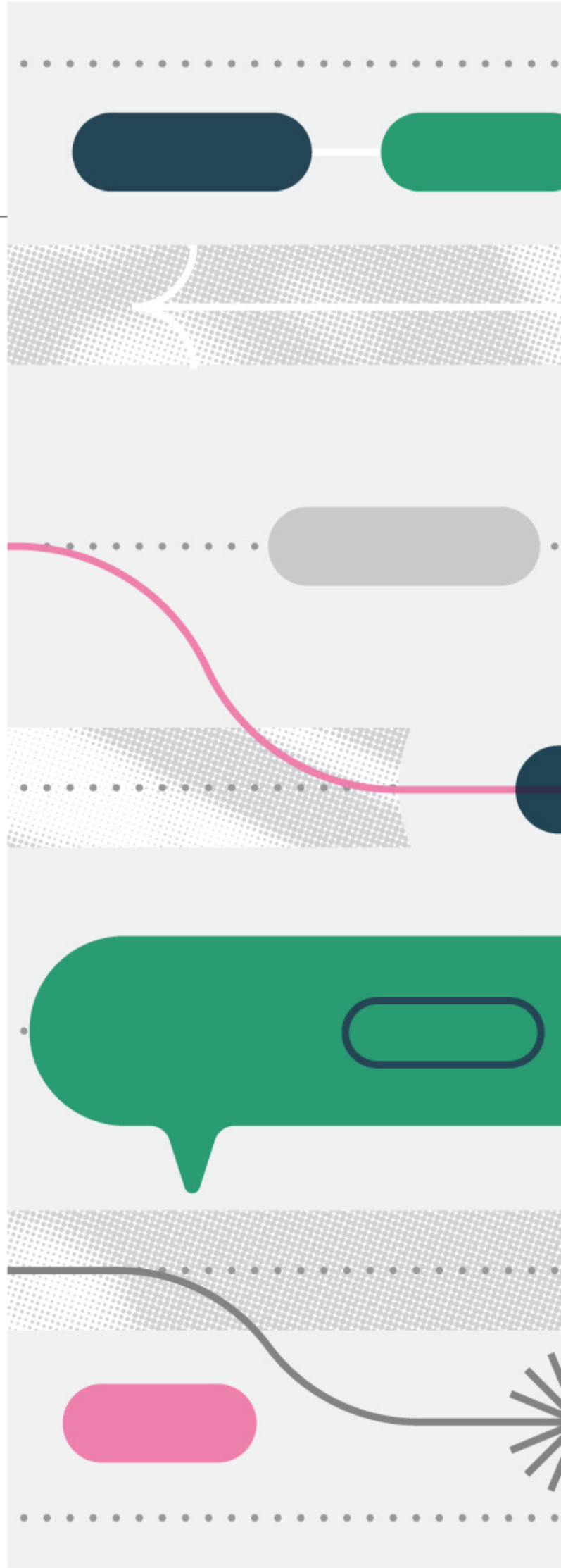

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How to Lead Your Fellow Rainmakers

Collectively, dynamically—and very carefully.

→ by LAURA EMPSON

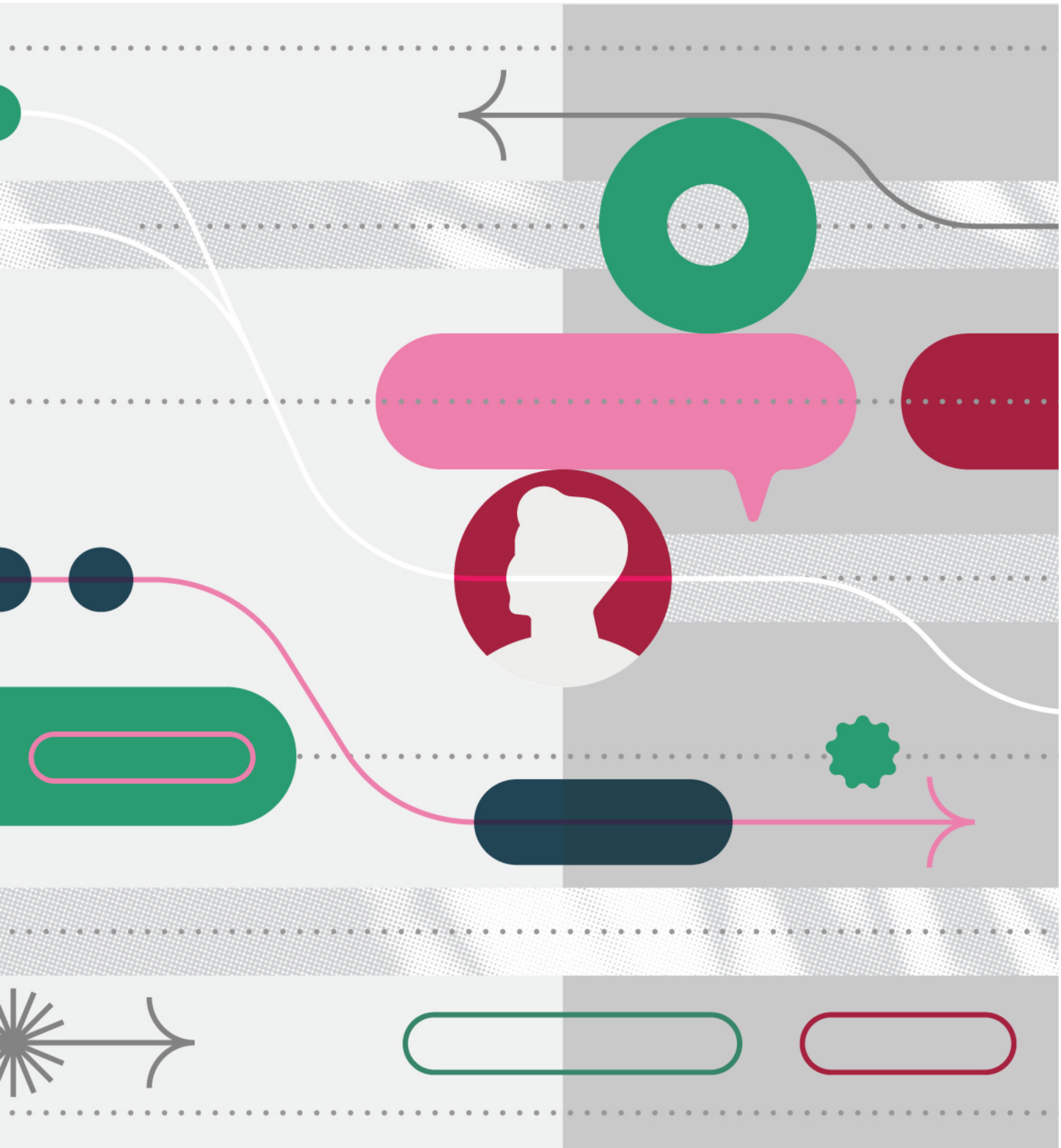
WHEN DANIEL WAS ELECTED managing partner of his consulting firm, his colleagues reacted enthusiastically. Relatively young and hugely energetic, he had quickly risen to prominence in his firm. He'd garnered widespread support among his peers, especially the younger partners, who felt that some of their older colleagues were "free riding" as they neared retirement. Clients had noticed a decline in the quality of the firm's work and were threatening to defect. During his leadership campaign, Daniel had outlined ambitious plans for reinvigorating the firm and restoring it to the number one position in the market. Flattered by his confidence in them and drawn to his vision for the firm, the partners elected Daniel by a substantial majority.

But 18 months later, the partners rejected Daniel's proposals outright and called for his resignation. What had gone wrong?

In conventional corporate settings, leaders are expected to inspire and direct their employees—leading is something they do *to* followers. But in professional service firms, the leadership dynamics are different, because the power relationships are different. Consulting, accounting, and law firms and investment banks tend to be full of highly opinionated rainmakers, who don't easily accept the role of follower—and may be just as unwilling to act as leaders. In this context, leadership is a collective, not an individual, endeavor, created through interactions among powerful peers.

Power in organizations belongs to people who control access to key resources. In professional service firms those resources are specialized expertise, major client relationships, and reputation in the market. Firms may try to codify and capitalize on them, but they cannot exist independently of the

Illustration by **KEMAL SANLI**



people who possess them. In partnerships, which many professional service firms are, this is recognized in the firm's legal structure, because senior professionals own the business.

As a result, power is widely dispersed in professional service firms—autonomy is extensive, and authority is contingent. Senior professionals need considerable autonomy to customize services for their clients. And while they elect or appoint their peers to leadership positions, they cede authority to them only on a conditional basis, reserving the right to challenge, ignore, and even depose them.

That places severe constraints on professional service firm leaders, who are entirely dependent on the continued support of their peers to get anything done. As a partner in a Big Four accounting firm told me, among colleagues at his level, "frankly, nobody has to follow anyone." One senior partner of a law firm described the way he works with his fellow partners like this: "It's not telling them what to do; it's just coming up with the prompts and ideas. So leadership *sort of happens.*"

If you've recently taken on a leadership role at a professional service firm, all this may sound daunting. How can you actually get anything done?

I've been studying and advising the leaders of such firms for the past 25 years. My research includes two major UK government-funded studies of leadership and governance in professional service firms, involving interviews with more than 500 senior professionals from a variety of sectors in 16 countries.

Through this research, and with the help of my colleague Johan Alvehus at Lund University, I've identified three distinct yet interconnected dynamics—*establishing legitimacy, maneuvering politically,* and *negotiating perpetually*—that explain how collective leadership actually happens among professionals. At the heart of each lies a tension between the actions of people in leadership positions and how colleagues respond to and interpret their actions. These tensions create an inherently unstable equilibrium. To maintain a balance, firm leaders must work constantly with their colleagues to manage these tensions. In the following pages, I'll explain how they can best meet that challenge.

Establishing Legitimacy

In conventional organizations rising stars are often advised to demonstrate their potential by seeking out leadership responsibilities. But in a professional service firm, it's wise to be wary. When a boss invites you to take on a "leadership" role, he or she may simply be trying to off-load burdensome administrative responsibilities. You risk getting sidetracked from income-generating client work and being seen by your peers as a glorified administrator.

