

# Network the **army** way

Just as a modern-day military force marches on information, you need a good network to advance in your career

HAVE you ever considered why a modern-day military defence force invests such considerable effort in ensuring access to timely, accurate, and relevant information?

Well, to the military, information drives intelligence. This allows it to assess threats and seize opportunities. Its forces need an early warning system to help in deploying resources, overcoming possible weaknesses and taking advantage of likely strengths.

The information is shared over a communications infrastructure, carrying it to and through a broad network of channels. By using its assets in this way, the military is quite literally “networking”; it is using its eyes and ears to keep apprised of things relevant in its environment.

In business and social settings, networking is simply a process to build collaborative relationships. Just like the military, those channels allow relevant information to flow.

Yet to be effective, those channels first need to be established. Networking therefore also builds the “network” — the “asset” that must be built and maintained well before it is needed.

## Start with a beachhead

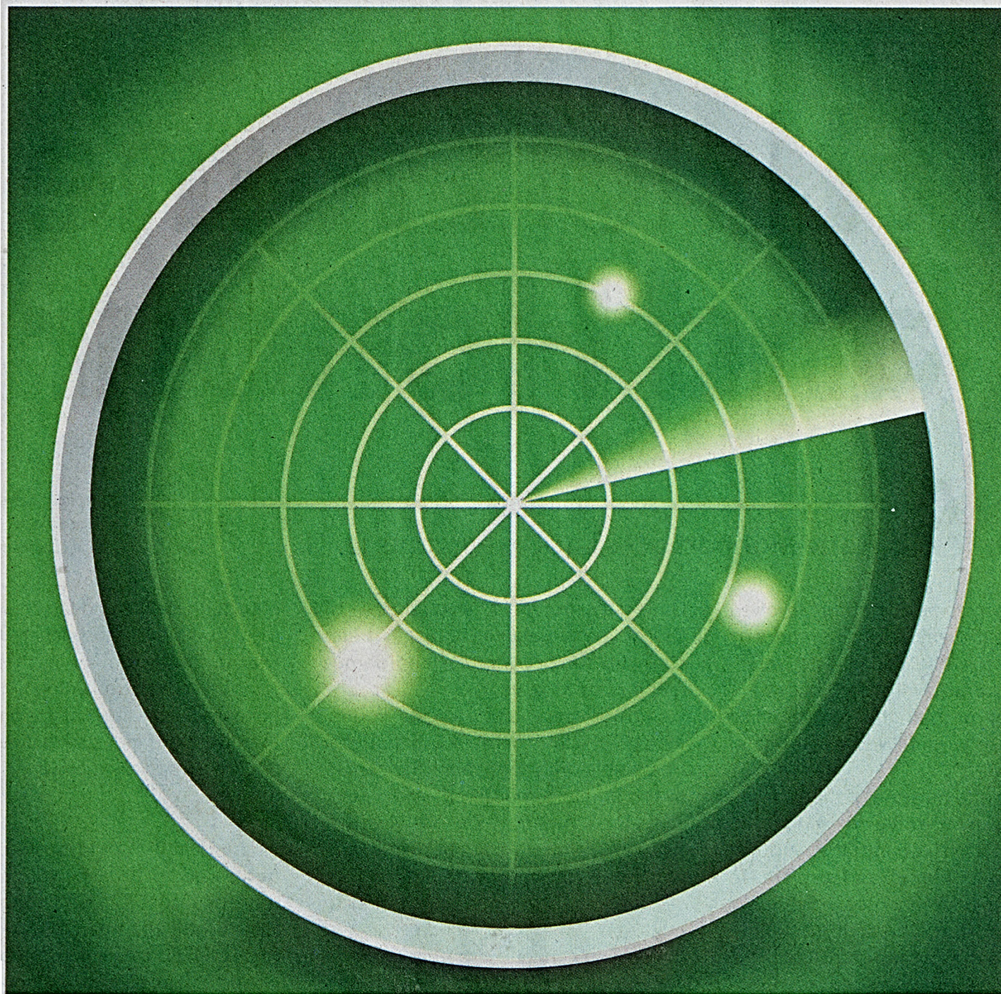
Sharing information is also vital when switching careers. An individual needs early warning of threats and weaknesses, as well as clarity about his strengths and possible opportunities.

Much of that information can be provided through your own network, so long as it has been established, and regularly maintained.

The biggest barrier to building a network is often in your head; how you think about networking. You have probably not done it much before. You may not yet believe in its effectiveness. You may already be telling yourself it is not for you.

The first thing you need to do is to develop a good networking mindset, one that values the process, and knows the steps involved. For this, you will need to do the reconnaissance, become curious about this new “enemy” and keep an open mind as you discover what the research indicates.

When it comes to getting a job, the evidence is consistent: around 60 per cent of openings are filled through personal “connections”. The most productive networking connections are not close to you but much farther away — in what American sociologist Mark Granovetter called “weak ties” in his influential research paper, *The Strength Of Weak Ties*.



Networking also builds the network, which must be maintained well before it is needed.

## Reinforce with a plan

So prioritise the need to build up your networking asset. Start by taking time to step back, reflect and compile a list of people you already know. Categorise them, such as friends, family, current colleagues, former colleagues, people in industry, alumni and so on.

In considering all your connections, you will quickly reach a couple of hundred names. Store this embryonic networking asset in a spreadsheet, as it will afford you easy maintenance. Remember the best time to build your network is well before you need it.

Consider other online resources focused on business networking. For instance, social media sites such as LinkedIn allow you to create an online profile, which

serves as your resumé. This provides you with a more permanent, 24/7 searchable presence, and allows you to subtly share a little personality.

Although this pre-work can be done in a relatively detached manner, networking requires that you eventually connect with people; you will need to engage the “enemy”.

## Build with more resources

Assess and value your current skill-sets — those competencies you have built up over the years. Many of these are called “hard skills” and are technical and functional in nature. They are closely related to your job, internal processes and organisation. Some of these skills may be less transferable than you might think.

Assess also your “soft skills”, which are the more transferable. These tend to be people-related skills, interactional, relational and communicational. They are closely related to your personal qualities, inner feelings and emotional expressions. They are very helpful when networking.

Much of your networking will be face-to-face, so aim to develop communication and emotional intelligence skills. Also increase your ability to understand non-verbal cues, to help you read moods and contexts, not just the surface content.

You may also need to learn a few additional networking skills to help you perform at events. For instance, do you know how to form a good impression, look confident, make introductions, manage small talk, listen, contribute and glide around a room with ease?

## Focus on relationships

Great networkers adopt a positive mindset, and have the relevant skill-sets that make networking a pleasurable and beneficial experience. They seem at ease with themselves, and make it easy for others too.

Intelligent networkers are not passive bystanders, but actors operating under their own command. They constantly reach forward to build new, future capacities, rather than hold back and focus only on maintaining old, past dependencies.

Networking is a collaborative process that builds trust. So respect your network by maintaining a positive outlook; give without needing to receive, promise first, then deliver. Thank and invest in those who offer their faith, commitment and support in helping you.

Choose to network intelligently and see how it can project your profile — higher, farther and quicker.

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