

‘Practical advice to build your influence,
impact, reputation and effectiveness’

Phil Jones, Managing Director, Brother UK



CONNECTED LEADERSHIP

How Professional
Relationships Underpin
Executive Success

ANDY LOPATA



Connected Leadership

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info@panomapress.com

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WHAT OTHERS SAY

“This book provides a valuable perspective for change management as relationships are what drive change. A solid network based on trust can accomplish corporate transformations faster and make them stick.”

**Ann Halvorsen, Director of Change
and Communications, Philips**

“Developing a network of professional relationships should be the foundation upon which all careers are built, it certainly has been for me. However, the best networks require careful planning and thought and need nurturing.

Andy is one of the pre-eminent experts of his generation as to how best to do this, his new book is a comprehensive and welcome summary of his thinking.”

**Tim Farazmand, Former Chairman,
British Private Equity & Venture Capital Association**

“Leading a business, connectivity is critical. Your networks – internal and external – will help build your influence, impact, reputation and effectiveness as an individual and a brand. In his latest book, Andy breaks down the component parts you can pay attention to, with practical advice to get started. An essential read.”

Phil Jones, Managing Director, Brother UK

“Relationships matter. Building and nurturing trusted relationships has been key to helping me on my professional journey. From finding mentors, to getting great advice and ideas, and making better decisions.

This book offers common sense advice with easy to apply new approaches that work.”

**Robert Gardner, Executive Board Director, Non-Executive
Director and Entrepreneur**

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WHY GREAT LEADERS RELY ON STRONG PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS



*"No man is an island entire of itself;
Every man is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main."*

**John Donne, MEDITATION XVII
Devotions upon Emergent Occasions**

Despite the popular image of the strong leader, from charismatic politicians to Silicon Valley billionaires, John Donne's words still ring true 400 years after they were written. In my opinion, nobody can reach their full potential without the help of others; as leaders, the sum of the parts around us definitely is greater than the whole.



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Each of us brings certain qualities to the table. We each have experience that has taught us the response we feel is most likely to be successful in certain scenarios; we have expertise developed over years of learning and applying those lessons; we have a way of looking at the world that helps us to find solutions.

For everything we do have, however, there is something we lack. If our experience gives us strength in one scenario, a lack of relevant experience may leave us struggling in another. We may be the world's greatest expert in certain areas but no better off than a beginner in others. And our perspective may provide one possible solution but our blind spots could mean that we miss an approach that is simpler or more effective.

What we can also have in our armoury though is a network of contacts whose own qualities complement ours. People

with different experience, expertise and worldview who can plug the gaps.

Strong professional relationships are the powerful resource that helps modern-day leaders maximise their impact in every area of responsibility, not just the ones they naturally excel in. They help leaders to inspire and to innovate, to grow and to stabilise and to keep everyone motivated and working together – from employees to shareholders.

Professional relationships are not something to be left to chance, as an afterthought or even taught as a skill. A strong leader will take a strategic approach to developing the right relationships, nurturing them so that they are strong and robust and leveraging them to ensure that they and their organisation benefit.

You can often tell the quality of a leader not just from the quality of his or her relationships, but by the ease with which they draw on them and the speed and willingness with which people respond.



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Once they have mastered that strategy personally, they will then make sure that it becomes an integral part of the organisation's culture, from bottom to top. Because together we can achieve so much more than we can on our own.

BLOWING BUBBLES

Most of the senior executives and successful entrepreneurs I work with are time poor and have many different challenges coming at them from all directions. They are often in a position where, as the most senior person in their organisation, the buck stops with them and they need to be strong in their decision making.

The majority of advice they receive, whether from inside or outside their firm, will come from people in a similar role and/or the same industry. As a result, they are working in a bubble; not accessing new ideas, the type of ideas that could lead to real breakthroughs in long-running challenges.



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This means that they are exacerbating the issues of being time poor by perpetuating the same challenges and wasting time with tired old solutions.

When an unexpected event has a big impact on the business, the bubble gets smaller and more robust. During the early days of the Coronavirus/Covid-19 outbreak in the UK I spoke to more than one business leader who was self-isolating. But not in the way that the Government was suggesting.

Understandably, they were working long hours trying to protect their business from the damage caused by a downturn in the economy and a nation hiding behind closed doors. But they were so busy trying to work on solutions that they stopped talking to each other to share their ideas.

The more leaders work in isolation, the less chance there is of learning from each other's successes and failures. Vital time can be lost as a result. In addition, the smaller and less diverse the circle of advice, the more we see reinforcement of existing opinions rather than the different views and challenges that are necessary to innovate and find better solutions.