Another mistake that professionals often make is to believe they can rise up in their firms just by doing technically brilliant work—by being respected and recognized by colleagues as an expert. That's essential to surviving the progressive culls of staff in the early stages of your career, but the game changes as you approach the rank of partner. It's rare for technical specialists to move into senior leadership roles; the largest law and accounting firms are almost never led by the head of the tax practice, for example.

Among professionals, legitimacy as a leader ultimately depends on your ability to generate revenue—in other words, to be a good rainmaker. My research has found that the people who reach the top of professional service firms are outstanding at winning new business and at managing the most demanding and lucrative clients; they also work harder and longer at earning fees than their peers do (in an environment where extended hours are the norm). Because colleagues see them as role models, they're willing to cede authority to them.

The irony is that many of these role models have very little interest in becoming leaders. They want to focus on the thing they love best—their client work—and are reluctant to put themselves forward as potential leaders of their practice or their firm.

Christine is a classic example. One of the top rainmakers in her accounting firm, she sold the biggest projects to the best clients. But she was frustrated by the head of her practice area, who had introduced too many controls that got in the way of her client work. In the past Christine had deliberately avoided taking on leadership roles, but her colleagues now asked her to step forward and challenge the practice head—to dismantle his unpopular controls and restore their cherished autonomy.

Christine was reluctant, but when she realized the practice head was planning to seek another term, she let it be known she was interested in the position. That was all the encouragement her fellow

It's OK to be ambitious for the firm, but you should not seem ambitious for yourself.

partners needed. They lobbied the firm's senior partner, saying they had lost confidence in their practice head but were willing to work with Christine. As Christine explained: "People were drawn to me. I had followers before I went into a leadership role because I was the lead partner for a big client. So I created opportunities for people, I was successful, and they enjoyed working with me and my clients." In other words she was seen by her peers as a potential leader because she was successful in the market *and* because she was willing to share her success with them.

Yet, while this gave her the legitimacy to lead, it did not guarantee that Christine would be good at leadership, as she would soon discover. To run their firms effectively, professionals need to understand two other leadership dynamics.

Maneuvering Politically

Although I never asked interviewees specifically about office politics, they were often keen to tell me how much they abhorred political behavior. The chair of one consulting firm in my study declared: "To me, politics smacks of alliance building in the corridors, in offices behind the scenes, of people engineering agendas, which deliver a fait accompli. I would like to think we don't have those behaviors in this firm."

That chair may have been in denial or simply not telling the truth. In fact, political behaviors were rife in his organization—as they are in most professional service firms I've studied. This isn't necessarily pernicious. In an environment characterized by extensive autonomy and contingent authority, political maneuvering is simply how leadership happens. Leaders need to create and sustain consensus among peers and offer them incentives in private to persuade them to lend their support in public. To carry this off and maintain their authority, leaders need four core political skills: networking ability, interpersonal influence, social astuteness, and apparent sincerity. And many firms enshrine politics within their governance systems, holding elections for senior leadership positions in which candidates issue manifestos, run campaigns, and participate in debates.

Professionals distrust colleagues who seem to want power over them. It's OK to be ambitious for the firm, but you should not seem ambitious for yourself. So as a leader you need to convince colleagues that you're employing your political skills for *their* benefit rather than your own. If you can do that, then they will not judge you as political but will perceive that you have integrity.

One way to persuade your peers of your integrity is to develop and communicate a compelling vision for the firm. Consider Antonio, who was a partner at a large law firm. Although he led a relatively small practice, he had big ambitions and decided to run for senior partner. He campaigned against eight other candidates and worked hard to win support outside his practice. He met several hundred of his fellow partners, individually and in small groups, listening to their concerns and explaining how his vision would deliver what they most wanted.

At the candidates' debate, he gave a compelling speech, explaining his desire to unleash what he described as the partners' entrepreneurial potential by "giving the partnership back to the partners" and introducing an ambitious investment program to fund new partner-led initiatives. Impressed by what they saw as his passionate commitment to the firm and his belief in their ability, his peers elected him by a large majority. The integrity they perceived in Antonio was evident in this description from one colleague: "He is not a player. His own motivations in this world are very genuine and clean."

There is a clear link between being a good rainmaker and being a good campaigner. Someone who has the

Idea in Brief

THE PROBLEM
Conventional leadership wisdom seems to fail in the professional service context. Trying to energize followers around a vision simply isn't enough.

WHY IT HAPPENS
The key asset of professional service firms is their highly expert and opinionated partners, who cherish their autonomy. As a result, a leader's authority is contingent on their consent, which may be quickly withdrawn.

THE SOLUTION
Recognize that leadership in professional service contexts is really a collective process, in which the designated leader must master three interactive dynamics: establishing legitimacy, maneuvering politically, and negotiating perpetually. At the heart of each lies a tension that the leader must constantly work to keep in balance.

The leadership team of a professional service firm in effect includes all the partners; in some firms collective leadership requires input and support from many hundreds of individuals.

networking ability, interpersonal influence, social astuteness, and apparent sincerity to manage powerful clients can also use those skills to manage powerful partners. But there's much more to leadership in a professional service firm than just that.

Negotiating Perpetually

Striking a balance between exercising autonomy and asserting control is far from straightforward. It involves perpetual negotiating—the third core dynamic of collective leadership in professional service firms. Knowing what actions to take is only part of the challenge. You need to understand when to take them, with whom, and how to persuade your colleagues that you're working in their best interests rather than your own.

For example, at the start of the financial year your colleagues may view your attempts to assert control as an unacceptable infringement on their autonomy. But if you wait for financial difficulties to become obvious, they may complain about a "leadership vacuum." If you challenge the inappropriate behavior of a popular and "colorful" partner, your colleagues may protest. But if you fail to reprimand a less likable, more marginalized partner for exactly the same behavior, they may raise questions about your moral leadership. One senior partner in my study explained the problem this way: "Partners say, 'You're too tight, get looser.' So you get looser, and they say, 'It's chaotic, get tighter.'"

One chairman compared the process to "walking a tightrope—helping my partners feel like owners, feel involved, and be engaged, but not dominating them, not getting out in front, and not having a huge ego, which makes them feel like the chairman's kind of off on his own trip. At the same time being strong and providing them with a sense of confidence that we're going somewhere."

Let's return to Daniel, the managing partner who struggled to fulfill his mandate and lost his peers' support. After winning the election, he hired a COO from the corporate sector to undertake a root-and-branch overhaul of his firm's cost base, with a focus on partner spending. Daniel personally led the task force that was redesigning the partner appraisal system, tightening up metrics, clarifying consequences of underperformance, and enhancing rewards for success. In other words he did exactly what his partners had elected him to do: assert control by introducing more performance-oriented financial rigor.

During the election he had talked about making the "free riders" more accountable but had been vague on the details. Once he was in office, his colleagues started to wonder: Which partners did he think were free riders? How many were there? And what exactly did "more accountable" mean? Disaffected partners started whispering that Daniel seemed to be enjoying his new power a little too much and was not showing his peers enough respect. They encouraged colleagues to believe they might be the free riders Daniel was referring to. This whispering campaign was effective. When Daniel introduced the new partner appraisal system, his colleagues rebelled, and he was forced to abandon his plans.

Daniel had failed to understand that when his partners had asked him to assert control, they meant control over *their colleagues* but not over *them* personally. They were prepared to *cede* some autonomy but not to have it *taken away* from them. By rejecting his proposals, they were trying to teach Daniel a lesson—that as their elected leader he ultimately worked for them, not the other way around. But having positioned himself as the firm's savior, he had become convinced by his own rhetoric and thought he could do it on his own. He failed to understand that he needed to bring the partners along with him—that leading professional service firms is a collective endeavor, and the mandate to lead your peers must be continually renegotiated and renewed.

An Unstable Equilibrium

In addition to perpetually negotiating, the leader of a professional service firm must keep a constant eye on the other two dynamics, which are always in flux. To retain your legitimacy, you need to continue to be successful in the market, despite the fact that you can no longer devote yourself full-time to fee-earning work. You must constantly maneuver politically, as alliances shift among partners and their relative power waxes and wanes. And, remember, it's not just about what you do as an individual leader but how your colleagues interpret and respond to what you are doing (inferring you have leadership ability, perceiving you have integrity, and feeling free to exercise autonomy).

The instability is amplified by the fact that the three leadership dynamics

Guiding Principles for Leading in a Professional Service Firm

Focus first on the fundamentals. Your peers will accept you as a leader only if they recognize that you're at least as good at their job as they are. You need to establish a reputation for doing and winning outstanding work early on in your career. Once you're in a senior leadership role, don't become so immersed in it that you neglect to keep bringing in new business.

Hone your political skills. Understand the subtleties of organizational politics—don't assume that colleagues who do it well are not to be trusted. Think about the last time someone changed your mind about an important issue. What did that person say and do? Then think about what you did and didn't do the last time you failed to get something you wanted. Strategically influencing others doesn't make you insincere; it's just common sense.

Take time to build consensus, but be ready to assert control. If you have a strong vision, you may be in a hurry to implement it. Don't be. You'll need to win over competing interests, listen respectfully to objections, and give way to some demands (to prove that you're listening). Remain patiently on the sidelines while your colleagues exercise their prerogative to "mess things up," because they'll ultimately do better if they learn things for themselves. But you also have to take control at the right time, or colleagues will complain of a leadership vacuum.

Be ambitious for your firm (and for yourself). Your enthusiasm and concern for the firm must be perceived as genuine, regardless of the extent of your personal ambition. Make your peers believe that you care as much about their interests as your own.

Know when to be a good "follower." There will never come a time when you can safely stop stroking your colleagues' egos. The higher you rise, the harder you will have to work to convince people you haven't got "above" yourself. As a leader of a professional service firm you should aspire to be a few steps ahead of your fellow partners but also be able to judge when to step back and show you are prepared to follow the will of the partnership.

are interconnected. If they discover your political maneuvering, your peers will quickly question your legitimacy. That will undermine your ability to negotiate the balance between control and autonomy, as will the failure to convince people you're acting in their interests rather than your own.

