

Cast a wide net

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Build your connections today to prepare for tomorrow



YESTERDAY, we looked at the benefits of networking. Today's article provides some pointers to help you assess the quality of your current network and suggests a way to extend it intelligently, through the use of technology.

Great networkers treat their network as an asset, keeping it under regular review. From time to time, they ask themselves just how good their network is, using metrics to measure the levels of its "goodness".

Network quality

Quality can be measured along many dimensions, and for those new to networking, I have highlighted five areas to consider. Paying attention to the growth in each area will help you build a more productive networking asset.

1 Scale

Network size brings benefits via Metcalfe's Law which states that the bigger the network, the greater its value. Being constantly on the lookout for new, relevant connections allows you to increase the worth of this vital resource.

2 Scope

Increasing diversity builds value by increasing "weak ties" — people other than your close

friends and family members. Most importantly, it gets you in touch with more of those people that journalist and author Malcolm Gladwell calls "connectors", those few folk who are very well connected indeed.

3 Maturity

All good gardeners know that the time to prepare the soil is before a seed is planted, yet many people still believe that the moment job hunting starts, that's the signal to start network building.

4 Investment

Successful networks work more by "giving" than "receiving". You need to provide help to it before you should expect to receive help from it. Reciprocity is a key networking concept; you know that paying it forward now will pay you back later.

5 Involvement

Finally, having built it, you need to stay involved with it. Maintain relations within your network through regular and relevant communication. "Little and often" is a great friend and guiding mantra when networking.

Intelligent networking

Let's come back to John, whom

I mentioned in yesterday's article.

He shared with me that he was a serious job searcher, but constantly reaching out to others was hard work and also brought with it additional costs.

Towards the end of our conversation, he asked me whether there was anything else he might do.

I suggested he look at social networking sites like www.Linkedin.com, which are oriented predominantly towards business, allowing registered users to place an electronic version of their resumé online.

Going online removes the need to traipse around with an armful of "yellow folders".

Where a contact is keen to find out more, John can point them speedily and directly to his online presence. This approach also allows him rather subtly to demonstrate that he is comfortable with, and has competence in, the use of technology.

Being online also means that headhunters searching for skills in his area can find him more easily.

John is networking intelligently, providing a presence 24/7 that allows interested parties to locate him quickly at their convenience

— and at zero cost.

Your strategy

Intelligent networking builds pathways to a brighter future. It also draws on a broader set of soft-skills, such as the courage to connect, the relevance of rapport, the confidence to converse, the power to present, and a mindset to manage time.

Intelligent networkers are not passive bystanders, but actors operating on their future careers.

Above all other things, networking is built on trust. So, give without the need to receive, promise first and then deliver, and thank those who offer their faith, commitment and support in helping you.

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