HOW PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS UNDERPIN LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES

Modern leaders face a range of challenges in their role, from selling their vision, growing the business and managing change, to recruitment and retention of the right team. Underpinning the solutions to all of those challenges are professional relationships. There are few challenges that can't be more readily solved with the help of other people.

In January 2020 I spoke at a forum for event organisers. The opening keynote speaker was Nalan Emre, COO of the global convention organiser IMEX. Nalan's presentation was focused on how IMEX were working to make all of their events as sustainable as possible. Nalan outlined the three key factors that made it possible to progress towards that objective. The second one was 'Collaboration'.

During the course of her presentation, Nalan listed the different stakeholders who each played a vital role in making the sustainability drive a success. There were the internal teams. Not just one team but the different departments within IMEX with responsibility for the event. There were suppliers such as the venue, the caterers, the transportation companies, stand builders and designers. And there were the clients – exhibitors, advertisers, delegates.

Each of those stakeholders needed to be on board. The more cooperative they were in making the changes that IMEX asked for, the more achievable the objective. Nalan said during her talk, "Once stakeholders join in, your activity gets multiplied."



"Once stakeholders join in, your activity gets multiplied."

Whatever you are looking to achieve, if you have a network of people to support you it will be easier to achieve your

objective. People whose cooperation you rely upon; who can advise you and give you the benefit of their experience; who can influence others and open doors.

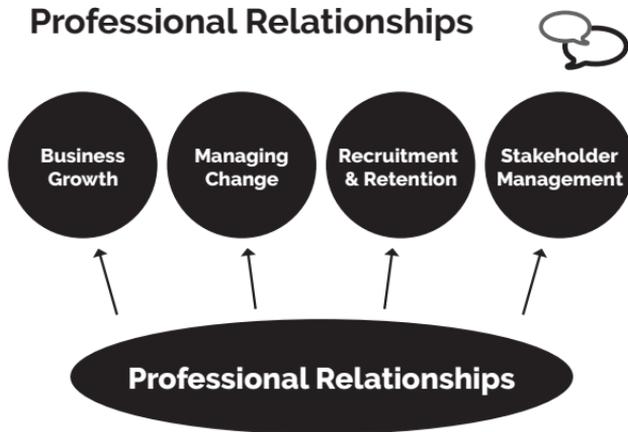


Figure 1.1

THE (6) 7 PERFORMANCE CHANGE LEVERS OF 'RELATIONAL LEADERS'

Italian leadership expert Luca Signoretti shares his Six Performance Change Levers of 'Relational Leaders'. Signoretti says that relational leaders 'have highly developed relationship-building skills as part of their skillset, in order to obtain the vital cooperation from all of the stakeholders (both internal and external) involved in generating the leader's and organisation's performance'.

Signoretti argues that strong relationships improve the performance of leaders in six ways.

1. *Agility* – enhance their ability to drive change and take advantage of new opportunities.
2. *Talent Development* – elicit a higher level of talent engagement by building closer, collaborative relationships.
3. *Knowledge and Skills* – Improve performance by accessing current knowledge through valuable professional networks.
4. *Collaboration* – Increase collaboration with all stakeholders because of increased trust.
5. *Creativity and Innovation* – Connecting internal resources with external expertise.
6. *Growth Opportunities* – Reaching out to new potential clients and opportunities through shared networks.

I would add a seventh lever to Signoretti's list, one that I think is increasingly important in a world that is more aware of the importance of vulnerability and protecting our mental wellbeing.

7. *Support* – A trusted network of people who will listen without judging and advise without prejudice.

BUILDING BROAD NETWORKS

A number of years ago I delivered a presentation at the London office of a well-known Australian bank. Before the audience arrived I was introduced to the CEO of the UK operation, who asked me to share what I was going to be speaking about.

As I explained the outline of my talk, the CEO grabbed a pen and turned over a new sheet on the flipchart standing at the front of the room.

“Are you going to speak about this?” he asked enthusiastically, as he drew a pyramid on the flipchart. *(Figure 1.2.1)*

“When I started working at the bank there were a lot of people at my level for me to share with and talk to. As I progressed through the organisation, those numbers shrank... until now, where there’s just me at my level.”