Remember Christine? Her colleagues wanted her to take over as leader of their practice because she'd been so successful at winning business. But she was quickly overwhelmed by the complexity of the new role and came to see why the previous practice head had seemed so controlling: There was a lot that needed to be controlled. She lacked the time and patience to manage the egos of the partners who had supported her and now expected her to support *them* in their pet projects and peeves. She became distracted from her client work, her core strength. And after she failed to land a couple of major new projects, her colleagues began to see her in a different light. They no longer inferred that she had leadership ability. As her peers withdrew their cooperation, Christine lost her authority and, with it, her ability to get things done. The equilibrium had become destabilized.

And what about Antonio? Fulfilling his election promise, he initiated ambitious spending plans. Profits plummeted, and as the clients became aware of the firm's difficulties, Antonio was unable to win new business. He lost his legitimacy as a leader and so was unable to negotiate effectively. But his political skills, which had helped him win his election against tough opposition, enabled him to save face. When a small group of influential partners called a meeting to demand his resignation, Antonio suggested a deal: He would complete his term as senior partner on the condition that one of them take over as COO to run the firm on his behalf. Rather late in the day, Antonio had come to understand the dynamics of collective leadership.

Collective Leadership in Action

What does collective leadership look like when it works well?

Peter and Paul, the senior partner and managing partner of a global law firm, displayed an intuitive understanding of collective leadership when they steered their firm through the greatest crisis in its 70-year history. After the 2008 financial crash, they realized that their firm had to undergo a major

restructuring and that a substantial number of its 500 partners would need to be asked to leave. Nothing like that had been done before in the firm, and its rules of governance required that the entire partnership vote on a decision of that magnitude.

Peter and Paul had been among the firm's top rainmakers and were highly respected by their colleagues. Nonetheless, they realized that if they misjudged the mood of their partners and mismanaged the process, they would quickly lose their legitimacy to lead.

The two convened a small group of the firm's most powerful partners and asked them to work together to decide who among their colleagues should be asked to go. Over the next few months, working in secret, this group analyzed performance data and debated at length the list of candidates for departure. Many partners had worked together for more than 20 years, and some in the group resisted putting the names of longtime friends and colleagues on the list. But gradually, Peter and Paul drew more and more partners into the decision-making process, until eventually 50 of the 500 were involved in the secret deliberations.

Key to the process was the way Peter and Paul intervened selectively, allowing the extended group of partners the autonomy to lead the work but asserting control when they felt its members were not making sufficient progress.

Peter and Paul divided up their roles. As one colleague explained, "Peter worked behind the scenes, speaking to each of us privately and putting pressure on us individually as to whether we had gone far enough." This approach didn't always work, at which point Paul intervened directly. He said, "I really had to push to ensure there were enough names on the list. But as soon as we had an agreement, within a couple of days the list got shorter. I had to go back to them several times and say, 'This is not enough.'"

Finally, five months after the financial crisis began, Peter and Paul were ready to speak to the partners as a whole. During several hours of one-to-one calls and meetings around the world, they asked 15% of the partners—75 people in total—to leave or accept a reduction in equity. Later that afternoon, Peter and Paul called an emergency meeting of the partnership to announce the departures. Relieved they hadn't been selected, the remaining partners didn't insist on their right to call a vote about the restructuring.

Peter and Paul were successful because they had worked with an ever-expanding subset of the partner group, ensuring that powerful potential critics were co-opted into the process of making a profoundly difficult decision. Their own track record of market success gave them the legitimacy they needed to persuade colleagues to cooperate. Their political skills enabled them to maneuver their way around the competing views of their peers. And their sense of when to assert control and when to let colleagues exercise autonomy helped them negotiate their way toward consensus.

Although the story of Peter and Paul concerns a one-off crisis, it's important to remember that collective leadership is continuous. Leadership dynamics are constantly in flux as the equilibrium is destabilized and restabilized. Sometimes one individual may step forward and assume leadership, and colleagues will allow him or her to do so. At other times that individual may step back and become a good follower, even if he or she is nominally in charge. So collective leadership is not something that is done *to* followers but is a process done *with* colleagues.

The leadership team of a professional service firm in effect includes *all* the partners; in some firms collective leadership requires input and support from many hundreds of individuals. When you're a managing or senior partner, your peers may look to you to be their heroic leader, and you may be tempted to take up that mantle. But you need to keep reflecting the leadership challenge back onto them—to keep reminding them and yourself that leadership is a collective activity. If it feels lonely at the top, that's probably because you're not doing it right.

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Quick Takes

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1. How to Strengthen Your Network When You're Just Starting Out

→ by HOLLY RAIDER

WHEN YOU'RE JUST beginning your career, making new connections and strengthening your professional network are vital to getting to where you want to go. But the guidance you need, like how to thrive in a new role or pursue a promotion, can be difficult to find in your inner circle.

New employees tend to make professional connections based on proximity (colleagues they see the most) or commonalities (the colleagues most like themselves). But that's a mistake. When you network with colleagues near you or like you, you create an echo chamber that circulates only the same ideas about the same opportunities. That sameness benefits neither you nor your peers, especially when it comes to innovation and growth.

While it may be intimidating to leave the safety of your circle, you should. Strong, diverse networks help you stay on top of the latest trends in your industry, meet new collaborators, and gain access to opportunities or resources that can help you be more effective in your work. The best (yet often overlooked) way to build this kind of network is to focus on your lateral connections: peers who work in different areas of your company. Many early-career employees don't recognize how powerful these relationships can be.

Lateral connections give you a broader, more varied view of your organization, one that ultimately shapes the quality of your work and gives you access to breakthrough opportunities. For instance, say you are a sales associate who has limited interactions with a coordinator on the product development team. Taking the initiative to form a relationship with that person could expose you to the innovations they are working on, allowing you to gain a deeper understanding of each product and equipping you with the personal stories behind their development. Those insights and stories will enable you to be far more effective in making a sale. Meanwhile, the product coordinator will learn from you exactly how a customer thinks when deciding whether to buy the product, allowing your colleague to make smarter suggestions fueled by customer insights during brainstorming meetings.

This is just one example of how mutually beneficial

Many early-career employees don't recognize how powerful lateral connections can be.

these cross-departmental relationships can be. Strengthening your interdepartmental network can also give you access to opportunities that may be brewing in other parts of your company before they become public.

So, how exactly can you start?

Look for people you can learn from. During companywide or cross-departmental meetings, pay attention and make note of the people and projects you find most interesting. It's best to be strategic about this—don't reach out only to those who seem like they'd make a good friend; reach out to those whose work has some intersection with your own. If you're an editor, connect with the graphic designers whose work complements your writing. If you're in finance, discuss with your peers in sourcing how the company manages currency fluctuations or transportation costs.

Take advantage of (virtual) meetups. A helpful way to build lateral connections is by attending or planning events with people who are not on your team. If you are working from home, virtual group happy hours or coffee breaks are good options. Conversations that occur during these meetings are often informal and free-flowing. If your office has opened back up, you could drop a message to a couple of peers in other departments whom you'd like to connect with and ask if they'd like to grab a quick (socially distanced) lunch. Remember, your goal should be building strong relationships, not just exchanging notes about work. That starts with getting to know people.

Here are a few conversation starters to kick things off:

Work-related

I am still getting a feel for things around here. It would be great to learn about the most exciting thing you're working on right now.

I am curious about the work you did on the [project name]. Tell me more about how you did that research.

You've been here for [ ] years. What important changes have you seen in that time?

Non-work-related

Do you have any movie or binge-watch recommendations?

What do you want to remember from these Covid months?

Have you taken any interesting courses lately?

Whatever the event, when it's over, be sure to follow up with those you most want to keep up with. You might send them a quick email the next day, saying, "Hi! I am [ ] and I joined [ ] days ago." Then state something personal to make the connection, like, "I heard during the virtual happy hour that you're learning Spanish on Duo. I was excited to hear that as I'm interested in studying a second language too." Finally, make a small request: "Would you like to meet for coffee and chat a bit more sometime?"

People usually enjoy talking about their experiences, so if your questions are respectful and specific, they will rarely turn you down. This is a great way to start things off. You will inspire each other and, better yet, help each other solve problems through sharing your diverse experiences and expertise.

Create or join online chat groups. If you're working remotely, take advantage of apps like Slack. Find out if there are existing chat groups you could join. If not, you could take the lead on setting up channels for specific topics (and they don't have to be about work!). Think travel, tech, cooking, gardening, film, or a word-of-the-day group. Begin by asking your colleagues what topics they are most interested in discussing—you can do this with a simple email or a free survey tool such as Survey Monkey or Google Survey. Then, bring the group together on a platform your company uses or via Google Hangouts or Facebook.

For starters, you and the other people in the group will have one thing in common: the reason you joined the group. Generate active participation by asking a colleague or two to jump-start the chat. Others will follow suit organically.

Say "yes" more often. Another excellent strategy for building lateral connections is to embrace assignments that involve collaboration with new counterparts in the organization. If your company has various committees (such as the sustainability, social planning, or virtual celebrations committee), volunteer: These are often a valuable cross-departmental way to get to know people you'd normally not work with. You can learn about these opportunities at your company's intranet,

via e-newsletters, and by asking your supervisor or HR representative.

Many companies have social responsibility volunteer opportunities as well. An internal sales representative I mentor found out about her company's softball team by talking with her peers in another department. Through this, she has friendships with peers she otherwise would not have met. Also, check out your company's learning and development website. It will have information on short courses, which are a terrific way to build your skills and meet new people.

Show curiosity to transform a connection into a relationship. Once you have made an initial connection, you can build toward a strong relationship that makes the most of your complementary skills and experiences. Show an interest in understanding others' work by asking specific questions, and even asking for advice that would be easy for them to give. For example, if a colleague in human resources gives a presentation that intrigues you, let them know and see if they could spare 20 to 30 minutes helping you prepare for a presentation you are developing. By asking for help, you will receive valuable assistance and strengthen your connection along the way. As Ben Franklin wrote in his autobiography, "He that has once done you a kindness will be more ready to do you another, than he whom you yourself have obliged." Start there, but do provide reciprocity, as a one-sided connection is not a pathway to a strong relationship.

These strategies are straightforward but are too often overlooked and undervalued. Making lateral connections is important for not just strengthening your network but also leading you to new opportunities. They can help you be more effective in your work and spark great ideas by bridging the different worlds of knowledge you will have available through your network—not to mention, they are some of the easiest to achieve.

So why not take advantage and start now?

