

‘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



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andylopata 
Connecting is not enough

Connected Leadership

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And thank you for reading this book. I hope you find some golden nuggets to take away and implement both personally and across your organisation. I would be delighted to help you to do that – please just reach out and ask.

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.



As leaders, the sum of the parts around us definitely is greater than the whole.

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.



They are working in a bubble; not accessing new ideas, the type of ideas that could lead to real breakthroughs in long-running challenges.

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.

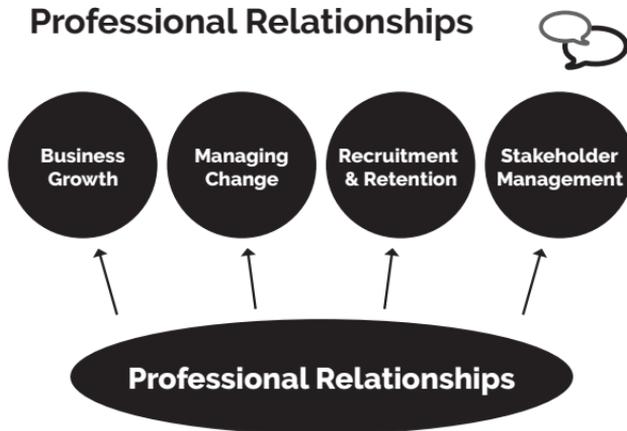


Figure 1.1

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.”

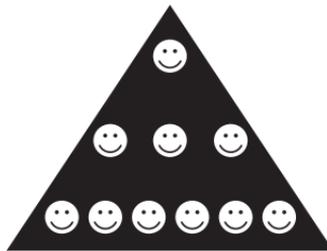


Figure 1.2.1

“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)*

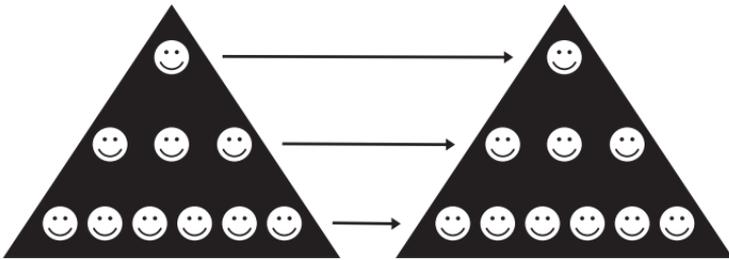


Figure 1.2.2

“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.”



“Unless the leader is connecting inside and outside and inhaling different conversations, he or she cannot breathe ideas back into the business.”

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.

2

BUILDING PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS



If I asked you to take a piece of paper now and list the key areas where you lack strong relationships, how effectively could you do so?

I would expect most leaders to be able to do so to a general degree and, if pushed, you could be very specific and strategic about recognising where the gaps in your network lie. But the key phrase here is, 'if pushed'. Most relationship and network building tends to be reactive rather than proactive and considered.

As you move below leadership levels, the amount of strategic thinking given to relationship building is, on the whole, negligible. People are told to ‘go out and build your network’ without much thought given to the best interpretation of ‘build’ (more of this later) or who to meet. At best, there might be some thought given to which industry events to attend or to developing some relationships within client or intermediary organisations, but that will be about as far as many people will go.

If you agree with my premise that strong professional relationships underpin the solutions to many of the challenges faced by leaders today, then surely it follows that a broad network with a balance of strong relationships with key people who bring different qualities to the group will make those foundations more powerful. So, rather than leave things to chance, we need to be more strategic about with whom we invest our relationship-building time.



*Rather than leave things to chance, we need to
be more strategic about with whom we
invest our relationship-building time.*

Or do we?

PARTNERSHIP V RELATIONSHIP MINDSETS

I introduced you earlier to Italian leadership expert Luca Signoretti. I recently attended a talk on networking that Luca delivered to NYU alumni students at the London School of Economics. Luca and I agree on most things but one area of difference stood out. Luca's advice on developing new relationships centred on what you could give and get from a new contact, whereas my approach is much more focused on getting to know each other first.

I discussed this with Luca and we're not so far apart on this topic after all. Luca told me that he sees connecting as 'looking for a partner'. For him, you need to have an eye on the return from any partnership. With limited time and energy, we need to be selective about partnerships we build. So understanding the return is key.

In my presentation and workshop on professional relationships I distinguish between strategic and relational approaches to developing new connections. With the former you need to understand where your network falls short in helping achieve your goals. The latter focuses on finding rapport and building on it.

Where you are being strategic you might be more transactional in your approach to developing the relationship. An accountant may well ask the financial advisor what they are going to do for them. And they may each measure just how much value the other party is bringing to their relationship – after all, there are other prospective partners who they could be investing time, energy and referrals in. (*Figure 2.1*)

On the other hand, if you meet someone and just click but there is no immediate transactional value apparent, relax and let the friendship blossom. One day they may be in a prime position to refer you to your dream clients, or you may be able to give them advice that could turn their business or career around. You don't know at this stage but enjoy their company and be open to supporting each other if and when the opportunity arises.

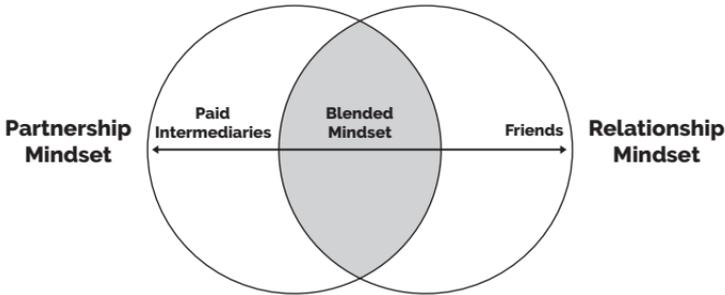


Figure 2.1

Luca's Partnership and my Strategic/Relational approach complement each other. You can have a Partnership Mindset to building new connections **and** a Relationship Mindset. It's important to be clear about the type of relationship you are seeking to develop and, from there, understand the most suitable mindset. Of course the world isn't black and white and a blend of the two is going to be the most powerful in most cases, developing strong personal relationships but able to talk about business when it's relevant. It's just a question of getting the blend right for each individual connection.



It's important to be clear about the type of relationship you are seeking to develop and, from there, understand the most suitable mindset.

A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

So, back to the question with which we opened this chapter. If I asked you to list the key areas where you lack strong relationships, how effectively could you do so?

I believe that in any project you are leading there are three key kinds of people with whom you need to build a relationship. And each of those people reside within each different stakeholder group that has an interest in the project.

The three types of people are:

Influencers

Influencers are people who may not necessarily make the key decisions but whose opinions will be key considerations for those who do. Their word has weight and their recommendations are taken seriously. I would, by the way, include budget holders and decision makers in this group as they clearly hold a lot of influence.

So many leaders focus predominantly on developing relationships with their peers at the top of stakeholder organisations but it's easy to forget that resistance at the coalface can lead to a project failing to get off the ground. Whether it's you personally or a more appropriate member of your team, it's absolutely vital that you understand the architecture and the dynamics of the networks within stakeholder groups and that strong, trusted relationships are built with key influencers wherever possible.



It's easy to forget that resistance at the coalface can lead to a project failing to get off the ground.

Intermediaries

In my early career I spent a lot of time working as a telephone sales operative. The golden rule I learned very quickly was that possibly the second biggest skill in sales, after closing, was opening. In other words, actually getting the opportunity to speak to the decision maker.

All of the people I had to call had someone in place who I needed to get past first, whether it be a PA, a receptionist or a junior colleague. And those people were tasked with stopping me. I did develop a bit of a talent in getting past the 'gatekeeper', my early relationship-building skills indicating where my future career path lay, although I never truly mastered closing. But these days I don't need to

worry. And I don't worry for one simple reason: the person I need to speak to is expecting my call.

My business relies on referral and introduction. I have a network full of intermediaries, or gatekeepers. People who trust me and who are trusted by the people I'd like to meet and who are happy to open the door for me.

Sources of Ideas, Information and Insight

The ability to sell, whether it's products, services or ideas, relies on being able to understand the mindset of the people who are buying. The more you understand about their needs, challenges and desires, the easier it is to present to them a solution that appeals.



The ability to sell, whether it's products, services or ideas, relies on being able to understand the mindset of the people who are buying.

To do this you need people to let you know what people are thinking, what challenges they are facing and what's happening in their world – whether it be their division, organisation or industry. Get plugged into the conversations that are taking place involving the people you want to engage with and influence. That means building a network who will share updates and insight with you.

Look at a key project you and your team are working on at the moment. Draw a Relationship Chart like the one below (Figure 2.2), filling in the names of the key influencers, intermediaries and sources of information.

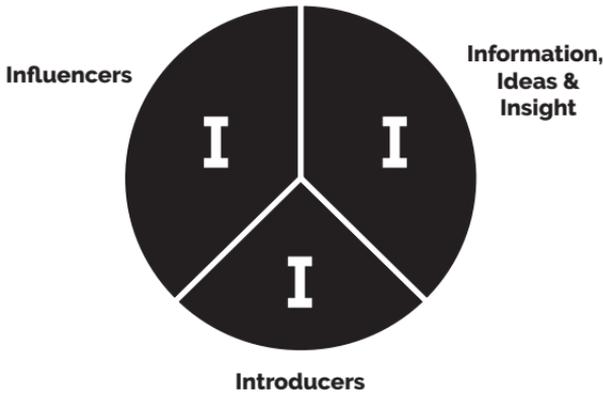


Figure 2.2 - Relationship Chart

Start to list the names of the people you already know and see where they fit on the diagram (they may fit in more than one segment). Are you engaging with them in the right way and are they already providing the support you have identified? Is your relationship strong enough so that they would want to help you?



*Are you engaging with them in the right way
and are they already providing the support
you have identified? Is your relationship strong
enough so that they would want to help you?*

Many projects you work on will have different stakeholder groups. For example, you might need to build strong relationships with Influencers, Intermediaries and Sources of Information, Ideas and Insight within your own organisation, across a client's organisation, across a client's industry and in the supply chain. To take this exercise to the next level, complete a Relationship Chart for each stakeholder group, giving you a clear view of who you know, who you don't and where you need to develop stronger connections.

This simple exercise to mapping out where your network can help you get better results will quickly identify the gaps in your network and tell you where you should be focusing your attention on building relationships strategically.

HORIZONTAL AND VERTICAL NETWORKING

The Relationship Chart approach can also work when looking at more formal networks and how you get a much stronger return from your engagement with them. At the NYU alumni event I mentioned earlier, I met Saurav Dutta. Saurav was at the event as the result of an invitation from other alumni members. Saurav hadn't been in the same class as the people who invited him though.

Many people attend business schools to complete a course like an MBA as much for the benefit of the network they will build there as for the content itself. The power of an MBA alumni network is well known. Saurav's approach takes this to another level; rather than connecting just

with people in his own class, Saurav was proactive about connecting with at least one person in each year group that he could.

He considers his own year group to be his ‘horizontal network’ and he stays in touch with them proactively on an ongoing basis. He calls his network of people in other year groups his ‘vertical network’ and he told me that through that network (assuming he has correctly identified the year group’s key influencers), he has access to the rest of each year’s alumni. By building relationships with people in different year groups, he has the potential to reach the whole course alumni, not just his own year.

A RELATIONAL APPROACH TO RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

While it might be time efficient, a purely strategic approach to developing relationships would probably leave you, and others, feeling more than a little cold. Taking away the human element of the need for community and to be surrounded by people we like and have interests in common with, the theory of Six Degrees of Separation teaches us about the power of random connections. The help you need can often come from the most unexpected quarters.



*The help you need can often come
from the most unexpected quarters.*

So there is a judicious reason for you to include a strong relational element to your professional relationships strategy.

If you haven't come across the Six Degrees of Separation before, I explain it in detail in my books *...and Death Came Third!*¹ and *Recommended*². In brief, this is the theory that we are no further than six steps removed from anyone in the world. Whether you want to connect with Bill Gates, Barack Obama or Beyoncé, there is a route to connect with them through your network.

Whether they would want to accept your invitation to talk is another topic entirely!

What this does tell us is that it is important to allow for random connections in our network alongside the strategic ones. Sometimes the colleague of your key stakeholder might have less influence on them than their spouse or sporting buddy does.

So be open to developing strong relationships purely on the basis that you enjoy their company and have plenty to talk about. They may provide you with the support or inspiration you need when times get tough, they may be able to make an unexpected but key introduction or you might just get along well together.