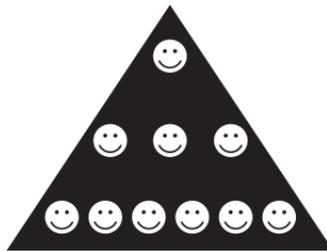


Figure 1.2.1

“So I had to go outside the bank to build my network; to find people who shared similar challenges and frustrations and in whom I could confide.” *(Figure 1.2.2)*

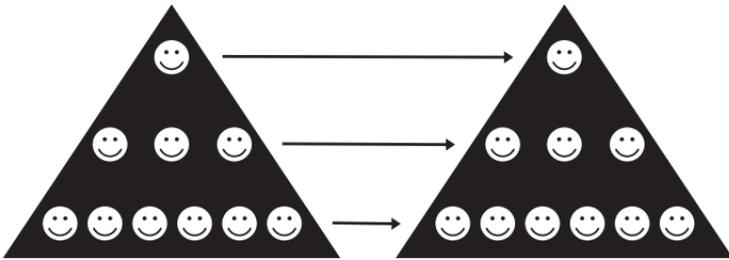


Figure 1.2.2

“In fact,” he carried on, “I’ve reached this role in my career as much because of my networks in media, politics and other industries as for my performance and expertise in banking.”



“I’ve reached this role in my career as much because of my networks in media, politics and other industries as for my performance and expertise in banking.”

Successful leaders tend to be connected, and the more connected they are, the more successful they are likely to be. Not connected for the sake of it but connected to learn, to grow, to share and to seek support. Phil Jones MBE, the MD of Brother UK, believes that networks are essential to successful leadership. For Phil, leadership is not purely about focusing on the bottom line, as important as that is. Relationships internally and externally are key, in fact they feed that bottom line.

Phil told me, “The intellectual and social currency that a leader brings to their business will produce greater results than purely financial currency.” He stressed the importance of wide-ranging conversations and how they can impact the business, telling me, “Unless the leader is connecting inside and outside and inhaling different conversations, he or she cannot breathe ideas back into the business.”



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EMPLOY A PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS STRATEGY

Despite the influence of key relationships inside and outside our businesses, many organisations leave professional relationships to chance. We invest time and resources in technical training (naturally) and key thinking on the challenges that affect us, but not on encouraging, enabling and developing the relationships that underpin the solutions to those challenges.

Professional relationships should be front of mind for everyone in your organisation. Teach the importance of networking and building relationships from entry level on. But that includes at the leadership level too. Lead from the front and focus on making sure that the right relationships

are in place and strong enough to help you to achieve your objectives.

Over the course of the coming pages I will look at the key elements you need to consider when putting a professional relationships strategy in place. We will look at:

Building professional relationships – knowing where the gaps in your network are and making sure that you are connected to the key people who can make your life easier.

Nurturing professional relationships – strengthening those connections by deepening the relationship and staying in touch despite all the other claims on your time.

And finally:

Leveraging professional relationships – seeking the help you need from those who are happy to give it.

As a leader, you are far more likely to be successful if you are connected to people who are able to help you, who want to help you and who know how to help you. People who will be able to help you:

- Feel less isolated and more supported when trying to convince people of your plan of action
- Innovate and problem-solve in a supportive and non-judgmental environment

- Grow the profile of your team, your division or your organisation both internally and externally and ensure that you are better able to manage what people know you for
- Develop new business opportunities and key connections who will support your objectives and help you achieve them
- Develop your own personal career further, leading to greater opportunities and more senior roles

My goal is to show you the way.

THE PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS WHEEL

Do you know where you are strong and where you need to focus in developing your professional relationships? Over the next two pages are two versions of a Professional Relationships Wheel, which will allow you to assess where you stand in certain areas around building, nurturing and leveraging your professional relationships.