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DAVID CROCKETT/GETTY IMAGES

2. The Best Way to Network in a New Job

→ by ROB CROSS and PETER GRAY

To cultivate allies, work to pull people into your network rather than push your way into theirs.

ANYONE WHO HOPES to hit the ground running in a new organization must first cultivate allies—a network of people who can provide the information, resources, and support needed to succeed. But few onboarding programs offer concrete advice on how to build those all-important connections.

Our research over the past decade shows that replicating the network of an established employee in a strong culture typically takes three to five years. But recently we began to wonder if there was a way to accelerate that process. Could we develop a better blueprint for newcomer networking?

We started by tracking people joining companies with employee bases ranging from a few hundred to more than 40,000 people and pairing their progress in making social connections with monthly attrition data. The goal was to find newcomers who got connected (and productive) much more quickly than peers starting at the same time and who stayed in the organization through milestones, such as the first nine months and the two- to four-year tenure band, at which flight risk is greatest.

We found a few surprises. First, contrary to popular opinion, "brand building" across a very broad network was not necessarily better; in fact, it was correlated with departures in years two to four.

Successful newcomers were instead more selective and less superficial in their outreach. They still set up a lot of exploratory meetings, but they used them to ask plenty of questions, offer expertise and assistance where they were able, create mutual wins, and generate energy. Greg Pryor, head of talent at Workday, which partnered with us on this research, describes the difference as working to pull people into your network rather than pushing your way into theirs. "We teach our people how to draw people to their ideas and create energy in interactions from day one," he explains. "When you embrace the approach, you're much more likely to connect well."

We also found—again contrary to conventional wisdom—that newcomers do *not* need a strong tie to a formal mentor or leader in their first nine months. More important for their long-term success was early contact with key opinion leaders—those well connected in the organization's networks who were able to confer know-how and legitimacy—as well as to fellow newcomers, with whom they could form affinity groups.

Crucially, effective networkers also shift their strategy as they approach the two- to four-year time frame. They begin to streamline their interactions with close colleagues, resulting in collaborative demands that are 18–24% lower than their peers', while at the same time reaching across boundaries to connect with new people in different functions or divisions and to those with similar values and passions, even when there is no clear short-term incentive to do so. The result is more opportunities for enterprisewide innovation and feeling purposeful in their work, which boosts their performance and engagement.

Booz Allen, which brings on more than 100 highly skilled people a week, is another research partner that has used network analysis to revamp its onboarding activities to help recent hires build the right connections at the right time. Aside from offering training in pull (versus push) techniques, they are encouraging cohort networks and initiating meetings between new employees and network influencers, rather than the usual-suspect mentors and managers. "You are not asking people to connect with a lot of other people," says David Sylvester, head of learning and development at the firm. "Very targeted investments make a big, big difference on people becoming productive more quickly and enjoying their time in the firm."

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3. New to the Workforce? Here's How to Grow in Your (Virtual) Career

→ by BHUSHAN SETHI

IF YOU'RE ONE of the many people who started their first job in 2020, you're probably anxious about how you'll manage your workplace relationships in a mostly virtual world. We know that the best ways for young professionals to build and grow their networks used to be through in-person experiences: participating in onboarding sessions, working shoulder to shoulder with colleagues, or attending social events like team lunches and happy hours.

How are you supposed to do that when you're working remotely? It's a question worth some serious consideration.

Fifty-four percent of U.S. business leaders plan to keep jobs remote for the foreseeable future, according to PwC's CFO Pulse survey. In addition, one-third of 330 executives surveyed by the Conference Board said that they are willing to hire 100% remote workers located anywhere in the U.S. or internationally. This means that anyone starting a new role could be onboarded virtually and work with people they may never meet in person.

While there are plenty of upsides to working from your couch, it can be especially challenging if you're new to a company. You may need to work harder than most to build meaningful relationships and establish a strong network.

The good news is that we're seeing more business leaders actively trying to help their remote teams connect and collaborate. Supporting remote work has rocketed to the top of business agendas. With the support of your manager, you can learn and grow while replicating many of the positive experiences you'd get if you were in an office.

Use remote team meetings as networking opportunities. Productive virtual networking is possible, and the easiest way to do it is in your team meetings. Try joining a few minutes early. You might run into other colleagues who have also hopped on before the call officially begins. This is an easy, natural way to strike up casual conversations with your colleagues—the first step toward making new connections.

Once the meeting starts, listen intently to show people that you're engaged. Think of curiosity as your superpower. Don't shy away from asking your manager and colleagues questions. You're not going to be able to shake hands with anyone in person, at least not right now, so you need to speak up if you want to be visible.

Afterward, message someone whose ideas you found interesting or challenging. It may be the best opportunity to connect with a peer to help

OXYGEN/GETTY IMAGES

You're not going to be able to shake hands with anyone in person, at least not right now, so you need to speak up if you want to be visible.

you not only get situated but also understand the details of their role.

Seek out mentors or coaches. A mentorship is one of the most valuable relationships someone in their early career can build. As you learn to navigate your new role and build out your career in general, a mentor can clarify your priorities, provide constructive feedback, and offer new knowledge and perspectives.

Your manager is probably the senior employee you have the most direct access to as a new remote worker. That said, this person may not be the best candidate for a mentor. Your manager has direct power over your career trajectory, and you may find it difficult to be candid with them about your biggest struggles and aspirations. Some of those struggles may have to do with their direction. Some of those aspirations may not be in their best interest (even if they are in yours).

To find a mentor at your current organization, ask your manager or HR leader if your company has a mentorship program for junior employees. If the answer is no, rest assured that there are many other places to find one.

Internally, look into employee resource groups, happy hours, or lunch and learns. Each of these spaces will give you more face time with the colleagues you are not bumping into in the physical office and help you find people who share your values and interests. If you're attending a lunch and learn, for example, and you hear someone make a point that you're curious about, reach out to them after the event. To begin the conversation, send an email stating clearly what caught your attention and why you want to know more.

Outside of your organization, look into your alumni network, or sign up for workshops in your areas of interest. A mentor or coach doesn't have to be someone you already work with. You may be surprised by the people who inspire you outside the virtual "office."

None of these things are onetime activities. Relationships build over time, and the first conversation isn't the most appropriate time to say, "Could you be my mentor?" Remember, too, that mentoring can take place through your external network and that it can be worth staying in touch with a mentor at your company even if you (or they) find another job elsewhere.

Take initiative. If your workplace doesn't have many virtual events to help you make new connections, think about how to initiate those relationships yourself. There are a couple of easy ways to do this.

One is to check in with your manager and see if they would be open to having you run an event yourself. You don't need to rely on ideas that revolve around work. Think book clubs, virtual lunches with new hires, or coffee meetups to discuss hobbies or other common interests. Many business leaders are aware of the challenges their teams are facing right now and are eager to help. You might be surprised by how welcome your suggestions are.

The second is to help your team members (you know, the ones you met when you showed up early to that meeting). For example, if digital tools are second nature to you, can you help a colleague who is less fluent? Great at creating presentations? Ask your manager if you can help format their next presentation. And don't stop at tech skills: Respectfully offer a new set of eyes whenever an opportunity arises. Does anyone need their report proofread or help brainstorming new ideas for social media?

Resist the urge to hang back: You were hired for your unique talents, so use them to your advantage.

Say yes to stretch assignments. Some managers offer their team members opportunities to work in other departments for a limited period of time. These special projects are sometimes referred to as "stretch" assignments because they require tasks that you may have less experience with but that give you the chance to learn and grow outside of your expertise. For example, a stretch assignment might include organizing an important company event or leading a recurring meeting to hone your project management skills. These assignments also allow you to expand your network and build better relationships as you meet new people or collaborate with colleagues in different ways.

How do you land one? Once you settle into your new role, think about your strength and struggle areas. What skills do you have but want to improve and develop? What skills do you want to learn? Once you've answered these questions, ask your manager if there are any projects on your team or in other departments that

you could participate in to hone or learn those skills. If you're interested in working for another department, address why it would be a good opportunity—leverage rapport from your strongest relationships and evidence from your best work performed in your current role to make the case.

While making connections in a virtual environment may not feel as organic as doing so in person, there are still opportunities to learn, develop, and build a network if you know where to look and how to start. Help your manager or team leader understand what you need, and take the initiative to grow.

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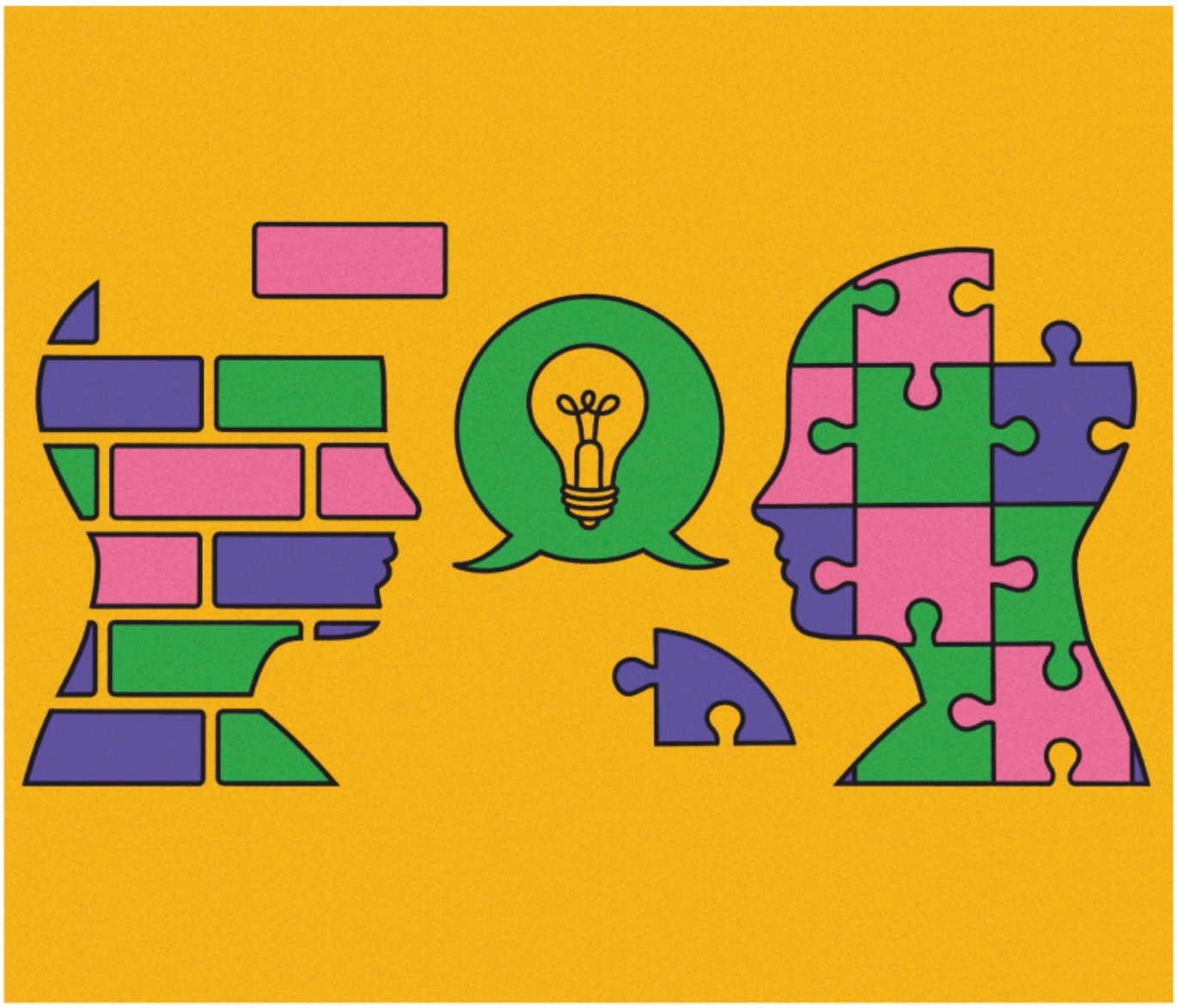