1 *...and Death Came Third! The Definitive Guide to Networking and Speaking in Public*, Lopata A and Roper P, 2nd Edition, Panoma Press 2011
<https://lopata.co.uk/product/and-death-came-third/>

2 *Recommended: How to Sell Through Networking and Referrals*, Lopata A, Financial Times, Prentice Hall 2011
<https://lopata.co.uk/product/recommended-how-to-sell-through-networking-and-referrals/>

In fact, it could be you who plays a key role in supporting their activity rather than the other way round. You just don't know at the point of connection and as you build the relationship. Because of the strong rapport and mutual interest, these supposedly random connections can often be the most impactful people you know. As the relationship naturally grows much stronger, more quickly, they are motivated to help you and will actively look out for opportunities to do so.



*Because of the strong rapport and mutual interest,
these supposedly random connections can
often be the most impactful people you know.*

So don't write them off.

BE YOU

It is very natural to be concerned about approaching relationships from such an analytical angle. This is one of the biggest challenges in the work I do. I look at what works and is effective and then break it down into teachable components. That process naturally leads to something that might feel less than authentic.

It is important that you engage with people you meet in a truly authentic way. Be you and don't try to be anyone else. If you don't have rapport, if you struggle to hold

a conversation with someone, then accept that your professional relationship will most likely be able to reach mutual respect rather than friendship. And that is fine.

Don't try to build relationships with people purely focused on what you want from them. It's fine to recognise who you need to develop stronger relationships with but then engage fully in doing so. Seek to support them and listen to them. Reach out when you don't need anything and particularly when you know that they might need your help.



Don't try to build relationships with people purely focused on what you want from them.

It's fine to build a network strategically based on the needs of your business and role. But always remember that you are engaging with individual humans, not their job title.

3

MANAGING YOUR PROFILE AND PERSONAL BRAND



For years I received a more hostile reception to one part of my talks and workshops than to anything else. I could almost guarantee that someone would argue back or cross their arms and grimace when I shared my opinion.

It happened when I told people, “It doesn’t matter how good you are at your job or what fair practice policies your organisation puts in place, your profile and your relationships will still impact your chances of landing a key role or winning promotion.” Explain it as best I could, it certainly wasn’t a popular opinion to share!

Then I heard about some research, to be honest a very old piece of research but still highly relevant, that put everything into perspective. The research, known as PIE, was originally shared by Harvey Coleman in his book *Empowering Yourself*³ in 1996. In the book, Coleman argued that career progress was dependent upon three key elements:

Performance – how well you do your job

Image – what people think about you and what they see as your qualities

Exposure – who knows about you and what they know and value

The reason I received so much pushback during my talks is that the majority of people expect performance to be the main criterion when it comes to securing promotion or being selected for that plum role. That is a reasonable expectation – in a fair world. But I'm afraid that the world doesn't work that way.

Coleman estimated that performance accounted for only 10% of the factors influencing promotion decisions. Image accounted for 30% while exposure is worth a whopping 60%. (*Figure 3.1*)

3 *Empowering Yourself - The Organizational Game Revealed*, Coleman H J, Second Edition, Authorhouse 2010
<https://www.authorhouse.com/en-gb/bookstore/bookdetails/287381-empowering-yourself>

Harvey Coleman - PIE

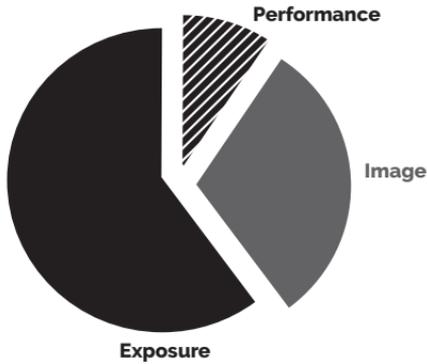


Figure 3.1

If you think about it in everyday terms, this makes sense. You might be good at your job (Performance) but unless you develop a network, the chances are that only your immediate line manager and your peers will be aware. And, while at more senior levels they may be influential, they usually don't make the decision on promotion.

If people are either unclear about where your key qualities lie (Image) or not enough *influential* people know about those qualities (Exposure), then your performance will be academic.



If people are either unclear about where your key qualities lie or not enough influential people know about those qualities, then your performance will be academic.

So you need broad and strong professional relationships to help you to deliver a powerful personal brand and to make sure that your name comes up in the right way and in the right conversations.

BEING TAKEN SERIOUSLY

Coleman's PIE model was developed to explain the key factors behind promotion decisions but it easily transfers to other scenarios. Who knows about you and what it is that they know, think and say about you and your ideas will drive your success in a range of ways.

Let's take a key strategic decision that you want your organisation's board of directors to adopt. The first factor that will influence your success is whether you are in that meeting, either as a member of that board or to present the idea to them. The ability to pitch the idea yourself will give you much more control over how it is presented and positioned.

If you're not in that position, then you are already on the back foot, relying on somebody else to present your idea with the same commitment, passion and in-depth knowledge as you would. They may need to be able to fence all manner of questions and challenges with confidence and a high degree of insight.



If you're not in that position, then you are already on the back foot, relying on somebody else to present your idea with the same commitment, passion and in-depth knowledge as you would.

Even if you are present, you then need the rest of the board to comply. How they receive the proposal will be very much reliant on how they perceive you and your qualities. If you have high levels of credibility across the members of the board, then your proposal will stand a good chance of being accepted. In short, if they trust you and they trust your ideas, there is likely to be less pushback.

If, however, your personal relationships with key people on the board is not strong or if you have very low recognition among members of the board, your idea may struggle to even be discussed seriously.

So your professional relationships and your profile play an essential role in how your idea is received. This is just one example of how this might play out, there are many others.

THE BENEFITS OF SHOWING AN INTEREST

At the beginning of my career, even before I went into sales, I worked in a large civil service office in Croydon. I was a Social Fund Officer for the Benefits Agency. My job

was to decide on claims for grants and loans predominantly from people claiming benefit. I would make my decision based on an application form and a member of my team would deliver it to our reception team who would, in turn, deliver and explain the decision to the claimant.

If the claimant was unhappy, which was quite likely given the budgets we were allocated, they would be entitled to ask for a review, which initially my team would undertake before setting an appointment with me if appropriate. It was the receptionists who would decide whether or not a review was appropriate and either set the wheels in motion or pacify the disappointed claimant.

I was in my early 20s and, I'll be honest, in a job I didn't enjoy. I hadn't heard of networking or 'professional relationships' as concepts at this stage, so there was nothing strategic about how I acted. But I did benefit from the way I engaged with that reception team.

We worked on flexitime, which meant that we had to complete a set number of hours a week (amazingly, looking back, just 36 hours excluding lunches) and had to be in the office between certain times. Outside of that we could be flexible in the hours we kept.

A number of my colleagues would get in very early and take a very short lunch so that they could leave at the earliest possible point in the afternoon. When lunchtime came they would move their paperwork to one side (we didn't have the luxury of computers back then!) and get their sandwiches out of their bags. They would eat at their

desk and not circulate, getting on with the job as quickly as possible. Many people still work that way today, even without flexitime, just because of the demands of their roles.

I was different, however. I used to like to go out for lunch every day (I've never really been one for sandwiches) and would call on friends from across the office to see who was free. Even in those days, I tended to be the one arranging everyone's social diary. Often a small group of us would go out for lunch and enjoy the brief pleasure of freedom from the office.

Probably the person I spent the most time with on those breaks was my friend Juliet, who managed the reception team. I got on very well with Juliet and, as well as lunches, I would stop off when I visited reception for a quick chat. I'd also chat to members of her team and got to know them quite well, all of which probably irritated my boss.

However, I learned many years later, when Juliet and I reconnected through Facebook, that my social butterfly approach benefited me professionally. Juliet told me that her team would always back my decisions when reviews were requested, as long as they were reasonable of course. Meanwhile, my colleagues faced review after review, granted almost automatically.

It was no coincidence that my colleagues never attempted to engage with the reception team, instead just dumping their decisions on them and leaving with barely a word.

One of the biggest challenges facing business leaders is breaking down internal silos and encouraging collaboration and mutual support between teams and departments. People get frustrated when colleagues in other parts of the organisation don't support them or deliver what they need as a high priority.

But is it really surprising if people aren't taking the time to get to know each other and understand what their colleagues are trying to achieve? So many organisations focus on team building within individual teams or have conferences and retreats with the intention of building cross-organisation relationships. But how sustainable are they? How much conversation between colleagues takes place away from the retreat, throughout the rest of the year?

People will support others they like and trust. In organisations where individual and team goals take precedence, why would anyone prioritise a request from elsewhere in the organisation? Unless they like the person who asked.



In organisations where individual and team goals take precedence, why would anyone prioritise a request from elsewhere in the organisation?

Great leaders implement goals and encourage conversations across the whole organisation. Not just once a year but on an ongoing basis. The more exposure people gain and the stronger the relationships they forge, the more they will gain the support they need and be happy to support others.

IT'S WHO KNOWS YOU

We all know the advice, 'It's not what you know, it's who you know'. That's fine, as far as it goes, but far more powerful is who knows you and what they know, what they say about you when you're not in the room.



*Far more powerful is who knows you
and what they know, what they say
about you when you're not in the room.*

Go back to the Relationship Chart in chapter 2 (*Figure 2.2*) and ask yourself what each of those key people you have identified either say about you to others or hear about you from their network. It's important for you to take responsibility for managing that message by developing strong relationships with people having those conversations and making sure that they understand what you do, what you're trying to achieve and, most pressingly, why you are important to them.

What does your personal brand need to be inside your organisation, across client organisations, across your industry and client industries, in your local community, among your shareholders and elsewhere?

Understand all the key people whose input, influence and action will impact your ability to achieve your objectives and make sure you focus on developing those relationships and getting them on board as your biggest advocates.

4

THE IMPORTANCE OF INFLUENCE



In chapter 3 we explored a scenario where you are trying to get a proposal accepted by a board of directors. This is not an outlier, many of the decisions you need to be made in your favour will take place after a conversation that you may not be party to. Sometimes you might have the opportunity to present your ideas in person, at other times they will be presented on your behalf.



Many of the decisions you need to be made in your favour will take place after a conversation that you may not be party to.

Somehow you need to be able to influence proceedings through the people directly involved in that conversation.

One of my clients is a globally renowned pharmaceutical company for whom this is a key challenge. When I first worked with them it didn't take me long to work out that my usual referrals training didn't apply to them; they couldn't seek ways to be introduced to people who had no intention of meeting them in any scenario.

Many decision makers in local healthcare economies put up walls between themselves and medical reps to protect them from accusations of favouritism and to ensure that their decisions can be as objective as possible. The challenge for the pharmaceutical companies is to successfully influence those decision makers without crossing the line of what is appropriate and what is permissible.

The approach we took was to understand two key things:

- 1. Who influenced the key decision makers*
- 2. What influenced the key decision makers*

THE INFLUENCE MAP™

To address the first challenge, understanding who influences the key decision makers, I asked my clients to draw up an Influence Map for each main stakeholder. The process, which is a spin on stakeholder mapping, requires a good basic knowledge of the networks and dynamics within the prospect's organisation. If that's lacking, the first step would be to find sources of information and insight who can help you, as discussed in chapter 2.

The Influence Map is very straightforward but can be very powerful. I recommend working in a team on each map so that you can brainstorm ideas to capture as much information as possible.

Step One: Put the person you want to influence at the centre of your map and around them name the people you believe will influence them (*Figure 4.1*). Where possible be specific, you want to know the names of people if you can or, at the very least, their job title. You can develop the map to two degrees of separation (pension fund trustees in the example).

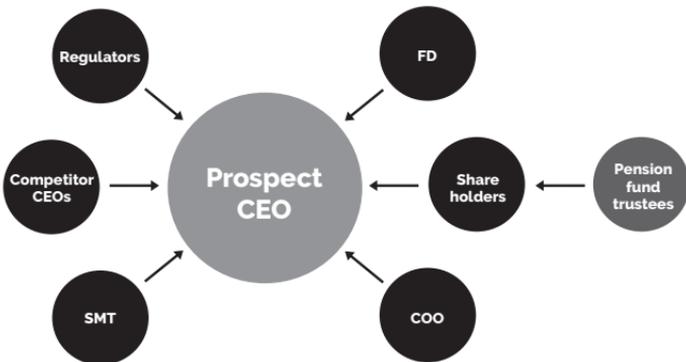


Figure 4.1 - Example Influence Map

For each person in the map, enter three scores, each out of ten (*Figure 4.2*):

1. *How strong is your relationship with them?*
2. *How well do you know what is important to them?*
3. *How influential are they?*

The strength of your relationship and how influential they are together give you an indication of whether your relationship-building efforts are focused in the right areas. If, taking our example map, you have a strong relationship with competitor CEOs but they are not very influential, perhaps you should be investing more time in developing your relationships with more influential stakeholders such as shareholders.



The strength of your relationship and how influential they are together give you an indication of whether your relationship-building efforts are focused in the right areas.