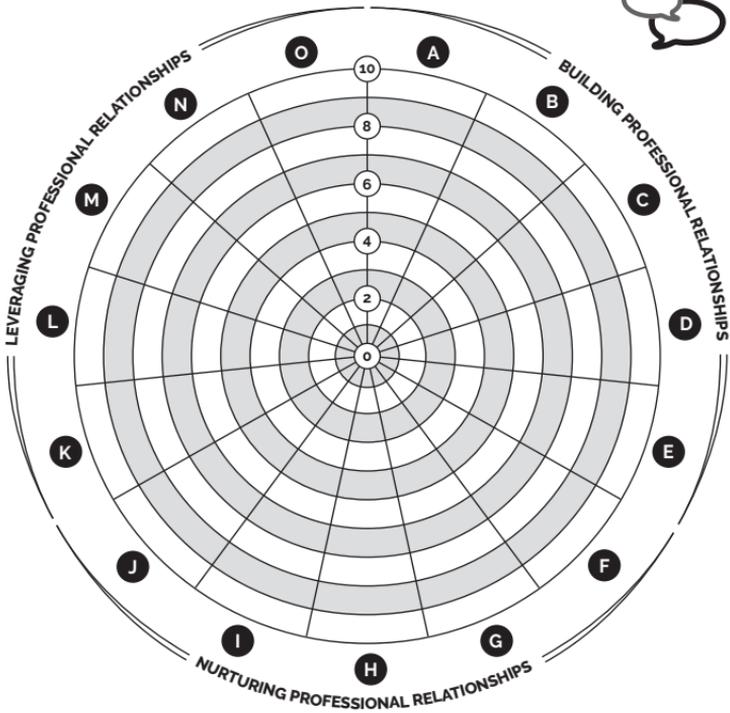
In the first Wheel, complete each section by scoring out of ten how comfortable you feel with the question and sharing in your scores.

You should see a pattern emerging. Are there areas which need more attention than others? Check your score and identify the areas that are most relevant to your role and most in need of developing. Then, in the second Wheel, write down in each relevant segment three actions that you need to take in order to progress.

Share this with your direct reports too and find out whose strengths complement each other and where the team needs support and development.

If you need copies of this wheel, please email andy@lopata.co.uk

The Professional Relationships Wheel



BUILDING

- A. Do you know where you need to strengthen your network to achieve your goals?
- B. Do you have strong relationships in all stakeholder groups relevant to your role and objectives?
- C. Do you regularly attend networking events or conferences and engage with people you don't know?
- D. How similar to you are the people with whom you have the strongest professional relationships?
- E. How active are you on social media?

NURTURING

- F. Are you investing time into following up with new contacts?
- G. How active are you maintaining contact with people with whom you already have a relationship?
- H. How willing do you think your existing network is to support you?
- I. How much weight do you give to relationship building in your day-to-day activity?
- J. How much of a priority do your staff give strong relationships outside their team?

LEVERAGING

- K. How comfortable are you asking for help and being vulnerable?
- L. Do you have a network of people who give you advice and support? (10-formal mentor/mastermind)
- M. Do your professional contacts understand what you do and how they can help you?
- N. How likely are you to ask for key introductions rather than trying to reach out on your own?
- O. Do you regularly support your network and do they ask for your help?

The Professional Relationships Wheel



In this second wheel, write down in each relevant segment three actions that you need to take in order to progress.



WHAT'S NEXT?

Thank you for reading the opening chapter of *Connected Leadership*, I hope that you found it useful and thought-provoking.

You can download the full ebook by visiting www.andylopata.co.uk/clebook

If you would prefer more tailored support, I would be happy to help you further to embed the ideas in this book, as well as to look more closely at your own specific challenges and objectives. I run a range of **mentoring and masterminding packages for leaders**.

If you would like to discuss these, we can arrange an **introductory 15-minute call**, during which I'd be happy to give you some basic advice and we can look at options of working more closely together.

To book a call, please visit www.andylopata.com/discovery. I will ask you a few simple questions to give me some background before we speak, and you will be able to book your call.

I look forward to hearing from you soon!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



A specialist in professional relationships and networking for over 20 years, Andy Lopata was called ‘one of Europe’s leading business networking strategists’ by the *Financial Times* and ‘a true master of networking’ by *The Independent* and Forbes.com.

A very experienced international speaker, Andy is the author of five books, has been quoted in a number of other business books and regularly quoted in the international press.

Andy is a Fellow and a board member of the Professional Speaking Association UK & Ireland (PSA) and a Fellow of the Learning and Performance Institute as well as a Master of the Institute for Sales Management. He is also one of just 26 recipients of the PSA’s top honour, the Award of Excellence.

Professional Relationships Matter

You can often tell the quality of a leader not just from the calibre of his or her relationships, but by the ease with which they draw on them and the speed and willingness with which people respond.

Professional relationships lie at the heart of executive success. Despite this, many leaders leave their professional relationships to chance and actively discourage their staff from forming strong bonds.

In this new book professional relationships expert Andy Lopata explores just how important strong relationships are and how to build a network of people who are:

- In a position to support you
- Want to support you
- Know exactly what support you need

‘Andy is one of the pre-eminent experts of his generation, his new book is a comprehensive and welcome summary of his thinking.’

Tim Farazmand, Former Chairman, British Private Equity & Venture Capital Association

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