VICKIE SIECZKA

4. Rebuilding Relationships Across Teams in a Hybrid Workplace

→ by RON CARUCCI

AS PEOPLE SLOWLY return to some form of hybrid workplace, bonds that tie them to one another must be rebuilt. Over the past 18 months, most organizations have experienced some degree of fracturing as social connections and cultural cohesion have been strained. The challenges of remote work, the dramatic uncertainty, the clumsy process of figuring out what returning to the office could look like, and the mass exodus of workers fed up with cultures that make them feel devalued have all served to threaten a sense of community. On top of all that, most of our

Working to rebuild bonds is especially important because most people won't be returning to work as the same people they were before the pandemic.

remote work interactions have been with our immediate colleagues and focused largely on the tasks at hand—research from Microsoft suggests that cross-functional collaboration went down by 25% as interactions within groups increased during the pandemic.

But fragmentation isn't a by-product of remote work. It results from a lack of intentional bridge building to link discrete groups and regions. Silos were certainly prevalent before the pandemic—hybrid work has simply created new requirements for effectively connecting teams that must work together to achieve shared outcomes.

Working to rebuild bonds is especially important because most people won't be returning to work as the same people they were before the pandemic. The last 18 months have changed all of us in some way: Our values and priorities have shifted. Our senses of meaning and purpose have broadened. Our anxiety has increased. For some, tolerance increased, whereas for others, it decreased. In short, we have to get reacquainted with who we've each become. Otherwise, our natural biases that formed about who each of us were will kick in, creating unhelpful dissonance as we react to one another as we did before the pandemic. For example, one executive said of his colleague, "She used to have the best sense of humor, but now quips I make that she would always laugh at get no reaction at all." He'd failed to consider that she was emotionally exhausted because her family was hit especially hard by Covid-19.

Here are three approaches I've seen help leaders and their teams use to reestablish strong connections across organizational boundaries as they've shifted to hybrid work environments.

Create new shared identities. Humans are naturally tribal beings. We bind with and narrowly identify ourselves as one of our immediate group. By default, those outside the group are "other"—and likely not to be trusted. This type of we-they thinking will intensify if cross-functional connections aren't strengthened. Enabling people to establish new shared identities that bind them to one another more broadly helps reorient their brains to new relationships, seeing colleagues who were once "they" with fresh eyes.

Research from NYU's Jay Van Bavel found that our brains quickly shift away from previously held biases when we work together in solidarity. In one experiment using brain imaging, a set of people whose amygdalas revealed a variety of implicit biases about certain types of people showed that those biases were dramatically reduced when participants were told those same people were now "on your new team." The closer we affiliate with our "we" tribe, the more outsiders become "they." The solution requires broadening the definition of "we."

In one organization, to break down unhealthy tribalism, we established cross-functional teams to take responsibility for various aspects of the organization's cultural health. Teams focused on things like learning and education, innovation, community building, and hybrid work health and were composed of members from numerous functions and regions, all resourced and empowered to act. Creating an affinity to a team with broader purpose immediately helped improve cohesion and collaboration across the organization.

Accelerate solidarity. Recent research from McKinsey revealed that the strongest drivers of people quitting were feeling undervalued (in other words, that they and their work mattered) and missing a sense of belonging. They lacked what I call "organizational solidarity": creating strong ties to one another and to a shared purpose so that people never question either.

Relationships across functions are especially challenging to form with solidarity when you haven't seen or spoken to one another in a long while. In one client organization where there had been a lot of change in one division during the pandemic (a new organization design, new people, and shifts in people's roles), we did a comprehensive re-onboarding of everyone in the organization. Leaders realized that if we didn't level the playing field for everyone, trust would take too long to build. In a two-day session of round-robin conversations, people gathered to "meet for the first time...again." Each person came prepared to share their responses to five prompts:

1. The most significant thing that's different about me since the pandemic started is...

2. The thing I'm most concerned about returning

The ultimate determinant of cross-functional health is the quality of leadership over the teams that must cooperate to get things done.

to work in our hybrid approach is...

3. I'm most excited about this team's ability to...

4. The help I need to be successful on this team is...

5. The contribution I feel I can make to your success is...

It was a heartfelt two days full of emotions and surprises for the group. Most notable were the many comments from tenured employees about seeing their long-standing colleagues in a fresh light while accelerating trust with their new colleagues. One participant said it well: "My default position with other departments has been to assume the worst. But when they showed up with that level of commitment to me, I knew I had to trust them." These results are further evidence of what my own 15-year longitudinal study revealed: Stronger cross-functional relationships are six times more likely to produce trustworthy behavior.

As you begin bringing people back to work in whatever form that takes, invest the time to reset relationships not only within your team but also between your team and key organizational partners. Use the opportunity to shed old baggage with rivaling cross-functional partners and start new by strengthening weak ties.

Build leadership learning cohorts. The ultimate determinant of cross-functional health is the quality of leadership over the teams that must cooperate to get things done. Leaders who model empathy, curiosity, proficiency with conflict, and a genuine desire to create widespread shared success build the strongest cross-functional partnerships. But these leadership skills don't often come naturally, especially to highly results-oriented leaders who've been raised in overly hierarchical environments.

I've found the fastest way to build strong, consistent cross-functional leaders is to immerse them together in cohorts of leadership development. In nearly a dozen organizations, we've built cohorts of 12 to 16 leaders who journey together in their own learning and formation for six to 12 months. The content is focused on key skills and knowledge they need to drive the shared results their functions must produce. Recently, we've oriented content to how the organization needs to rethink leadership in a hybrid workplace. Small subteams spend time on real projects aligned to strategic goals that create added value for the organization, and pairs of "peer coaches" are assigned to meet weekly to exchange feedback and advice on identified development areas. I've found that the relationships that form during these cohort journeys remain deep for years beyond their initial time together.

As you bring leaders back to your "new normal," invest in their development by establishing cohort learning communities that will bind them to one another—and their shared organizational aspirations. They will naturally cascade their newfound broader orientation down to their teams, who in turn will connect more effectively with their cross-functional peers.

THE COMING YEAR of inventing our way toward whatever our workplaces will look like offers a marvelous opportunity to refresh and reinvent the most important relationships in our organizations: the ones between those who, together, create results and cohesion for the enterprise that no one team could create on its own. Don't squander it.

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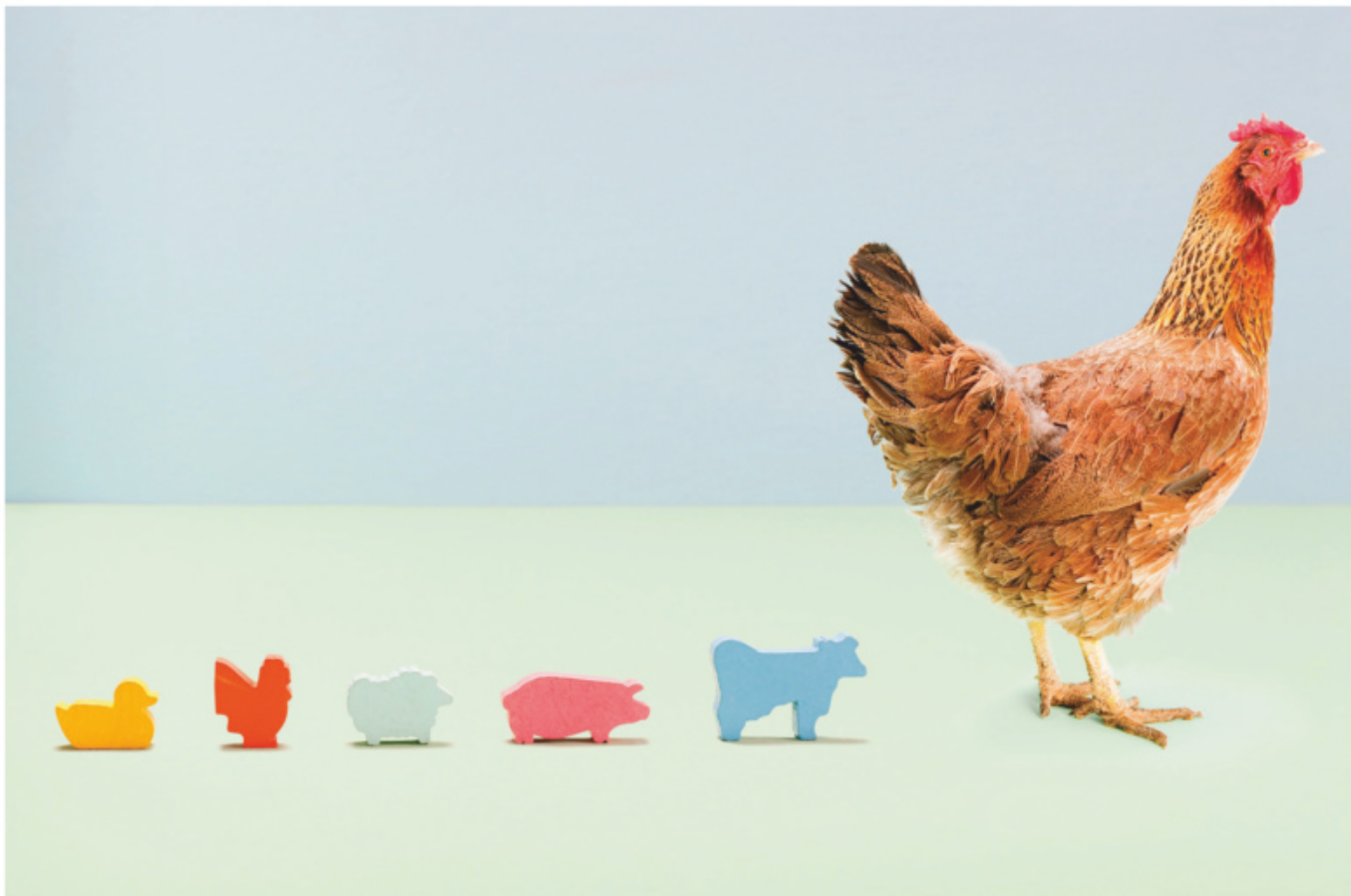