The second degree connections, in this example trustees, helps you see how you can make your message viral and goes to our second challenge: what influences the decision makers. If you can influence the trustees to talk to the pension schemes (shareholders) and inspire them, in turn, to influence the CEO, your message might get through.

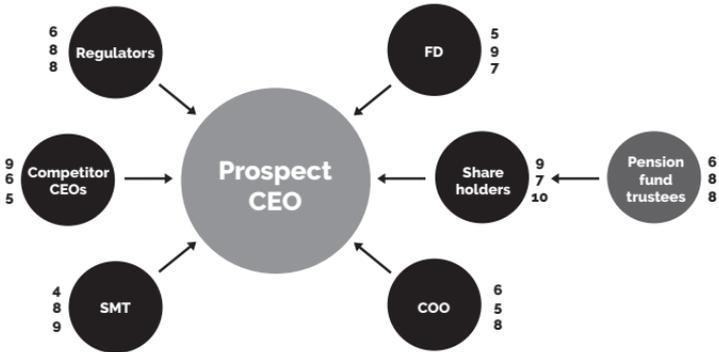


Figure 4.2 - Example Influence Map with scores

But for it to do so, it needs to resonate. And that's where our middle score, understanding what is important to them, comes in. Your message needs to be sticky and transferable – people need to remember it and be able to pass it on accurately. For people to both want to engage with your message and pass it on, it needs to feel important and personal to them.



For people to both want to engage with your message and pass it on, it needs to feel important and personal to them.

And the more you understand what is important to them, the better you can craft that message.

Remember that your message might need to be adapted to reflect different stakeholders' priorities. I worked with

one client who was struggling to make progress on a key account. He had developed a strong relationship with his contact on the account, mainly because that contact really believed in the cost-saving benefits of my client's solutions.

However, that contact was due to leave his role and his successor was not engaging with my client at all. He seemed resistant to any approaches. I suggested to my client that perhaps cost savings were not as big a priority for the successor as they had been for the original contact. As a result, they were less likely to prioritise any conversations with my client. He needed to understand what was important to that specific person.

And sure enough, the new contact's focus was on product quality rather than cost savings, so the message could be adapted and progress made.

THE ROLE OF TRUST

Of course, probably your primary asset when seeking to influence people is your credibility – how much people trust and believe in you. Credibility in a professional context has three different elements:

1. *Trust in you as an individual*
2. *Trust in the company or brand you represent*
3. *Trust in the product or service you deliver*

Ideally, all three of these elements will be strong, if one is missing then your credibility begins to wobble. For example, if people trust you as a person but don't believe in the service you are offering, they will let you down with a smile. But they are not going to work with you until either you are offering something different or you address issues with the service to their satisfaction.

Trust in you as an individual

This is the element you are most in control of. People want to know that you are reliable, knowledgeable and have high integrity. They also want to feel confident that you have their interests at heart; that your focus is on serving and supporting them rather than on meeting your own objectives and moving on.



They want to feel confident that your focus is on serving and supporting them rather than on meeting your own objectives and moving on.

This is where people who build strong professional relationships are in their element. Everybody you deal with is an individual, with different measures of how they trust people. While some will trust easily and wait to be proved wrong, others will want you to earn their trust and respect. One might favour reliability and distrust you as soon as you turn up late, fail to respond on time or let them

down. Others might be more focused on your integrity and forgive you any one-off failings.

I believe that the best way to earn people's trust is to be authentic. Authenticity is a word that is bandied around very loosely these days but I believe it is integral to strong, trusted professional relationships. Be yourself and be honest and you will attract people who appreciate your genuine qualities. If you try to be someone you're not in order to please others, it's far more likely that the mask will drop at some point and people will wonder how much is an act.



Authenticity is a word that is bandied around very loosely these days but I believe it is integral to strong, trusted professional relationships.

You can develop personal trust by showing a genuine interest in other people. When you engage in conversation, invest yourself fully and listen actively to what the other person is saying. Take yourself out of the equation, don't worry about what you can get from the conversation and focus on what you can give. When you do that, people will pay attention in turn when you are speaking to them and seek ways to support you.

You can also build personal trust by developing your network with other influential people. At the beginning of the book there are a number of endorsements from people in senior positions in well-known organisations. This is a very common technique used when publishing books and is designed to bolster the author's credibility for those who might not have heard of them before.

This is *Associated Trust*, trust that you earn because you are associated with another source that is already highly trusted. Associated trust is probably more often used when marketing goods and services; see how often celebrity endorsements are used in advertising campaigns for example, but can also affect how people see you as an individual if you surround yourself with respected people.

If you are seen to be trusted by people who are already respected and liked, you're already a step ahead.



If you are seen to be trusted by people who are already respected and liked, you're already a step ahead.

Of course, this can also work in reverse, with people distrusting you because they have had negative experiences, or because of the poor reputation of someone whose company you are known to keep.

Trust in the company or brand you represent or the product or service you deliver

Sometimes, however hard you work to build your personal brand and trusted relationships, you will find it difficult to build credibility and influence others because the company you represent or product you are offering isn't trusted. On the positive side, it can work the other way round as well.

Sometimes it's a whole profession that has earned a bad name. Estate agents, cold callers and my clients, pharmaceutical reps, are good examples of professions that are not typically seen to be trustworthy. In some cases that is fair but often it's the actions of a minority that make life difficult for the rest.

I trust and respect the clients I have worked with because I have seen the passion they have for what they do and for the difference they can make, but they will have a hard job of proving that to the outside world who rely on stereotypes to make a judgment. It doesn't have to be the end of the world if that's the case, you can still turn the tables around and build strong credibility. But you will probably have to work twice as hard to do it.

The first thing to recognise is that you are not necessarily tasked with turning around *everybody's* perception, just of the key people you need to influence. So it comes back to understanding just what led to that perception of your brand and how much of it is down to personal experience or hearsay.

Then address the perception by doing the unexpected. Negative perceptions lead to negative expectations. They will be expecting you to mislead, be unreliable, provide poor quality or whatever else led to the impression they have formed. So do the opposite. Be open and honest, deliver what you have promised, make sure that the quality is of the highest possible level.



Address the perception by doing the unexpected.

Understand what you can change and change it. Communicate clearly, accept and address issues when you can't.

The good news is that if somebody distrusts you, it's possible to turn them into your advocate with excellent service and communication. Advocacy depends upon people having a story to tell others; if you have excelled against expectations, then people have that story. And if expectations are low, then it's a lot easier to substantially exceed them.

Influence people by developing strong credibility and giving people compelling stories about you that they want to share.



HOW TO PROTECT YOUR REPUTATION



Much of the focus in this book has been on how to develop your reputation and forge strong relationships in the right areas. On the flip side, however, it is much easier to damage your reputation and destroy relationships and the impact is likely to be felt more quickly and spread further.

For years, reputation and brand experts have highlighted the story of Gerald Ratner's famous comments in his

speech to the Institute of Directors, when he referred to products sold by the company bearing his name as ‘crap’⁴.

Today similar examples crop up on a relatively frequent basis, thanks to the increase both in the number of channels for business leaders to broadcast publicly (and thus, potentially slip up) and the growth in the reach of their comments through social sharing.

The outspoken owner of the Wetherspoons chain of public houses, Tim Martin, aroused public anger during the early stages of the Covid-19 outbreak in the UK when he said that he wouldn’t pay staff after being forced to close down the pub chain as social distancing came into force, suggesting that they find work in the supermarket Tesco instead⁵.

Martin backed down very quickly after a huge outcry on social media and graffiti scrawled across the front of one of his chain’s pubs in south London. But the damage to his relationship with both his staff and customers may not be easily repaired.

It doesn’t need to be left to a business leader’s comments to damage a brand’s reputation and relationships either. The actions of their staff are under even greater scrutiny than ever before and poor customer service is tolerated far less than previously.

4 ‘We also do cut-glass sherry decanters complete with six glasses on a silver-plated tray that your butler can serve you drinks on, all for £4.95. People say, “How can you sell this for such a low price?” I say, “Because it’s total crap.”’ - Gerald Ratner, IoD Conference, 23 April 1991

5 ‘Tim Martin blocks staff pay after Wetherspoons pub closures’, *The Times*, 25 March 2020

Look through Twitter on any day and you'll find a host of complaints about service from brands, while peer review sites encourage even the smallest gripes to be aired publicly. It seems to have reached a point where many companies have given up tracking or responding to complaints on social media and seem immune to the impact on their reputation.

Relationships with your customers, with the community and with the media are all essential. They always have been; you know this and that's why PR managers, brand gurus and crisis management are always in favour. It's not just down to the leadership though, it is so important that the whole organisation understands this and is driven by developing those relationships.

That doesn't mean pandering to every comment and suggestion in the Twitterverse or succumbing to every complaint. The customer may not always be right, despite traditional wisdom, but I do think that some organisations have become so weary of the increase in complaints driven by social media and peer review sites that they have perhaps lost sight of the importance of treating their customers with respect, even when they disagree with them.



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ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

It is not just organisations who need to consider how they impact relationships and reputation by their behaviour, particularly in the digital age. As individuals there are countless opportunities available to us to damage professional relationships, even in the way we act in our personal lives.

For many years one of my primary ways of letting off steam has been to go to football (although, as a Charlton Athletic fan, recent years have seen football attendance add to my levels of stress rather than reduce them!). Over the years I have been a very active supporter; sitting on the committee of the Supporters' Club, organising train travel for fans to away matches, publishing an award-winning fanzine and more. When I was younger I used to travel to matches across the UK following Charlton, at one point not missing a first team match for four years.

And I used to find myself right in the middle of the singing.

In fact, when a new tier was built behind the goal at our ground, The Valley, I was one of about 20 fans invited into the CEO's office to look at the plans and agree where we would position ourselves to maximise the atmosphere. When the new tier opened, my seat was right beside the drummer!

When I ran business networking groups I used to time visits to some areas of the country based on whether Charlton were playing in that city at the weekend. Then

one weekend we played at Birmingham City. On the Friday I went to one of our Birmingham meetings, where I enjoyed some good-natured exchanges with a number of our members about the match the next day. The following day I joined one of our local members for some drinks before the game, before he went into the home section and my friends and I headed for the away fans area.

Early in the first half the Charlton fans started a popular chant at football at the time. Everyone was joining in, from young children to their grandparents – it was a jaunty and catchy tune that everyone enjoyed. The lyrics were, in true footballing tradition, aimed at the opposing supporters and weren't exactly complimentary.

As I stood there, I looked around the ground. I looked at each of the other stands and I knew people in each one of them. People I knew professionally and liked. And I wondered how I would feel if I knew that they could see me standing there chanting those words.

From that moment on I made the decision that I should never act in public, irrespective of the context, in any way that would make me ashamed if a professional contact witnessed it. I can still have fun, still enjoy a few drinks, still go to all-night parties (although less and less often!) and punk gigs, but I act in a manner that is authentic to me.



I should never act in public, irrespective of the context, in any way that would make me ashamed if a professional contact witnessed it.

ANTISOCIAL MEDIA

Which brings us on to the biggest challenge of all when it comes to maintaining professional relationships and managing our reputations – our engagement and behaviour online.

There are so many pitfalls on social media and they have been well documented. I talk in more detail in chapter 7 about how to approach social media from a strategic point of view to develop and nurture professional relationships, but it would be worth spending some time exploring the pitfalls.

In the UK the arguments that raged over Brexit brought home just how damaging social media can be to both personal and professional relationships. I can't recall a deeper divide politically in British society, certainly since the miners' strikes in the 1980s. However deep the divide was, or might have been, social media almost certainly enhanced it.

Good friends and family members found themselves taking different positions over the UK leaving membership of

the European Union; then in too many cases, attacked each other for those differing opinions. I personally saw relationships I treasured get strained, to the point where I had to stop certain people seeing my posts discussing Brexit because of the aggressive nature of their responses.

Perhaps, you might argue, I shouldn't have posted about the topic at all, and I can certainly see the merit in such an argument. But it was important to me to engage in a debate I felt strongly about and participate in the democratic process. Social media gives you the ideal platform to do that. The challenge is, you need everybody to engage respectfully and responsibly for democracy to flourish, and that just didn't happen.

But while I participated actively in the debate on Facebook, I kept my counsel on LinkedIn. It didn't feel like the right platform for me to engage in political debates, it still doesn't. And while I might have robust debates with friends about such issues, I would be much less comfortable engaging on the same topics with professional contacts.

Whether it's politics, religion, sport or humour, it's important to sense where the line is in non-business related discussions with professional contacts. I don't believe in being 'vanilla' and keeping to safe topics. That's not where you find people's real personality and authenticity. But there is still a line, particularly for leaders who set the tone and to whom people are likely to look for inspiration. And that line is likely to be further back than with a purely personal connection.



Whether it's politics, religion, sport or humour, it's important to sense where the line is in non-business related discussions with professional contacts.