IMAGE SOURCE/GETTY IMAGES

5. How to Figure Out How Much Influence You Have at Work

→ by MAXIM SYTCH

A BANKER IN Southeast Asia wanted to allow employees of a car rental agency to buy used cars from the employer. But not a single business unit was able to put together that product. Different units were stopped by either the existing product portfolio, the underlying risk, or regulatory guidelines. One of the banker's colleagues, however, was able to facilitate valuable introductions across the company. That led to the solution being code-signed and jointly offered by two business units.

Credit the success of this new financial product to the banker's informal power. Informal power—which is unrelated to your formal title—can enable you to mobilize resources, drive change, and create value for the organization as well as yourself. And in the modern workplace, informal power is increasingly pivotal and can secure your place within your organization.

Why? Nowadays, workflow is migrating from specialized verticals to the white spaces between the verticals as companies respond more precisely to customer needs. This trend matters in organizations with cross-functional teams, account managers, or a matrix structure. Even smaller organizations are increasingly project driven.

And more and more, work is done outside the organization in collaboration with suppliers, distributors, and customers. Companies are crowdsourcing ideas and work. We engage with freelancers and third parties. Sometimes we even collaborate with competitors.

The fact is, your formal title, direct reports, and formally granted authority do not always carry you far when working across your own organization and with outside stakeholders. Do you have the informal power to generate value and get things done? Here's how to do a power audit:

Step 1. List your top 10 contacts who enable you to get work done. These contacts can be either internal or external to your organization.

Step 2. For each contact, assign a score from 1 to 10 indicating how much you depend on them. If a contact provides a lot of value and is also difficult to replace, assign a high score. Think broadly about the value your contacts offer. This includes

Informal power can enable you to mobilize resources, drive change, and create value for the organization as well as yourself.

career advice, emotional backing, support with daily activities, information, and access to resources or stakeholders.

Step 3. Do the same in reverse. Assign a score to yourself from others' perspectives. Approximate how much value you offer your contacts and how difficult it would be to replace you. Be honest.

Next, look for the following red flags in your power audit. These could indicate that you lack informal power and are replaceable.

Do all of your contacts work in one team, function, product unit, or office building? This could indicate a limited ability to generate value beyond the basic requirements of your job description.

Do your contacts provide you with more value than you return? Such relationships are difficult to sustain in the long run. Asymmetries in dependence indicate others hold the power in a relationship.

Are your dependence scores low throughout? This could indicate the prevalence of transactional relationships, ones often driven by quid pro quo. In contrast, high-dependence relationships can be imbued with values and relational dynamics that are not simply calculated.

Is all of the value you give or receive concentrated in a couple of contacts? You could be vulnerable if you lose these contacts or your relationship changes. One senior executive shared with me that two key contacts drove the value in his network. Unfortunately, one passed away and the other moved to a different region. This executive's informal power shut down overnight.

So, now that you've conducted your informal power audit, how can you improve your standing?

First of all, a prime way to rectify unfavorable power audit scores is to earn relationships by delivering value to your contacts. Ask yourself: What value can you deliver to them? One way is to develop and continuously improve upon a skill set that leads others to value your contributions. Then proactively use your skills to help others, well beyond the demands of your formal role. You don't want to be the expert nobody knows.

Second, let your job help you. Manage your job description so that you can contribute to the workflows of multiple functions inside the organization as well as customers, outside partners, or regulators. Volunteer for cross-functional initiatives. View lateral transfers as a move up. By positioning yourself at the intersection of workflows, you position yourself to meet, learn from, and deliver value to a variety of diverse groups in the organization.

Third, get to know your stakeholders and collaborators better as individuals. You may be surprised how something that is rather easy for you to do carries significant value for them. Sometimes we freeze because we believe that we have to offer really significant contributions or do massive favors for others. Knowing others well can present us with helpful alternatives. And don't limit yourself to the professional domain.

Outside of work, join social associations as well as professional ones. Shared activities have an underestimated impact on expanding our networks beyond an insular group of immediate coworkers. A friend of mine, an entrepreneur, first learned from his swim club partner about venture capital firms' criteria for selecting and funding life science companies. That partner ended up being his first investor.

Your value should not be defined solely by your ability to perform a formal organizational role. If it is, you are quite likely in trouble—sooner or later, a cheaper, younger, and smarter competitor will join the company. By creating value for diverse stakeholders and making yourself irreplaceable, you open possibilities for yourself within the organization and beyond. And, by doing so, you add value to your company.

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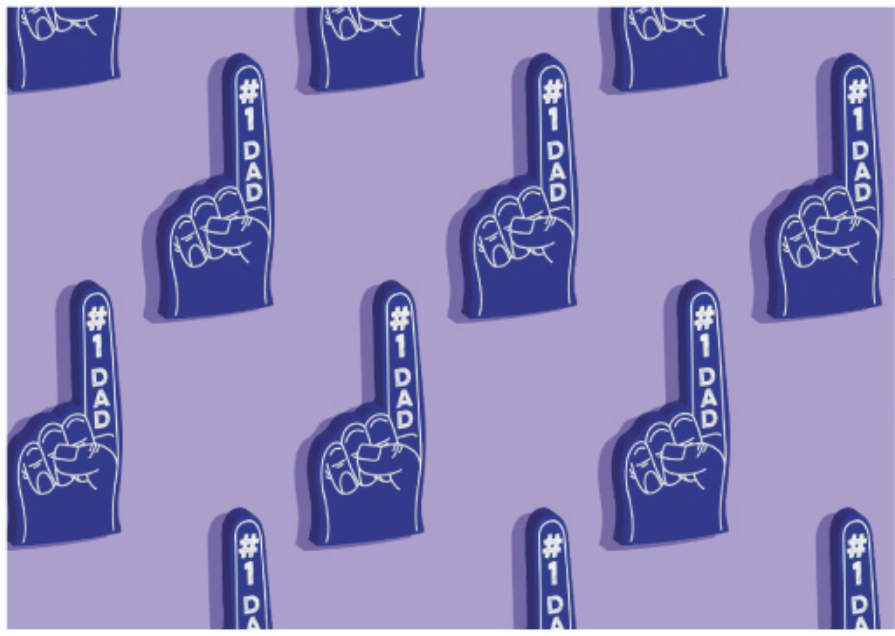

6. How Dads Can Build a Network of Parenting Allies at Work

→ by HAN-SON LEE and HUGH WILSON

WE HAVE ALL heard the truism that it takes a village to raise a child, and of course we all know that if you want to get ahead at work and in your career, you need to be an effective teammate and successful networker. But most fathers have not yet put two and two together and realized the importance of building a network of parenting allies at work.

Our research on modern working dads shows that while fathers still want (and need) successful careers, they also want to be present and involved as parents and partners. They want to share the workload and the joys. They want to soothe a crying baby at night and be home in time for baths and story time. They want fulfilling weekends with their family and meaningful time with their children throughout the week.

Unfortunately, workplace policy and tradition are still holding dads back. The notion of fatherhood being segregated from work life, as well as a culture of presenteeism and face time, have been the norm since the advent of the office. Rather than confronting this culture, many dads succumb to it, particularly if their finances are fragile.

Nurturing a network of parenting allies can help fathers on two levels: support and advocacy. On the *support* level, your parenting allies are the colleagues who will have your back when you have to rush home to look after a sick child or offer a sympathetic ear when you're overwhelmed. This type of support is interpersonal, unofficial, and can be fostered in any corporate culture. If a colleague can support you emotionally or practically in your goal of succeeding in your career and as a parent—and you do the same for them—then they're a worthy ally.

The *advocacy* level of your parenting ally network has a higher goal: changing company culture for the better. If you're hoping to mold your organization into a friendlier place for working parents, going it alone is a recipe for failure. Parenting allies can help you widen the discussion and take it in different directions. They have conversations with a wider range of people. They normalize the ideas, and leadership starts to take notice. Slowly, they change minds.

Think about advocating for a more progressive paternity leave policy. One dad can't fight for change by himself—he needs allies to help spread the word. A preponderance of conversations are needed about how better leave means happier, more productive dads. Fathers, and those who intend to become fathers, stay with the company longer, and new talent is easier to recruit. What a business loses in long hours, it gains in loyalty. Mothers benefit when fathers take longer paternity leave. These messages need to spread across the shop floor; in HR, marketing, and finance departments; and in the CEO's office.