With social media's viral nature, however, it's important to remember that you might be surrounded by friends but your post might be seen by others. Just as I was among friends at the football match but I chose not to act in a way that would cause embarrassment if viewed by others. The same rule is a very good one for social media, whatever platform you are using.

Ultimately, common sense should rule, and I expect most (if not all) people to know how to manage their reputation when reaching leadership positions. Leaders still need to understand, however, how to set the boundaries for their reports.

If anything, I see too much risk aversion in this area. Companies who are worried about the type of reputational damage outlined above err on the side of caution, effectively tying their employees' hands behind their back. As a result, many companies miss out on the huge opportunities offered by effective use of social networks, with many of their teams either hardly using such channels at all or engaging with complete blandness, devoid of any personality.



Many companies miss out on the huge opportunities offered by effective use of social networks, with many of their teams either hardly using such channels at all or engaging with complete blandness, devoid of any personality.

A few years ago I was approached by a major Asian bank to help them to write their social media guidelines for employees. I asked them whether they had an employees' handbook.

They did.

I asked whether, in the employees' handbook, there was guidance on using common sense, on how to represent the company in public forums, on what could and could not be shared and on communication etiquette.

There was.

“Then,” I told them, “you are covered.”

THE EIGHT RULES OF DIALOGUE

If you or your staff do find yourself being challenged by customers or others, you could do worse than study ‘The Eight Rules of Dialogue’, which appeared on shop windows and walls around Prague during the Czech uprising against the communist regime in November 1989.

1. Your opponent is not your enemy, but your partner in the search for truth. We are not engaged in an intellectual competition, but in the search for the truth. To take part in dialogue, there are three pre-conditions: respect for the truth, for the other, and for oneself.
2. Try to grasp what the other is saying. If you cannot understand their point of view, you can neither accept nor reject his statements. Repeat his statements yourself, to make clear that you have understood them.
3. Statements for which no proof is offered are not valid as arguments.
4. Do not stray from the point. Do not try to dodge uncomfortable questions or arguments by steering the discussion in another direction.
5. Don't fight to always have the last word. A great flood of words will never replace a missing line of argument. If you reduce your opponent to silence it neither means that you have defeated his point of view nor succeeded in changing it.
6. Never devalue the worth of your opponent. Whoever attacks the personality of his opponent loses the right to participate in dialogue.
7. Never forget that dialogue demands discipline. We should formulate our thoughts and conclusions in a reasonable, not an emotional way. Whoever is incapable

of controlling his feelings and passions cannot conduct a thoughtful conversation with another person.

8. Do not confuse a dialogue with a monologue. Everyone has the same right to express their opinions. Don't lose yourself in irrelevant details. Prove your respect for others by using the time economically⁶.

6 '89: *The Unfinished Revolution*, Thorpe N, Endeavour Press 2009
<https://nickthorpe.org/2010/03/12/89-the-unfinished-revolution/>

6

MAKING THE ROOM WORK FOR YOU – BEING STRATEGIC AROUND EVENTS AND CONFERENCES



Of course when looking at professional relationships, it's important to explore the importance of networking. I have spent much of the last 20 years teaching people that networking is far more than events and conferences, that they are merely tools to help you to build and nurture

your network. But a tool they are and, if approached strategically, potentially a very effective one.

The challenge is that many individuals and companies don't approach networking opportunities strategically; or if they do the level of consideration goes as far as the need to be seen at certain industry events or at a client's networking reception. The fact remains that probably the most common reason for attending events is because somebody invited you or your boss told you to be there. And there's not a lot of strategic thought behind that!

A number of years ago I was on a late train home from central London during the early part of the festive season when Christmas networking events were in full swing. A young lady sat opposite me on the train and started to look through a handful of business cards. I couldn't resist and asked her if she had been to a networking event which, of course, she had.

I asked her why she was there and what she had set out to achieve. She had no idea; she had gone because her manager had sent her there. She had no intention of following up on the conversations she had enjoyed over the course of the evening and, of course, the whole exercise was probably a waste of time. I would very much doubt that if you asked her now she would remember the event or had ever spoken to any of those contacts again unless their paths crossed in the usual course of business.

Leaders have to take a lead in setting an understanding of why staff need to attend networking events and conferences

or why their company would host their own. There needs to be a common buy-in to the purpose of such activity and careful consideration of how to maximise the return on investment.



There needs to be a common buy-in to the purpose of such activity and careful consideration of how to maximise the return on investment.

And the investment is substantial. It's not just the cost of a ticket. It's the time of the individual participant – if approached properly that includes preparation and follow-up – not just the event itself.

It includes the reputation of the company and any individual attending. Leaders should be discussing with their teams what they want others to think, feel, say and do as a result of engaging with them at conferences and events. A clear understanding of the reputational impact of attending events would stall some of the more destructive habits such as overindulging, pitching without engaging and sticking together in a group.



Leaders should be discussing with their teams what they want others to think, feel, say and do as a result of engaging with them at conferences and events.

Finally, a good leader will reinforce the message that engagement in such events is about building *long-term relationships* rather than focusing on short-term sales. A message that, if sales is a goal, they should be *through* the room, not *to* the room and an understanding that it's OK to take time out after the event to develop and nurture the relationships (more on that to come).

HOSTING YOUR OWN EVENTS

Many organisations host their own events, from short networking receptions and client dinners to fully fledged conferences. Whatever the event, hosting your own takes up a lot of time, effort and emotional investment by the team if it's done properly. And that can be rewarded if you approach it strategically.

Here are a few simple tips if you or your team are hosting events. These apply as much to corporate hospitality as to networking cocktails.

Understand your purpose

Have a clear and, if possible, measurable outcome that everybody involved clearly understands. Measurable outcomes are not always possible, networking is about relationship building and the return from your investment may well come a lot further down the line and in unexpected ways.

That's fine and often more desirable, just be clear about the purpose of the event: to engage with and get closer to key clients and intermediaries for example.

Know who is coming

Of course you should know who is turning up; you are the ones putting together the invitation list! However, how much does each individual representative of your company know about each attendee? They should know, at the very least, who are the key people you want to develop trusted relationships with, who within the company is responsible for the relationship and some background on them.

A couple of clients I have worked with now print off an attendee list in advance and circulate it to all staff working at the event. The list will include a picture (from their LinkedIn profile) to help people recognise them and some basic information. One client goes through the list in a briefing meeting with the full team ahead of the event.

It's not foolproof and all staff should be able to hold a simple conversation without any background (my second book *...and Death Came Third!*⁷ can help with this) but some basic information can go a long way.

Clear roles and expectations

Everyone on the team who is going to be present at the event should have a clear understanding of what is expected of them. I see too many people at such events hanging around in the corner or talking to colleagues. A lot of that is due to confidence but it's equally due to being told to attend without any clear role.

7 *...and Death Came Third! The Definitive Guide to Networking and Speaking in Public*, Lopata A and Roper P, 2nd Edition, Panoma Press 2011
<https://lopata.co.uk/product/and-death-came-third/>



I see too many people at such events hanging around in the corner or talking to colleagues. A lot of that is due to confidence but it's equally due to being told to attend without any clear role.

If people lack confidence at events then giving them a role and responsibility helps them to engage and overcome the fear. It also makes the whole operation look much more professional and creates a better impression.

Part of those expectations should be conveying a sense of being great hosts. No visitor should be left alone and your team should be active in making sure that key introductions are made. Explore in advance which of your guests would benefit from meeting each other and ensure that one team member is tasked with making sure that they make the connection.

Follow-up

The real power in effective networking, whether you are hosting or attending, lies in the follow-up. For the host, it's imperative.

In your preparation, agree how you will approach follow-up and in your debrief agree actions and share out responsibility. Do you want the person responsible for relationships with an invitee to be the person who follows

up or the team member who had the most in-depth conversation with them? Or a combination of the two? Be clear and plan carefully so that no individual slips through the net and, on the other hand, no one feels spammed by follow-up approaches from all directions.

ATTENDING CONFERENCES AND EXPOS

Most of the same rules apply to attending third party events, particularly conferences and expos. These are typically a much higher investment, in cost, preparation and time at the event, and a strong and clear return on investment should be expected.

But again, that ROI doesn't necessarily have to be transactional and counted in short-term pounds and pence (or currency of your choice!). If you are attending to develop long-term relationships, for visibility and presence in that market or to reconnect with key influencers, that is fine. Just be clear about your objective, how best to achieve it and how you will know whether it is OK to toast your success.

Most importantly, engage with people at the event. Just because you have invested in a stand doesn't mean that you have to camp there for the whole event. Don't wait for people to come to you, go out and meet them. Make sure you have a presence on your stand by all means but don't park the whole team there.



Just because you have invested in a stand doesn't mean that you have to camp there for the whole event. Don't wait for people to come to you, go out and meet them.

If you are there as the leader, you should be spending your time making key connections. I would suggest contacting key people who you want to see in advance and making arrangements to meet them for coffee or lunch over the course of the event. Aim to fill at least two-thirds of your diary with scheduled catch-ups, leaving some time free for random connections.

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

As a leader, many of these events offer you the chance to move beyond the throng pressing flesh and exchanging business cards and take centre stage. Seek opportunities to speak at events and to be invited to join panels.

Remember, the goal is to position yourself as a thought leader and person of influence, someone who others would aspire to engage with. It is not about selling. There is a place and there are events for that, but I would argue that paid-for speaking slots where you promote the benefits of your latest product or service are not going to position you as a thought leader in your industry.



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I want you to think beyond that. Position yourself as somebody who can talk about trends in the industry as a whole or who can share groundbreaking new ideas that others can adopt. The more you grab that opportunity, the more your credibility will grow and your ability to influence with it (as discussed in chapter 4).



HOW 'SOCIAL' SHOULD YOU BE?



These days networking isn't just taken to refer to conferences and events but to its online cousin too. Over the last decade or so sites like LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram have risen from nowhere to become integral parts of our lives and an essential tool for many in modern day business.

They have their many well-documented faults but social media sites are not just the playground of trolls or a repository of food photographs and cat videos. Nor are they the sole preserve of the younger generation and a

distraction from work; many senior executives can be found connecting and posting on LinkedIn and some are even very active on Twitter, Instagram and other platforms as well.

The time for leaders to bury their heads in the sand and ignore the influence of social media has passed. You may choose not to personally be active on it, but do so having properly understood and weighed up the pros and cons rather than based on what the media tells you.



The time for leaders to bury their heads in the sand and ignore the influence of social media has passed.

Most organisations, however, can no longer pretend that social media doesn't impact them, whether they engage with it or not. As we explored in chapter 5, the chances are that people are talking about your organisation online and telling their networks about their experiences with you. If those experiences have been positive, that's great. However, research tells us that people are far more likely to share negative experiences than positive, although the gap seems to be closing in more recent research⁸.

⁸ <https://www.customerthermometer.com/customer-service/customer-service-and-satisfaction-statistics-for-2020/>

This is one example summarising recent research. Looking at a number of studies, there seems to be a trend towards more positive sharing than in the past, probably fuelled by social media and sites like TripAdvisor. But the tendency still seems to be sharing bad news rather than good.

Either way, a switched-on leader will want the opportunity to engage in any conversation that impacts their brand.

A CONNECTED GENERATION

One of the most important reasons why leaders need to be far more comfortable with social media than they might want to be is that increasingly their staff will be. A generation is now coming into the workplace who have grown up with social media at the centre of their lives.



A generation is now coming into the workplace who have grown up with social media at the centre of their lives.

Social media is a core means by which they communicate and they will expect to be able to carry on communicating the same way within the workplace. That is a huge advantage to switched-on organisations. This is probably the most connected generation in history. My generation didn't even experience email and mobile phones until we had been working for a few years, let alone Facebook.

When I backpacked around Australia and South Africa in my mid-20s, I forged strong friendships wherever I went. In most cases I would spend six to eight weeks at a destination and become close friends with other people staying in the same hostel. We would do everything together. Then I

would carry on my journey in one direction, they would head the other way. We would have each other's home address and number but it would be a long time before any of us would see our homes again. By then the bond had weakened and, with one exception who went on to become my closest friend, I hardly saw those people again.

That doesn't happen any more. Within a couple of years the person who became my closest friend was back out in Australia backpacking again. But this time he could stay connected the whole time with people he met on his journey through email. And a few years later Facebook meant that shared experiences continued despite geographic distance. Suddenly those fleeting shared experiences led naturally to life-long friendships.

The new generation coming into the workplace may well be connected to friends from throughout their school and university years. They will stay connected to friends from each job they work in and each neighbourhood they live in. People they meet once at a party will become connected to them and they will stay in touch, all the time growing their network. That network is potentially a huge resource to your organisation. Your staff can be recruiting new talent for you from their personal networks and introducing new clients, suppliers and influencers.