Building Your Parenting Ally Network

More people than you might think can be your parenting allies. Many will be mothers—moms have been fighting for parental work rights for decades, and they'll appreciate the vigor a new generation of involved dads can bring. Your allies may include parents who are older than you, those who remember the challenges they faced combining their family and career. An ally can have any job title, though those who have a direct influence on parental policy at work can be more effective. They come in all shapes and sizes. They can be sounding boards for your own thoughts or ideas, or they can be in a position to spread those ideas widely. Here are a few steps to start the conversation.

Share your life as a dad, in all its messy, wonderful glory. We often hear of dads who are successful and popu-

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lar at work and who keep the fatherhood side of their identities entirely hidden from colleagues and clients. This reticence has the tendency to be contagious. To overcome it, simply start talking. Chat about your weekend and include the family outing. Mention that you're leaving on time today to get home for story time. Joke about that diaper change that went horribly wrong.

Normalize your parenting life and your colleagues will see you don't treat it as a taboo subject. Maybe a parent with younger children will want to ask you for advice, or a parent of older kids will have some tips for you. Either way, you've created a space for discussion. If you're a manager, you've also provided an example for other dads to talk about their lives as parents. Don't forget to mention the pressure of your dual responsibilities. Free others to admit that being a good worker and a good dad is sometimes a tough balancing act.

Fly your dad flag virtually. If you work remotely, you won't bump into other parents in the office kitchen, but the principle remains the same, even if you're chatting over Zoom or Teams. Hang your children's artwork in your background. Make your profile photo a family photo. Take an occasional meeting with a toddler on your lap. Start a Slack group for parents and parenting issues, invite a few people, and watch word of mouth take over. Create a virtual discussion around parenting.

Join existing conversations. Your organization may already have formal parents' groups. These are a brilliant way for moms and dads to start talking about the issues at work that affect them as parents. We've led a number of parent networking sessions where we've been asked to talk about the challenges we've faced as working dads. Workplace parenting groups are more likely to be mom-focused, often because moms are more likely to set them up. You and your allies can help change that dynamic.

Create a dads' network. If your workplace has no ready-made parent networks, start your own. Make it a dads' network, at least to start with, to coax reluctant fathers out into the open. Some men might be put off by the idea of a general parenting club and more comfortable discussing issues with other dads. You can change the policy, if that feels right, later. We've seen more and more work-based dad clubs starting to emerge, not least through our own Dad Connect program, which aims to help dads forge connections within and across organizations.

Ask other dads at your workplace if they'd like to meet informally to talk about issues around parenthood and work that are important to them. It shouldn't require too much time or energy—once a month at lunchtime might be enough to begin. Ask HR if you can advertise the group in the staff newsletter or put a poster on the notice board. Keep an email list or Slack group of interested individuals and contact them before each meeting.

As the group becomes more established, widen its responsibilities. Invite a member of the senior management team to talk about what the business is doing to promote family-friendly working practices. Invite moms to meetings or create ties with mom groups in the business. Compile a document of innovations the group would like to see implemented, alongside examples of best practices. Keep the group engaged between meetings through regular messaging, and encourage members to discuss practical, everyday questions, such as recommendations for family-friendly restaurants or the best things to do with a four-year-old this weekend.

THOSE ARE JUST a few ideas. What you do with your allies is up to you. Whether in a formal or informal setting, and whether you're having the conversation with dads, moms, or everyone, the most important thing is to start the discussion. A work culture that acknowledges working dads is a step toward a more progressive vision of parenting and work. The more people who take part in the debate, the harder it becomes to ignore, and the sooner we'll create cultures that are genuinely supportive of all working parents.

This article is adapted from the HBR Working Parents series book Advice for Working Dads.

HBR Reprint H06JHZ

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7. Four Ways Women Can Build Relationships When They Feel Excluded at Work

→ by BRENDA F. WENSIL and KATHRYN HEATH

A MALE FRIEND of ours recently had a realization. He was walking through the bar at a private golf club, looking for a colleague he was meeting for dinner. The dark-paneled bar was filled with men, and they all seemed to know one another. Will wasn't a member of the club, and he felt a little out of place. When he found his friend and they sat down at a table, he felt more comfortable. Then he looked around and realized that only about five of the 35 people in the large room were women. Even if they were members, these women stood out in this mostly male setting. He could blend in so easily. These women didn't have that luxury.

Welcome to our world. As female executives, it's sometimes difficult for us to fit in, but we need to be in that room nonetheless.

There are typically two ways to get things done professionally. One way is explicit, established, and formalized: the job-specific mode we use to get our work accomplished every day. Job descriptions, agenda items, expertise, and hierarchy dictate how this work is done and how formal decisions are made. The other way is informal, highly nuanced, and relationship-based. It involves leveraging human connections, corporate maneuvering, physical proximity to decision makers, and personal and professional influence inside the office and outside at informal gatherings. While both ways are important, we have seen in our work coaching women executives that they overwhelmingly struggle more than men to take advantage of informal networking situations.

Part of the problem is systemic: When men go out together after work, women often are not invited. Eighty-one percent of women say they feel this type of social exclusion in work situations. This problem has further intensified, based on published reports, as the #MeToo movement has grown, with men saying that they feel more hesitant to socialize with female colleagues for fear that their motives might be called into question. Many men we know or work with have told us that this is a genuine concern for them today.

The other issue is that women themselves often can't or don't want to socialize after work or during work hours. They keep their heads down at the office to maximize their efforts, and then they feel the pressure to get home to spend time with their families (and often to start their "night shift" of cooking, laundry, homework help, and bedtime routines). Many of our women coaching clients have told us things like: "I don't have time to go out with the group. Nothing gets done at these things anyway. It's all politics."

Regardless of the rationale, the effect is the same: Doing less relationship

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building limits women's access to sponsorship and diminishes their chances for career advancement. Developing informal relationships is one of the most important things women can do to advance their careers. With our livelihoods on the line, we must turn this dynamic around.

By committing to a manageable combination of informal relationship building inside and outside the office, we can amplify our efforts and develop genuine influence with senior colleagues and decision makers. Here's how:

Leverage informal norms. Is your workplace a coffee culture? Do people play cards or grab a drink together after hours? Knowing what social rituals define your organization makes relationships easier to maneuver. There's no need to get a lunch on the calendar, for instance, if you know the executive vice president is in line at Starbucks every morning at 7 AM. Regardless of the specifics, seize easy opportunities to connect.

Similarly, examine the cross-silo social networks that underlie your organization. Perhaps the tech-savvy crowd all sit together at staff meetings, or the young moms meet at the park on Sundays. Even if you don't fit within any of the social networks yourself, just knowing who does can tell you who's closely connected to whom. This also applies to the social networking tools people use. Knowing how people connect allows you to reach out to them more easily.

Make meaningless time more meaningful. Legitimate time constraints are the most common reason women cite for ditching dinner with colleagues or skipping optional work events. Because of that, it's crucial to maximize the time we do have. For instance, arrive five minutes early to meetings and start a conversation. Walk to the train with someone you know is going your way. An accomplished publishing executive we coach arrives at the office 10 minutes early every morning and walks around the building. Sometimes she has an agenda; other times she simply stops to chat with whoever's milling around. She always catches somebody and finds out what's going on. If she's proposing a new project at the following week's meeting, she gets early feedback and is more prepared for her presentation. The point is to make your extraneous time more meaningful by using it to form connections. The informal information flow is powerful.

Suit yourself. Relationship building is never a one-size-fits-all proposition. Don't bother learning to play tennis if that's not your thing. Decide what you like—opera, ball games, wine tasting, trendy eateries—and invite a few colleagues along for fun. If you are an introvert, don't go it alone. Meet a few work friends and head to the company party together. It's fine to work the room in pairs. The same goes for informal socializing. It doesn't have to be a one-on-one event. Getting a group together to have drinks or dinner makes it easier to talk to someone you don't know. Many women prefer to invite colleagues and their spouses or partners into their home instead of meeting solo or going out to dinner together. Most of us are more comfortable on our own turf.

Doing it the way you want to makes you more comfortable and lets people get to know you in a way that can change how they perceive you.

Face forward. It's not only teenagers who can't tear their eyes away from their smartphones; screens rob all of us of precious face-to-face interactions. This is an easy one: Stop hiding behind your phone. Look people in the eye and talk to them, whether it's before the meeting starts, on your way to lunch, on the stairs, or in the elevator. Simply being fully present will help you make many more crucial connections.

As women, we need to continue to work together to think of new solutions to this old problem. The higher we rise in organizations, the more important informal interactions become. Regardless of the venue or activity, relationship building is just another part of the job.

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Executive Summaries

It's possible to shift your mindset so that you see networking as an opportunity for discovery and learning rather than a chore.

LEARN TO LOVE NETWORKING
PAGE 10

Networking Fundamentals

Learn to Love Networking

Tiziana Casciaro, Francesca Gino, and Maryam Kouchaki | page 10

"I hate networking." It's a familiar refrain. But in today's world, networking is a necessity—and fortunately, an aversion to it can be overcome. Drawing on laboratory experiments and on studies at a large law firm, the authors have identified four strategies that can help people become more excited about and effective at building relationships:

Focus on learning. Adopt a "promotion mindset" and concentrate on the positives, and you're more likely to perceive networking as an opportunity for discovery rather than a chore.

Identify common interests. Consider how your goals align with those of people you meet, and networking will feel more authentic.

Think broadly about what you can give. Remember that you have something valuable to offer, whether it's knowledge, gratitude, or recognition.

Find a higher purpose. Frame your networking in terms of a larger goal—the collective benefits for your company, say—and the activity will feel more authentic and will lead to connections that bear fruit for everyone.

HBR Reprint R1605J

Looking for a Job

How to Find a Great Job Using the Strength of Your Weak Ties

Claudio Fernández-Aráoz | page 40

For those seeking jobs during the current health and economic crisis—either because the crisis has put them out of work; they worry their companies or sectors are at risk; or unexpected quiet time at home has caused them to rethink their own preferences, aspirations, and purpose—the outlook might seem bleak. Competition for open positions is likely to be the fiercest anyone has ever experienced. However, by approaching your search in a disciplined way, you can drastically increase your chances of success. First, create a list of 100 potential contacts. Next, reach out, explaining your needs and ambitions. Third, track and prioritize leads as well as their probability of leading you to a good job. Finally, seal the deal with interviewing best practices, even if you must do so virtually.