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from their personal networks and introducing
new clients, suppliers and influencers.*

The connected generation will engage positively with your organisation online if you make it easy for them to do so and make them proud to be able to do so. Create an environment where they want to shout about their part in your story to their network. And make it easy for them to engage positively and productively online at work, harnessing the power of that tremendous connection for your benefit.

IN SIGHT, IN MIND

One of the biggest, and least stated, benefits of social media for professionals is the ability to stay in touch with people even when we don't see them on a regular basis, as illustrated above. The ability to stay 'in sight, in mind'.

I'm very active on social media and have managed to maintain a connection with many people with whom I've worked over the last 15 years or so through platforms like LinkedIn and Facebook. I regularly hear from people with whom I haven't interacted in many years because they have seen an opportunity for me or just want to reach out. What they have in common is that they have engaged regularly with me on social media, even if out of my sight, by just keeping track of my updates. And I have done the same, reaching out to other people who I haven't seen for years but to whom I still feel a strong connection because their online activity has kept them front of mind.

This has worked particularly well for me following business travel. I've had the pleasure of speaking in over 25 countries around the world and have built a network

of people I consider friends based on brief but positive interactions when I have been in their country, followed by ongoing engagement with each other on social media and the occasional Zoom or Skype call, WhatsApp messages or Facebook chat.

While that's nice for me on a personal level, it has also led to new business opportunities with people recommending and referring me for new opportunities years after we initially met or they saw me present. I am certain that those opportunities would not have come about if I had not stayed in sight, in mind.

Think back to the strong relationships you have developed throughout your career, with colleagues, clients, suppliers and others, and ask yourself where those people are now. Before social media, those relationships would have just drifted away as your roles were no longer relevant to each other's, your paths stopped crossing and you moved on.

I hear people say that friends come into and out of your life for a reason. I don't fully buy that; sometimes the relationship is strong but if your paths don't cross naturally, you drift apart. That isn't to say that if you stayed connected the relationship wouldn't remain just as positive.

Social networks can provide that glue.

Think back to the gaps in your network that you explored earlier. How many of those might be filled by people you used to have a strong relationship with but with whom you

lost touch? How many of those people could have helped you to connect to the people you needed to meet?



Think back to the gaps in your network that you explored earlier.

How many of those might be filled by people you used to have a strong relationship with but with whom you lost touch?

Used thoughtfully, social networks can be a huge asset for a professional relationships strategy.

SOCIAL STRATEGY

It's all well and good understanding the importance of engaging with social media but you need to also understand the best route to take. There are countless networking platforms available, not just the well-known brands I've already mentioned but hundreds of niche communities targeting specific industries, roles and interests.

With limited time available, it's important to be selective. Which sites should you join and engage with personally? Which should your organisation maintain a strong presence on?

I would argue that you are best advised to focus on deep engagement with a small number of sites rather than a

presence with very shallow engagement across the board. Having said that, in some cases it will be better to have a presence rather than none at all. A bit like being listed in Yellow Pages in days gone by, you needed to be listed there and the details had to be up to date.

Understand the possible benefits you can gain from being more active on social networks and then look to each platform and ask how they will help you reach your objectives. Sites like LinkedIn have a lot of functionality, so focus on what you are comfortable doing with the time you have available and work out what actions you need to take. Then set aside time to take that action. Get your profile right first and then be consistently in action.

It might take a bigger investment of time up front, for example populating your profile on LinkedIn and building your connection base. Once that is done, you could make a big impact with as little as ten minutes' consistent activity a day.



*It might take a bigger investment of time up front.
Once that is done, you could make a big impact with
as little as ten minutes' consistent activity a day.*

Ten minutes of engaging with updates on your newsfeed from your network or writing a quick post with some thoughts on your industry or what's happening in the world.

I always encourage my clients to spend a minimum of ten minutes each day just looking through their LinkedIn newsfeed and doing one of three things: 'Like, Comment or Share'. Each action having a stronger impact than the previous. Of course, as you start to see engagement and recognise the value, I hope that you will invest more than ten minutes and you can really start to make a difference. But small steps first if this is new to you.

I've talked more about LinkedIn than other platforms as that is the most obvious choice for most business leaders. But that doesn't necessarily make it the right one. There are plenty of things to consider when deciding where to invest your social media time, for example:

Which platform best suits your objectives? If you are looking for referrals and introductions to key decision makers, then LinkedIn is probably the best fit, from the generic platforms at least. If you want to raise your profile in your industry then a niche network may be a better fit.

Where are other people playing? Ultimately, it doesn't matter which site you are more comfortable with; you need to be where your market is. Which platform is populated by the people you want to reach?



Ultimately, it doesn't matter which site you are more comfortable with; you need to be where your market is.

If you're looking to engage with young people then you may want to look at TikTok or Instagram. A particular interest group, then via the appropriate hashtag on Twitter.

Where can you make the biggest impact? If your brand or organisation is very visual and photo-friendly, a patisserie for example, or a travel company, fashion designer or photographer, then Instagram may be the best fit. If you want to be seen as a thought leader, then regular posts and blogs on LinkedIn and Twitter might be the answer.

SOCIAL MEDIA AS A RESEARCH TOOL

A lot of this chapter has been focused on how social media can help to connect you and to position you. It is also, however, extremely effective even if you want to stay in the shadows. Social networks are a fantastic research tool.

Your research on social media can be covert or overt. Many people 'lurk' in the shadows, watching the conversation and just understanding what their audience are thinking, feeling and saying. Others will be more proactive, running polls and asking questions to check their thinking and do real time research. It's not necessarily as scientific, accurate and representative as formal market research but can be a very useful part of the process.

Hashtags provide a very powerful way to tune into the right conversations. Search by the terms that will be used by the people to whom you want to listen and you can filter your feed to provide only updates using those hashtags. For

example, if you want to understand the challenges faced by people working from home, hashtags like #Homeworking #WorkingFromHome and #RemoteWorking would help to filter the right updates.

TIME TO BE SOCIAL

As mentioned above, leaders are busy and social media is seen as a distraction. The techniques I have shared of starting with just ten minutes a day, possibly on a commute or waiting for meetings, will make it less daunting a prospect.

Ultimately, however, time is relative. Time is something that you invest in different activities and if an activity provides a substantial enough return on that investment, then it justifies itself.



Time is something that you invest in different activities and if an activity provides a substantial enough return on that investment, then it justifies itself.

So that strategic approach to social networking, something that is often lacking among the noise of the pros and cons of different networks, is key. Understand your objectives and how you plan to achieve them and you'll then be willing to invest whatever is reasonable to help you achieve them.

Used wisely, social media platforms can provide very powerful shortcuts, helping you to save time rather than waste it.



NURTURING PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS



Networks are not measured just in numbers. You can only truly assess the strength of your network if you look at the diversity within it, the depth of your relationships with people to whom you are connected and, perhaps most importantly, whether your network can offer you the support and help you need when you most need it.



You can only truly assess the strength of your network if you look at the diversity within it, the depth of your relationships and whether your network can offer you the support and help you need when you most need it.

When I teach referral strategy I ask people to score their ‘Champions’, the people who can potentially refer them, on three factors:

Willingness to refer/trust – This is where the depth of your relationship comes in and their belief in you as an individual and in the brand, product or service you represent.

Understanding – How readily would they recognise an opportunity for you and know how to respond?

Opportunity – Are they talking to the right people and do they carry credibility into those conversations?

The first two measures, willingness and understanding, are both more likely to be strong if you have developed a deep relationship. People naturally are more enthusiastic about supporting people they like and trust and they also show much more interest in what that person does and the help that they need. So we need to change our typical approach to networking; stop seeing it as a numbers game and focus much more on nurturing the relationships that lie within our networks.

NETWORKS AREN'T FLAT

When we picture a network it's easy to visualise a flat entity, a single structure comprising all of the people we know. Much network theory focuses on the number of people in the average network, with classic studies such as Girard's Law of 250⁹ and The Dunbar Number¹⁰ often quoted.

In my opinion, both of these studies are flawed. They are flawed in their interpretation: The Dunbar Number was never intended as an indication of average network size. They are outdated: they were both developed in the last century, well before social media dominated our lives and networks. And flawed in basic premise: Girard's Law is based on the observation that the average number of guests at a wedding or funeral is 500. I went to a funeral recently that was described as 'busy' and I can promise you that nowhere near 500 people attended.

The way both studies have been used in network theory is the biggest flaw. We have been told that 'the average network size is 250' (based on Girard's Law). Other objections aside, this oversimplifies the nature of a network.

Rather than being a flat structure or simple grouping of contacts, networks are more complicated organisms with people flowing in and out and between various levels. I tend to visualise a network as a group of expanding circles, much like the side section of half an onion (*Figure 8.1.1*).

9 <https://www.joegirard.com/posts/girards-law-250/>

10 <https://bit.ly/3cpH3jn>

The Structure of a Network

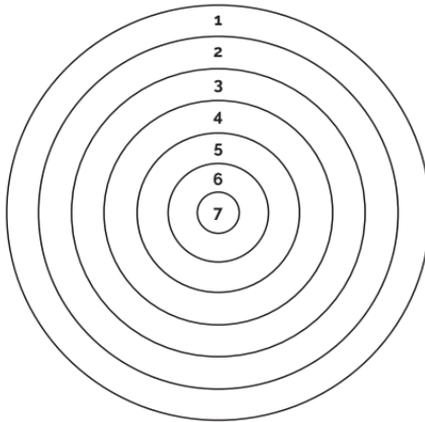


Figure 8.1.1 - The Structure of a Network

Within that network, there are seven levels of professional relationship:

1. *Recognise*
2. *Know*
3. *Like*
4. *Trust*
5. *Support*
6. *Advocate*
7. *Friend* (moving into your personal network)

Towards the centre of the network are people you have a lot of time for and want to support. That feeling is likely to be reciprocal and you'd be available whenever the other party needs and, at stages six and seven, actively looking out for each other.

This is what we'd call your *trusted network*, people you are likely to see day in day out, week in and week out (although absence doesn't necessarily exclude people from your trusted network).

As you move further out through the layers, the relationship becomes a little less trusted, not as deep. You might see each other less frequently, be less inclined to share openly with each other or ask for help.

At the outer edges of your network are people who come in and out. If we meet at an event or dinner party I'll be in your network for a few days. By that, I mean that if we bump into each other or I call you, you will remember me and know who I am. But that link is tenuous. After a few days or weeks we will probably be strangers again.

Compare this to someone in the centre of your network. You could probably go three years or more without speaking to each other but still pick up where you left off as if no time had passed.

People on the outskirts of your network will come in and out. If you want to embed people in your network, your first challenge is to get beyond that outer circle and into their long-term memory (*Figure 8.1.2*).

The Structure of a Network

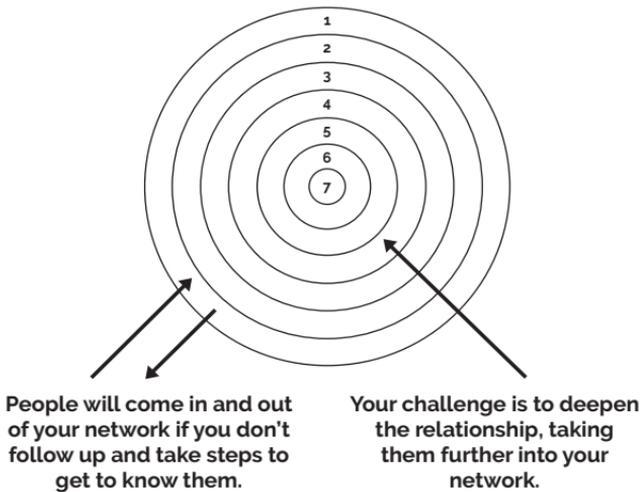


Figure 8.1.2 - The Structure of a Network

TRUSTED RELATIONSHIPS

It could be argued that stage 3, 'Like', could be skipped. The absence of 'Like' does not necessarily imply disliking someone but that you may simply not have rapport or interests in common. If you have mutual respect that may be enough. Stage 4, 'Trust', is a completely different matter. People might do business with people they don't actively like but who they respect. But a complete absence of trust is going to be a bigger problem.

So a core challenge when nurturing deep relationships is to develop trust. As we explored in chapter 4, relationships aren't all the same, they don't all start from a standard

point of trust. How someone views you when you first meet them (and how you view them of course) will depend upon a number of factors, including who introduced you, where you met, how you dress, how you talk, your job title and more.



*Relationships aren't all the same, they don't
all start from a standard point of trust.*

Be aware of the different elements that influence how other people perceive you and the level to which they are likely to trust you at the point of that first interaction. Clearly, it's in your interest to create the right image. Seek an introduction from a trusted third party, reinforce your credentials and experience, listen and show as much interest in them as they do in you. Then seek to understand what you need to do to build trust as the relationship grows. Focusing on the other party and their needs would be a key step, as would showing yourself to be reliable from the very beginning.

One of the biggest causes of distrust at the beginning of professional relationships is the fear that the other party is only looking for what they can get. Disarm people by not looking to gain straight away.

Unless your needs are urgent or there is a clear transaction that would be useful to both parties to discuss, think about the relationship long term. Don't jump in at the first

chance of selling to the other person or asking for a key introduction or other favour. Sow the seeds for a much more fruitful relationship which will benefit both of you in the years to come. Most importantly, don't only reach out to the other person when you need something. Be there to support them, ask how they are and don't expect anything in return.

Don't be that person – you know the one, the person who you haven't heard from in years but who then reaches out to see how you are and lets slip that they are looking for a new job. Make people feel valued and respected by genuinely caring about their wellbeing rather than being solely focused on your own.



*Make people feel valued and respected
by genuinely caring about their wellbeing
rather than being solely focused on your own.*

The former Radio 4 producer Carole Stone once said, “Make friends when you can, not when you need them.” It's a great phrase that captures the spirit of building trusted relationships over the long term.

SOME PRACTICAL STEPS

How do you move people along their journey through your network, from first interaction to trusted contact? It's very simple and you know how to do this anyway, I very much doubt you would have reached a leadership position otherwise. But sometimes we might know the steps to take but neglect to actually put them into practice because of all of the challenges we are facing.

Here are seven simple and practical steps that you can build into your daily routine, alongside the social media steps shared in chapter 7, to nurture stronger relationships.

1. *24-7-30* – The first month is key to embedding people in your network. Follow up within 24 hours of meeting someone; it's not dating, so focus on being seen to be reliable rather than worrying about being considered desperate! Then follow up again after a week, perhaps a personalised LinkedIn request, and again after a month, maybe meeting for coffee.

Then you will have moved up a level in each other's networks.

2. *Two for the Price of One* – If you're travelling to a meeting, even to the other side of the same city or town, ask yourself who else you know there who you could catch up with. Reach out to them for coffee or lunch, simple touchpoints that can be about catching up rather than a set agenda, that help to build the relationship. Even if they are not available,

the fact that you reached out and invited them will have a positive impact.

3. *Never Eat Alone* – The title of an excellent book on professional relationships by Keith Ferrazzi and great advice on its own.

Seek opportunities at least a couple of times a week to arrange lunch, coffee or dinner with somebody in your professional network. It doesn't need to be a long meeting, it can be a half-hour sandwich, but you are creating yet another touchpoint with time that you need anyway to take a break from the daily routine.

4. *I Saw This and I Thought of You* – Look out for articles, blogs, videos and news that might be of interest to people in your network. Send it to them with a note explaining, 'I saw this and I thought of you'.

This is even more effective if you share something related to people's personal rather than professional interest or related to a challenge they have shared with you.

5. *Schedule Random Calls* – Find time in your diary to pick up the phone and call people you haven't spoken to recently and where there's no transactional need to do so. Calling to touch base and see how someone is has tremendous impact as long as there is no other agenda.

Unsure who to call? Scroll through your address book and look for people you have fallen out of touch with, look at your LinkedIn home feed for people posting interesting content or look back at your diary from a year ago – who were you meeting with but haven't spoken to since?

6. *Make Valuable Connections* – Introduce people in your network to each other. Constantly be seeking to make valuable introductions which both parties will appreciate.
7. *It's About Them, Not About You* – The Golden Rule of nurturing relationships – make it about the other person.

It's incredible how many messages I get on LinkedIn that are sent to mass lists and simply update me on what that person has been up to for the last year, 'In case we haven't spoken'. I didn't ask!

You'll make a much more powerful impact by picking up the phone to five people and having a personal conversation than you will by spamming a mailing list of 1,000 with the journal of your last 12 months.



LEVERAGING PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS – WINNING REFERRALS



Once you have developed a strong network of trusted relationships, your next challenge is to effectively leverage it.

I make no apologies for using such language; there are a lot of people who are uncomfortable with the thought of networking as manipulative and using people for your own ends. It doesn't have to be like that, nor should it, but

that doesn't mean that you shouldn't be proactive about seeking support from your network. After all, why are you developing these relationships?

As we explored in chapter 1, your professional relationships are your biggest resource but, just like any other resource in your business, it only works for you if you put it into action. You wouldn't buy a machine and never turn it on or employ staff and tell them to stay at home and watch the television. Why should your network be any different?



Your professional relationships are your biggest resource but, just like any other resource in your business, it only works if you put it into action.

Let me be very clear here. In chapter 2 we explored the difference between Partner and Relationship Mindsets when building professional relationships and I was clear that you might be more transactional in some cases than in others. But while you might recognise your network as a resource and focus on maximising your return on investment, your interaction with each individual within that network is human to human.

In other words, leverage your *network*, not each individual in that network.



While you might recognise your network as a resource and focus on maximising your return on investment, your interaction with each individual within that network is human to human.

If you develop strong enough relationships so that people want to help you, then help them to do so. Look at the challenges and objectives you face in your role and ask yourself three very straightforward questions:

How could other people help me to achieve this objective/overcome this challenge more effectively?

Who specifically has the experience, expertise, world view or connections to help me?

What help do I need to ask them for?

Then ask people for that help.

My first challenge on completing this book was to reassure myself that the content was both useful and relevant for the people I wanted to read it. So I reached out to some of the most successful business leaders in my network. With no notice and a short timespan, I asked them if they would review the manuscript for me and give me some feedback.

The fact that a number of the people I approached not only agreed to do so but also came back to me swiftly with some very constructive and useful feedback is testament to what people will do for you if the relationship is strong enough.

Your job is to make it as easy as possible for others to help you. If you have done all the groundwork in nurturing the relationship so that they would want to help you, all you need to do is ask – and ask in a way that makes the solution seem simple to them.



Your job is to make it as easy as possible for others to help you.

In my case, along with the manuscript I sent five questions that I specifically wanted answered and a date I needed to receive the feedback by. That both directed the feedback I received and also made it much easier for my reviewers to accede to my request.

Be specific about the help you want and the difference it will make to you. If the relationship is strong, people will be only too happy to help.

GETTING INTRODUCED

Ask most business owners and sales directors where their most effective leads come from and they will tell you that they come through recommendation, referral and word of mouth marketing. But explore just how much time, focus and resource they invest into strategies to generate these leads and they will look blankly at you.

We invest time and money into so many other forms of lead generation, from internet advertising and PR to cold calling, yet referrals are so often left to chance.

Strong professional relationships are the foundation of a successful referrals strategy but they are a means to an end, not the end itself. People might like and trust you but they won't necessarily advocate on your behalf unless you ask them. Even if they do (stage 6 in the seven levels of professional relationship – *Figure 8.1.1*), it's highly likely that they will miss more opportunities than they spot.



People might like and trust you but they won't necessarily advocate on your behalf unless you ask them.

To maximise your flow of referrals, it is incumbent upon you to do the work. Focus on who you want to meet and who can introduce you and have the conversations necessary to ensure the introductions are made.

Referrals are more likely to lead to your calls being taken, meetings being accepted, sales being made and clients being retained than any other form of lead generation¹¹. Referrals will help you to bypass gatekeepers such as PAs, receptionists and junior team members and get in front of hard to reach decision makers. And referrals lead to conversations where your prospects are interested in buying from you rather than you selling to them.

So why don't we spend more time and effort focusing on generating them?

THE GOLDEN RULES OF REFERRAL

If you want to put a successful referral strategy into place, here are a few simple steps to consider:

- 1. Have a clear idea of who you would like to be referred to*

If you don't know who your ideal prospect is, then how does anyone else? Remember, your job is to make it as easy as possible for other people to refer you. That means painting a clear picture in their mind's eye of who you want to meet. To be able to do that, you need to have done your research first.

¹¹ <https://www.annexcloud.com/blog/39-referral-marketing-statistics-that-will-make-you-want-to-start-a-raf-program-tomorrow/>

2. *Seek quality referrals*

Don't do what so many others do and settle for second best. Salespeople will regularly accept inferior information or action rather than taking the time to educate their network and having the courage to ask for referrals.

A referral happens when someone potentially needs or wants what you offer, has expressed an interest in finding out more and, *most importantly*, is expecting your call.



A referral happens when someone potentially needs or wants what you offer, has expressed an interest in finding out more and, most importantly, is expecting your call.

If they are expecting to hear from you then the ensuing conversation will be more open, less defensive and more constructive. In most cases, it's worth waiting for people to speak to the other party first to get their buy-in before bringing you into the conversation.

3. *Take responsibility*

Don't sit there waiting for the phone to ring or relying on excuses not to put yourself out there and ask for help. Be active by speaking to your network, educating them

and asking for referrals. Be creative in the way you thank people and thoughtful in the feedback that you give.

And be strategic, don't leave this to chance or react when an opportunity arises – seek to carve out the referral opportunity yourself as part of a focused business growth plan.

4. Anyone could be your Champion

We tend to categorise our network by their relevance to us. So we think of family issues when interacting with family members, of social interests in common when talking to our friends and of the project of theirs we are working on when thinking of our clients.

It's easy to forget that people around us have a life beyond the life they have with us. Among their other family members, friends, clients, suppliers and wider network could be the key person we want to meet. And they may hold just the right amount of credibility to make the introduction.



*It's easy to forget that people around us
have a life beyond the life they have with us.*

Be open to referrals coming from across your wider network, not just from clients and intermediaries.

5. Don't assume that people want to be paid

So many businesses rush to offer financial inducements to encourage others to refer to them, without thinking about how effective that approach is as a motivator on an individual basis. For some it works very well, for a large number of other people it's actually a disincentive.

Get to know your network personally and understand why they would want to help you. Everyone is different and what motivates one won't necessarily motivate all. Similarly, what motivates you won't necessarily motivate your network. Understand people individually so that you can ask in the appropriate way and increase the possibility that they will support you.

6. Be patient

This fits with the theme of this book and with chapter 6 in particular. The deeper your relationship and the greater the levels of trust then the more likely people will want to help you. So don't rush to ask for referrals as soon as you meet someone. Build the relationship and then you'll be able to ask in a way that makes the introduction both easier and more pleasurable for them to make and more comfortable for you to request.



The deeper your relationship and the greater the levels of trust then the more likely people will want to help you.

REFERRALS START AT HOME

Before you start scouring your wider network for referral opportunities, look a little closer to home. It is amazing how much more competition I see inside organisations compared to collaboration and how much potential revenue they pass up as a result.

Unless carefully planned with cross-referral in mind, bonus structures and incentive schemes typically encourage siloed thinking and prevent teams looking out for each other across even small businesses.

When I used to run networking groups, we would not allow any competition within each group. So there could only be one solicitor, one accountant, one printer, one designer as members. Over the years I attended countless meetings where the solicitor would introduce themselves but only talk about their area of speciality. I rarely heard lawyers talking about other areas of their firm. I even heard stories of referrals being turned away by law firms because they weren't in the right area of speciality, even if colleagues in the firm could have handled the enquiry. Particularly given the absence of their competitors from the group, that was an appalling demonstration of the damage to a company of siloed thinking.

Business leaders need to look at the organisation as a whole and ask what encourages and what stops referrals being passed between colleagues. Opportunities should not be allowed to slip away from the organisation and into the hands of competitors if strong relationships exist between any part of the organisation and the client/prospect.



Business leaders need to look at the organisation as a whole and ask what encourages and what stops referrals being passed between colleagues.

Similarly, leaders should encourage referrals to be the responsibility of everyone in the firm, not just the management or sales team. We will explore this in more detail towards the end of the book.

These are some of the key points you might want to consider, but for a full exploration of effective referrals strategies, please see *Recommended: How to Sell Through Networking and Referrals*¹².

12 *Recommended: How to Sell Through Networking and Referrals*, Lopata A, *Financial Times*, Prentice Hall 2011
<https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/0273757962/>

10

LONELINESS IN LEADERSHIP - THE IMPORTANCE OF A SUPPORT NETWORK



Nick Jonsson, Managing Director of EGN Singapore, a network for senior executives, noticed a trend among his members, so he decided to conduct some research. Through that research, Nick found that 30% of senior executives have experienced a bout of depression and 82% of executives find it difficult to talk about stress and depression in their company¹³.

13 *Executive Loneliness*, Jonsson N, book to be published in 2020/1

There may be particular circumstances in Singapore that underlie those figures, with regional leaders feeling isolated from head office and expatriates feeling the stress of moving a whole household around the world while moving into a high-pressure role. But there will always be different reasons for stress and depression to affect senior executives.

A large number of the business leaders I engage with on a regular basis are constantly under pressure, with important deadlines looming, crises and challenges to manage and a board breathing down their neck for results. Many of those executives regularly go for long spells without returning calls and emails and I'm reasonably confident that I shouldn't take it personally! The fact is, there always seems to be too much to do and too little time in which to achieve it.