HBR Reprint H05OA4

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Executive Summaries

Looking for a Job

A Five-Week Guide to Getting a Job

Isaiah Hankel | page 46

As a job seeker, you may feel powerless right now, but this is not entirely true. Yes, your competition has increased, but so have your remote work opportunities. Here is a five-week strategy to fast-track your job search.

Week 1. Update your résumé to highlight transferable job skills. To show you are adaptable, generalize the skills on your résumé into three main areas: systems-oriented, people-oriented, and self-oriented.

Week 2. Improve your personal brand on LinkedIn and make your profile visible. Make sure hiring managers see your LinkedIn profile by using keywords to land more search results

Week 3. Conduct informational interviews with potential coworkers. These conversations might land you an informational interview, or they might guide you toward other potential opportunities.

Week 4. Ask for job-search referrals from your connections. Getting a job-search referral usually guarantees that your application will be seriously considered

Week 5. Prepare for your virtual job interview. Craft a few questions catered to the company, the work they do, or projects they've launched that catch your interest.

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What's Your Story?

Herminia Ibarra and Kent Lineback
page 52

When you're in the midst of a major career change, telling stories about your professional self can inspire others' belief in your character and in your capacity to take a leap and land on your feet. It also can help you believe in yourself. A narrative thread will give meaning to your career history; it will assure you that, in moving on to something new, you are not discarding everything you've worked so hard to accomplish.

Unfortunately, the authors explain in this article, most of us fail to use the power of storytelling in pursuit of our professional goals, or we do it badly. Tales of transition are especially challenging. Not knowing how to reconcile the built-in discontinuities in our work lives, we often relay just the facts. We present ourselves as safe—and dull and unremarkable.

That's not a necessary compromise. A transition story has inherent dramatic appeal. The protagonist is you, of course, and what's at stake is your career. Perhaps you've come to an event or insight that represents a point of no return. It's this kind of break with the past that will force you to discover and reveal who you really are. Discontinuity and tension are part of the experience. If these elements are missing from your career story, the tale will fall flat.

With all these twists and turns, how do you demonstrate stability and earn listeners' trust? By emphasizing continuity and causality—in other words, by showing that your past is related to the present and, from that trajectory, conveying that a solid future is in sight. If you can make your story of transition cohere, you will have gone far in convincing the listener—and reassuring yourself—that the change makes sense for you and is likely to bring success.

HBR Reprint R0501F

Succeeding in Your Role

How to Succeed Quickly in a New Role

Rob Cross, Greg Pryor, and David Sylvester | page 72

A role transition, whether it's a promotion, a move to a new organization, or a fresh challenge in an existing job, can be a huge boost to one's career. But in today's hyper-collaborative and dynamic workplaces, successful moves aren't as easy as they once were, even for the most qualified, hardworking people. After analyzing employee relationships and communication patterns across more than 100 diverse companies, and interviewing 160 executives in 20 of them, the authors discovered an overlooked prerequisite for transition success: the effective use of internal networks. That involves five practices: *surging* rapidly into a broad network by asking a lot of questions and discovering boundary-spanning, innovative people across the organization; *generating pull* by understanding, energizing, and adjusting to new connections; *identifying* how to add value, where one falls short, and which people in the broad network can help fill any gaps; *creating scale* by using the network to engage other key opinion leaders, expand the scope and impact of one's projects, and more efficiently deliver outsize results; and *shaping* the network for maximum thriving by making connections that enhance one's workplace experience.

HBR Reprint R2106C

How to Build Your Network

Brian Uzzi and Shannon Dunlap

page 80

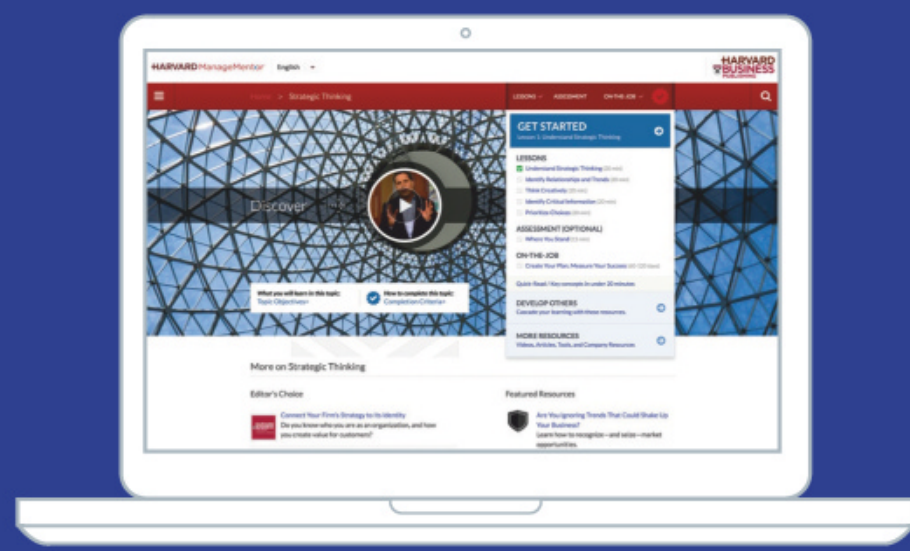
Many sensational ideas have faded away into obscurity because they failed to reach the right people. A strong personal network, however, can launch a burgeoning plan into the limelight by delivering private information, access to diverse skill sets, and power. Most executives know that they need to learn about the best ideas and that, in turn, their best ideas must be heard by the rest of the world. But strong personal networks don't just happen around a watercooler or at reunions with old college friends. As Brian Uzzi and Shannon Dunlap explain, networks have to be carefully constructed through relatively high-stakes activities that bring you into contact with a diverse group of people.

Most personal networks are highly clustered—that is, your friends are likely to be friends with one another as well. And, if you made those friends by introducing yourself to them, the chances are high that their experiences and perspectives echo your own. Because ideas generated within this type of network circulate among the same people with shared views, though, a potential winner can wither away and die if no one in the group has what it takes to bring that idea to fruition. But what if someone within that cluster knows someone else who belongs to a whole different group? That connection, formed by an *information broker,* can expose your idea to a new world, filled with fresh opportunities for success. Diversity makes the difference.

Uzzi and Dunlap show you how to assess what kind of network you currently have, helping you to identify your *superconnectors* and demonstrating how you act as an information broker for others. They then explain how to diversify your contacts through shared activities and how to manage your new, more potent, network.

HBR Reprint R0512B

Harvard Business Review



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Executive Summaries

Succeeding in Your Role

How Leaders Create and Use Networks

Herminia Ibarra and Mark Hunter
page 90

Most people acknowledge that networking—creating a fabric of personal contacts to provide support, feedback, insight, and resources—is an essential activity for an ambitious manager. Indeed, it's a requirement even for those focused simply on doing their current jobs well. For some, this is a distasteful reality; they believe it means relying on "who you know" rather than "what you know"—a hypocritical, possibly unethical, way to get things done. But even people who understand that networking is a legitimate and necessary part of their jobs can be discouraged by the payoff—because they are doing it in too limited a fashion.

Based on a close study of 30 emerging leaders, the authors outline three distinct forms of networking. *Operational* networking is geared toward doing one's assigned tasks more effectively. It involves cultivating stronger relationships with colleagues whose membership in the network is clear; their roles define them as stakeholders. *Personal* networking engages kindred spirits from outside an organization to learn and find opportunities for personal advancement. *Strategic* networking puts the tools of networking in the service of business goals; a manager creates a network to help uncover and capitalize on new opportunities for the company. The ability to move to this level of networking is a key test of leadership.

Companies often recognize that networks are valuable, and they create explicit programs to support them. But typically these programs facilitate only operational networking. Likewise, industry associations provide formal contexts for personal networking. The unfortunate effect is to give managers the impression that they know how to network and are doing so sufficiently. A sidebar notes the implication for companies' leadership development initiatives: that teaching strategic networking skills will serve their aspiring leaders and their business goals well.

HBR Reprint R0701C

A Smarter Way to Network

Rob Cross and Robert J. Thomas
page 98

The adage "It's not what you know, it's who you know" is true. The right social network can have a huge impact on your success. But many people have misguided ideas about what makes a network strong: They believe the key is having a large circle filled with high-powered contacts. That's not the right approach, say Cross, of UVA's McIntire School of Commerce, and Thomas, of the Accenture Institute for High Performance. The authors, who have spent years researching how organizations can capitalize on employees' social networks, have seen that the happiest, highest-performing executives have a different kind of network: select but diverse, made up of high-quality relationships with people who come from varying spheres and from up and down the corporate ladder.

Effective networks typically range in size from 12 to 18 people. They help managers learn, make decisions with less bias, and grow personally. Cross and Thomas have found that they include six critical kinds of connections: people who provide information, ideas, or expertise; formally and informally powerful people, who offer mentoring and political support; people who give developmental feedback; people who lend personal support; people who increase your sense of purpose or worth; and people who promote work/life balance. Moreover, the best kind of connections are "energizers"—positive, trustworthy individuals who enjoy other people and always see opportunities, even in challenging situations.

If your network doesn't look like this, you can follow a four-step process to improve it. You'll need to identify who your connections are and what they offer you, back away from redundant and energy-draining connections, fill holes in your network with the right kind of people, and work to make the most of your contacts. Do this, and in due course, you'll have a network that steers the best opportunities, ideas, and talent your way.

HBR Reprint R1107P

How to Lead Your Fellow Rainmakers

Laura Empson | page 104

In most corporate settings, leaders are expected to inspire and direct employees—leading is something they do *to* followers. But in professional service firms, the situation is different. These firms tend to be full of powerful, opinionated experts who prize their autonomy. They don't easily accept the role of follower—and may be just as unwilling to act as leaders. A leader's authority is contingent upon their consent, which can be quickly withdrawn. In this context, leadership has to be a collective, not an individual, endeavor. It requires a grasp of three key dynamics:

Establishing legitimacy. To be accepted by their peers, leaders have to keep demonstrating an ability to generate revenue.

Maneuvering politically. Achieving consensus requires social astuteness and networking skill, and peers must believe the leader is acting in *their* interests.

Negotiating perpetually. To strike a balance between asserting control and giving peers autonomy, leaders must always negotiate.

These dynamics are both in flux and interconnected, and leaders have to constantly manage them.

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