This is where professional relationships often get left behind, deprioritised as everything else takes precedence. However, this is also the time when those same relationships are more important than ever before – potentially providing an outlet for support and empathy as well as a source of solutions and ideas that will help meet those deadlines and achieve objectives more quickly and effectively.



*Professional relationships often get left behind,
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However, this is also the time when those same
relationships are more important than ever before.*

TOO CLOSE TO HOME

One of the biggest solutions to relieving stress is being able to talk through the causes of the stress with somebody who understands, has been there or who may even be on the same journey themselves¹⁴.

Most people would recognise the benefits of those conversations and it's likely that you will remember a conversation you had with someone where just the act of talking about what was on your mind lightened the burden, even if no solution was forthcoming. Yet, time and again, we bottle things up and fail to share.

Of course, sharing isn't necessarily easy. Setting aside the time pressures that make it hard to find space for the conversations we need to have, it's very difficult for senior executives to share with people in the same organisation as them. Staff will be looking to them for leadership while there may be concerns that peers might be ready to exploit a weakness for their own ends.

That might be the concern but it doesn't make it a reality. It is important to find trusted colleagues who will listen and engage without judging or manipulating. A mentor is the ideal person to do this.

14 Townsend, S S M, Kim, H S, and Mesquita, B (2013, December). Are you feeling what I'm feeling? Emotional similarity buffers stress. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*. doi: 10.1177/1948550613511499
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1948550613511499>



It is important to find trusted colleagues who will listen and engage without judging or manipulating.

Open, honest leaders are often the most respected. In an interview for my book *Just Ask*¹⁵, former Sales and Marketing Director of Thomas Cook, Phil Gardner, told me, “One of the things that I did really early on was to openly admit that I didn’t have all the answers. ‘I don’t know’ isn’t a popular thing to say, but quite often an appropriate one.

“Where I saw that we had existing expertise in a number of areas, I said, ‘Right, we have got an issue here. This is where we need to get to, I don’t know how to do that; can you help me figure that out?’ We had a very open environment.

“I think openly admitting that you are not entirely sure what the reaction to something is going to be and needing some reassurance from your peers is a theme which is important regardless of the hierarchy, the structure or where you sit within it.”

Phil found that the openness and vulnerability that he shared at the core of his management style helped him when he had to send 97% of his team home without pay

¹⁵ *Just Ask: Why Seeking Support is your Biggest Strength*, Lopata A, to be published 2020/1

on the day Thomas Cook was wound up. He was able to have very difficult and emotionally charged conversations with members of his team without the backlash you might have expected, because he had earned their respect from the beginning.

BURST THE BUBBLE

Even when business leaders do reach out, as we say in chapter 1, it often tends to be to people working in the same industry. There are certainly good reasons to ask people who know the challenges and people involved intimately, but staying inside a bubble of the same people leads to tired decision making and a lack of innovative solutions.



Staying inside a bubble of the same people leads to tired decision making and a lack of innovative solutions.

In his excellent book *Rebel Ideas*, Matthew Syed makes a strong case for cognitive diversity. In other words, surrounding yourself with people who have different experiences and perspectives from you and who can offer a different take on the challenges you face.

One of the stories that Syed shares relates to an invitation he received to join a technical advisory board to help the England football manager Gareth Southgate. England had a track record of achievement in international

competition that was below the level expected of a country of their status and had just been knocked out of the 2016 European Championship by minnows Iceland. The panel was convened to find out why.

Alongside Syed on the advisory board were Manoj Badale, a founder of high-tech startups, Sue Campbell, an administrator in Olympic sports, Sir Michael Barber, an educationalist, Stuart Lancaster, former head coach of the England rugby team, Sir Dave Brailsford, the renowned cycling coach, and later, Lucy Giles, the first female college commander at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst.

The football establishment questioned how a panel of people from outside the sport could offer advice that would help the England manager and suggested that he would be better off turning to other experienced coaches such as Sam Allardyce and Tony Pulis. Syed was inclined to agree. But as they met and got to know each other, Syed noticed that a lot of great ideas were being put forward. He explained, “The most exhilarating moments occurred when someone in the room said something not known to anyone else; when they offered an insight drawn from experiences that were in some way unique. In other words, when they offered what we might call ‘rebel ideas’.

“Moments such as when Lancaster offered a perspective on selection before a major competition based upon his experiences at the 2015 Rugby World Cup. Or when Brailsford shared details on the use of large data sets to improve diet and fitness. Or when Giles offered insights about building mental fortitude from her knowledge of the

army. Or when Badale talked about the techniques used by tech startups to drive innovation. Or when Barber talked about turning abstract ideas into practice drawing upon his experiences as the first head of the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit under Tony Blair.”

Syed wondered what would have happened if the FA had, instead, gone down the route of forming a panel from the footballing establishment. Their credentials in football would have been far greater, as would their understanding of the game and insight into the latest coaching techniques. But would it have been effective?

“The problem is that Redknapp and Pulis know very similar things. Their frames of reference overlap. They know a lot about football, but – crucially – they know very little that Southgate doesn't already know. Their presence would almost certainly have led to a mirroring dynamic, inadvertently entrenching the latent assumptions within the English game. A group of wise individuals would almost certainly have become an unwise board.

“Diverse groups express radically different properties. It was fascinating to see how people who were not expert in football were nevertheless able to pierce through to some of the underlying weaknesses or bring a fresh perspective. Rebel ideas were often rejected. Exchanges were robust. But these almost always led to divergent thinking and more sophisticated solutions¹⁶.”

16 *Rebel Ideas: The Power of Diverse Thinking*, Syed M, John Murray Press 2019
<https://www.matthewsyed.co.uk/resource/rebel-ideas-the-power-of-diverse-thinking/>



"Rebel ideas were often rejected. Exchanges were robust. But these almost always led to divergent thinking and more sophisticated solutions."

Bursting out of the bubble of people who share similar perspectives and who subscribe to the perceived wisdom of the industry you work in will open the door to new and innovative ideas. Almost every client I've worked with, from a wide range of sectors and industries, tells me that their problems are unique. But I've yet to find one that truly is.

If we accept that different industries share common problems, then perhaps we can also accept that the different personality styles those industries attract can combine with different 'ways of doing things' in those industries to lead to innovative solutions. The problems may not be unique but the approaches to overcoming them may well be. And if you can tap into those different ideas from a range of industries, you can, as Phil Jones said in chapter 1, breathe them back into your own.

MENTORS AND MASTERMINDS

Of course, you can formalise the support that you receive through mentoring or masterminding (very similar to action learning, with which you may be more familiar) relationships. Having formal mentoring and

masterminding relationships doesn't stop you from seeking help from elsewhere. But they force you to focus and take action, setting aside the pressure of the everyday, taking a step back and asking for help.

I talk in much more detail about both mentoring and masterminding in my forthcoming book *Just Ask*, but I want to give you a few key points for the moment. Look for people who are going to challenge you rather than praise you. If you want to seek applause and reflect in the wonder of everything you've achieved, look elsewhere. A mentor or mastermind group are there to challenge and hold you accountable. To push you further.



Look for people who are going to challenge you rather than praise you.

Just as a leading athlete's coach won't tell them to ease off and celebrate because they have set a new world record, so your support team should be enabling you to reach greater and greater heights.

With the importance of diverse thought in mind, as covered above, look outside your immediate circle for mentors and masterminders. I have two mastermind groups, one of which is formed of other speakers and authors but the other is more mixed. In fact, the majority of the group is made up of people from the industry I sell into – I want to

understand my business from *their* perspective. Similarly, my mentor is a former client of mine.

Be aware of Reverse Mentoring. We traditionally see mentoring relationships represented by the wise old sage and the young keen learner. But increasingly those relationships are being turned around and younger, more junior members of staff are mentoring senior leaders. They are often best placed to talk about trends among younger generations and explain the power of social media. Age doesn't have to be a handicap to a mentor, it all depends on the support you need.

Above all, commit. Whether in formal relationships or otherwise, prioritise seeking help and support. Time may be preventing you from doing so but make the time. If something has enough impact, it becomes important enough to focus on and the ideas, insight and support you can receive from the right network can be game changing.

So find the time and relieve the pressure.

11

ALL HANDS ON DECK – HOW TO DELEGATE THE RELATIONSHIP ROLE AND BUILD A RELATIONSHIP CULTURE



A robust professional relationships strategy is important to you as a senior executive both for your personal career development and to excel in your role. However, the buck shouldn't stop with you.

The expectation in most organisations is that relationship building and networking is the preserve of the management team and everybody else should focus purely on technical delivery. The possible exception is the sales team but, even then, I often see sales teams where the Sales Director has the network and their team rely on them to make introductions and pursue less effective approaches to lead generation themselves.



I often see sales teams where the Sales Director has the network and their team rely on them to make introductions and pursue less effective approaches to lead generation themselves.

I believe that this is a misguided approach. We have already explored the power of strong professional relationships to find easier and more effective solutions to a range of challenges. So why is this valuable resource only utilised at senior levels? Surely that means that the rest of the organisation are being left to work less efficiently, less effectively and with greater levels of stress. Leaders who understand the impact of strong professional relationships will encourage their teams to start developing their own deep networks at the earliest possible opportunity.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DEVELOPING A RELATIONSHIP CULTURE

We have already discussed just how much pressure modern day leaders are under. One of the most important leadership skillsets is the art of delegation. By encouraging team members to develop their own professional relationships, the burden of continual coffees and catch-ups can be spread around.

That's not to say that everything gets delegated. The idea of a relationship culture inside an organisation is that *everybody* gets involved, including the leadership team. But it does mean that senior executives can invest more time in nurturing the most important relationships.

Think back to Figure 1.2.2, shared in chapter 1.

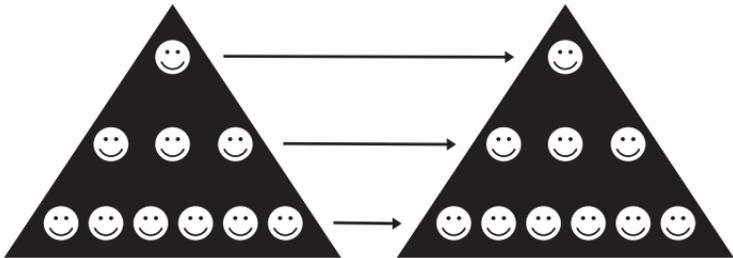


Figure 1.2.2

The CEO I was talking to at the Australian bank had drawn this figure to illustrate how he relied on networks outside his bank for support and conversation now he had reached the top. We can also look at the same figure to

illustrate the benefits of a relationship culture throughout the organisation.

I often get asked by delegates at my talks and workshops how they can network with more senior people. It's a fair question but perhaps a misguided one. Yes, there are times when people need to be able to network 'up' and hold conversations with people who are older, more experienced and more accomplished than they are. However, it is too easy to dismiss the benefits of networking at peer level.

A number of years ago I was mentoring a team of bankers in Ireland. Much of the focus in our early sessions was on how they could get in front of, or develop stronger relationships with, the senior executives at companies they were either already serving or had targeted as potential new customers.

In a mid-programme debrief with the department heads and the CEO who had brought me in, the recurrent nature of this topic came up. The CEO pointed out that we needed to shift their focus and change tack. "We already have the relationships at those levels," he told me, "through me and the rest of the senior management team. We need the team to develop the relationships at their own level."

Decisions in organisations are influenced by opinions, experiences and perceptions at all levels. The final decision may rest with a senior executive but they are likely to listen to their team, the people who will have to implement that decision and work with partners on a day-to-day basis.



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So, while it might feel more productive to chase relationships with the most senior people, often strong relationships with more junior members of their team are more important. And that's where strong peer-to-peer relationships can make such a difference.

For the individual team member, there is benefit in surrounding themselves with the right people who are at a similar level to them. If they pick the right people to develop relationships with as they progress in their career, so will their network. That means that they will reach leadership levels with a fully fledged network of peer executives already in place and with great depth. That will make them even more of an asset to their organisation and will smooth the transition to the next stage of their career.

LEVERAGING COMBINED NETWORKS

Much of the focus of this book has been on the benefits of tapping into the wisdom of a diverse network. That applies internally as much as externally, yet I often witness more competition than collaboration within organisations, even some of the smallest. That leads to lost opportunities, slow growth and a lack of agility.

A relationship culture within an organisation shifts this dynamic. For an effective relationship culture to be in place, the focus on developing strong relationships needs to be as much inward looking as outward. In simpler terms, your staff need to get on together!



For an effective relationship culture to be in place, the focus needs to be as much inward looking as outward.

Look at your incentive and bonus system and explore just how much internal competition it drives and how healthy that really is for your business. I understand the arguments for internal competition to drive achievement but I think there are other ways. And recognising how people contribute to the success of the organisation as a whole, particularly to projects they are not directly responsible for, should be part of the package.

A lot of relationship breakdown within organisations happens when one department needs help from another and it's not forthcoming. Blame is easy to spread and reciprocal non-cooperation is likely to follow, clogging up the efficiency of the organisation as a whole.

The answer is simple and it comes down to a lack of relationship, empathy and communication. When department A needs help from department B, they simply make the request and set a deadline. They fail to consider the work department B is focused on or where their

request sits in that department's priorities. For them it's a high priority, therefore they expect a quick response.

If the team in department B has no direct interest in the outcome of department A's project, only one thing is going to elevate its priority for them. And that's a 'What's in it for me?' (WIIFM) factor. If they see a benefit, then they will get the work done.

If the two departments are regularly co-dependent, then the need for reciprocity will be a key WIIFM factor. If incentive and bonus schemes recognise their input, that will also encourage them to respond quickly.

For me, however, the key factor is the strength of their relationships with the team from department A. If they like the team and get on well with them, they will be happy to help and see department A succeed. We all like to help our friends and people we trust and respect. This is what worked for me at the Benefits Agency in Croydon, which I shared with you in chapter 3.

So the leading WIIFM factor is also the simplest to put in place – encourage conversation and relationships between different teams.

Create communal eating areas and tables for people eating alone to join each other. Add hot-desking spaces and innovation hubs where people can share ideas and ask for different inputs. Set up action learning sets and mastermind groups for cross-silo problem solving and trust building.

Look at how you can implement and encourage the use of technology such as internal social networks and databases of networks to encourage conversation, the sharing of challenges, requests for ideas and information, and joining the dots where different parts of the organisation are talking to the same clients, suppliers or key influencers.

It will take some work; people don't change their natural behaviour just because you put in some hot desks or an internal social network. But if you get this right, your organisation will be more efficient, more innovative and should enjoy greater growth as cross-referrals flourish. It's worth investing time and effort in getting right so that the business can grow and your people enjoy working there.

THE FEAR FACTOR

If building a relationship culture is such a positive idea, what is holding us back?

Apart from a 'survival of the fittest' hangover from the 1980s, I believe that the number one factor stopping organisations being more relationship driven is fear. Specifically, a fear of giving staff more flexibility in the way they work and a fear that staff will be attracted elsewhere by better offers if they build strong external networks.



I believe that the number one factor stopping organisations being more relationship driven is fear.

Some of those fears may well be realised. Undoubtedly, some team members would take advantage of greater freedom by abusing it. Long lunches with friends might be passed off as nurturing a potential client, while wandering around the office, talking to other teams, may just be an excuse to avoid mind-numbing but essential tasks. And yes, some people will move on because they have come to the attention of other employers and have been attracted by better offers.

But do we really need to let these fears win the argument? Organisations will always find slackers among their ranks. Eventually they either get found out or they change their ways. Maybe giving them a little bit more respect and responsibility will bring out the performance you want from them.

The best sales managers I know hate to see their teams at their desks. They will challenge why they are in the office rather than out seeing prospects and customers. They know that a salesperson's best work is done out of view, in front of their prospects, so that is where they want them.

It doesn't just have to be sales teams who are trusted in this way. Not every phone call needs to be accounted for, every lunch receipt challenged. Find the balance between safeguarding the business against abuse and trusting your team to build the relationships that will produce powerful rewards.

And what if people attract offers from rival employers? Wish them luck if they move on. The idea of a job for

life, which was the culture and expectation when I came into the workplace 30 years ago, no longer prevails. People move around, bringing new ideas with them when they do. Wish the best for your employees as they move on and take pride in the part you have played in helping them along their journey.

If they move on, that is. If you develop a strong relationship-driven culture where people enjoy working, the chances are that they are more likely to stay longer. Not only that, they may also talk more positively about you to their friends and family, helping to build your relationship in the job marketplace and attract even more talent.



If you develop a strong relationship-driven culture where people enjoy working, the chances are that they are more likely to stay longer.

With sites like glassdoor.com helping jobseekers read reviews on potential employers written by people who work for them, what your employees say about you has more resonance than ever before. So it is in your interest to create an environment they fully engage in and will rave about.

AFTERWORD: PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND COVID-19



In some ways, this book is a child of Covid-19.

While the idea for the book had been seeded a couple of weeks before the impacts of the pandemic really hit the UK, the lockdown and the cancellation of meetings and events created the space to focus and complete the project much more quickly than might otherwise have been possible.

The shutdown of everyday life in the UK and around the world also, of course, has had a tremendous impact on the ideas shared in these pages. It is, after all, not so easy to develop strong professional relationships with people when you can't see them in person.

Humans are a very adaptable species, however. Within days of the restrictions, signups to video conferencing sites like Zoom.com shot through the roof. We even saw images of the British Government's cabinet meeting on a Zoom call, although whether the Prime Minister should have

posted images of the meeting, including the Zoom room details, might be questioned!

Writing this during the second week of the lockdown (I never thought I would start a sentence like that, which sounds like it comes from a sci-fi novel!), a few things have struck me about how we approach professional relationships in the current situation. In such circumstances, it is natural to re-evaluate what is important to us.

I have listed ten things that I think we can take away, at this early stage. Not just for relationship building when we're all confined to our own homes but hopefully ideas we can carry on using when life returns to normal. You might be reading this a year later and life has returned to normal but hopefully the observations in this chapter will still resonate and make sense.

1. The importance of empathy

One of the biggest challenges generally can be when people don't return calls or follow-up promptly. It can be so easy to create our own stories about why that is, from not valuing what we have to offer to rudeness, arrogance or ignorance.

I learned a while ago that I had to stop writing those stories – there were many possible reasons why people didn't return calls and I was probably one of the least likely. The truth is that everyone has a lot going on and we have to prioritise.

The early weeks of the lockdown have brought this to the fore. Some people are more available than usual but many are simply focused on the huge task of changing direction, safeguarding their business and equipping their workforce to operate remotely, all while coping with working from their own home surrounded by children running amok. So we have been much more understanding about people's unavailability and lack of response.

There's always something happening in the lives of the people you engage with. The difference right now is that we have a pretty good idea what the major pressures are, so we find it easier to empathise. If we can carry that empathy and understanding into our relationships post-lockdown, we will find it much easier to build strong bonds.



*There's always something happening in
the lives of the people you engage with.*

2. The importance of just checking in

I've seen a visible increase over the last fortnight in phone calls, text messages and emails just checking in with me to see how things are going. And I appreciate every one of them, particularly if it's clear that it's personal rather than a mass message to a whole mailing list.

In chapter 8 I talked about the importance of making follow-up with contacts about them, rather than about

you. I think we are seeing this happen much more because of the crisis we are experiencing. If we can demonstrate that level of care for our network at all times, relationships will, again, grow much stronger as a result.

As a leader, checking in with staff working remotely is increasingly important. While in the current environment that is everyone, there has been a big push towards remote working over the last few years and there is a reasonable chance that this will increase after the crisis is over.

Staff need to feel connected and feel that you care. In a physical office, you can walk around and see people. When they are working remotely, you need to replace that with regular check-ins. Don't leave people thinking that you only remember them when you need something.

3. The importance of offering support

A step beyond asking how people are is asking what they need, or just offering something to them. People have really taken this on board with elderly and vulnerable neighbours and family and every day we hear more stories of people offering to get the shopping or pick up prescriptions for those who can't do it for themselves.

We can do this for our professional network too. I have approached some clients with an offer of an online question and answer session with their team to help them adapt to maintaining relationships while confined to their homes and it seems to have been well received. I have also arranged a Zoom panel of experts to answer questions from local businesses where I live, related to a sales and

marketing conference I help organise for local charities every year.

These are easy gifts to offer, I look ideally for things that don't take a huge amount of time to put together but can have a strong impact. And again, these aren't actions that need to be confined to times of crisis. Look to see what you can offer your network that costs you little in terms of time and effort but offers big value to them.

4. The importance of selling

We may seek to serve but that shouldn't take away from our need and, indeed, responsibility to ensure that our businesses survive in troubled times. I have seen and heard several comments from people saying that you shouldn't sell in times of crisis. I understand where they are coming from but fundamentally disagree.

The Covid-19 crisis hasn't stopped organisations like Amazon, Tesco and Netflix from selling their services. Retailers of home fitness equipment and technology designed to support home working and video conferencing are thriving.

If you are selling a product or service which will help your clients cope and carry on during these challenging times, you need to let them know how you can help them. The key is that we are selling solutions to problems or products and services that meet people's desires. If what you offer is going to make people's life better, then make it available to them. If it doesn't, how can you adapt?

Again, surely this is what we should be doing anyway. Selling with integrity lies at the heart of strong, ongoing relationships with our clients.

5. *The importance of vulnerability*

I work in a business that has predominantly relied upon face-to-face engagement with my clients. Typically that has been through speaking at conferences and training at workshops and seminars.

Covid-19 and the resulting lockdown has not been ideal for my business model and several large contracts have either been postponed for up to a year or cancelled entirely. I have needed to change my business model and fortunately it was already a journey I was on. My focus over the last few months has been on developing mentoring and masterminding tools, predominantly for senior leaders. The intention has always been to keep the workshops and keynotes but to be less reliant on them. That is more important than ever.

Covid-19 added an urgency to that change. The advantage I had was that my network would understand without judging my need to seek new opportunities quickly. I was able to pick up the phone to trusted contacts and ask for their help – and I received it, for which I will always be grateful.

Covid-19 gave me an excuse to do something that I am already comfortable with but many are not. That was to be vulnerable, to say ‘I need your help’. It gave me a

reason that everyone can understand and allowed me to shed any pretence that everything is wonderful.

So many people don't ask for help from people who would love to support them because of a fear of looking bad and being judged. During times of public crisis it becomes much easier to ask for help but it's a habit that we need to take forward once everything settles back down.



*So many people don't ask for help from people
who would love to support them because
of a fear of looking bad and being judged.*

6. *The importance of face-to-face communication – or maybe not*

How important is it to see people in person to maintain strong relationships? There have always been two schools of thought about this, probably driven as much by personality style and preference as by fact. Introverts, who draw their energy from their own time and space, would probably be more comfortable with virtual meetings and conversation than extroverts, who need to be around people.

That aside, we are about to find out just how important that face-to-face engagement is. As Joni Mitchell sang,

‘you don’t know what you’ve got til it’s gone’¹⁷. People are already getting used to video conferencing, as mentioned earlier.

I still believe that you can develop stronger and deeper relationships in person than you can online. Virtual meetings tend to be more transactional, with less small talk than when we meet face-to-face. That small talk is so important as we get to know the person behind the job title and find out what we have in common. So we need to allow for that online but it is less natural for us.



You can develop stronger and deeper relationships in person than you can online.

Even more important is the messaging and nuance we get from body language in face-to-face conversation that we miss online. It’s also much easier to surreptitiously glance at your phone or check your emails on a virtual call than when sat opposite someone.

All of these reasons make me believe that face-to-face meetings will still reign supreme when we are allowed to revert to them. However, we will have become much more comfortable with virtual conversations, so we will be more likely to weigh up our priorities and push more

¹⁷ Lyric from *Big Yellow Taxi* by Joni Mitchell, Crazy Crow Music/Siquomb Music Publishing 1970

conversations online if it allows us to reclaim valuable time.

7. The importance of structure

Without meetings and events in our diary to force us to keep in touch with our network, the onus falls even more on our shoulders to structure our follow-up. Ideally you should have known intuitively who to reach out to in the early stages of the lockdown, who was likely to be suffering the most and would appreciate a friendly call.

That instinct is great but a structured process to keep you on track is even better. A CRM system that flags when you haven't spoken to key contacts for a while is ideal and is something that will serve you at any point in your career, not just now.

8. The importance of staying in sight, in mind

In chapter 7 I talked about the power of social media to help us to stay in sight, in mind. When we don't have the chance to bump into people at events, around the office or elsewhere, that becomes even more important.

Social media activity seems to have increased substantially in the early weeks of the lockdown, certainly in my network. There are plenty of opportunities to post and to engage with other people's posts. The time challenges that stop people from fully engaging with social media are not as prevalent for many at present, or won't be as things settle down. This is the ideal time to shift gears and truly

participate on social channels. It's also the most important time as the ability of social media to remind people about us takes on increased relevance.

9. *The importance of connection*

With the exception of the most introverted, I believe that the majority of us will learn to value human connection in a different way by the time we are able to enjoy it again. The ability to sit opposite colleagues and enjoy a coffee or lunch, to meet in person, to shake hands (if that does come back into fashion) or hug (appropriately and with permission, of course).

I've actually enjoyed a period of isolation. It's allowed me to focus on the business in greater depth than usual and also to be productive – writing this book as an example. But I am starting to miss the human touch. And Zoom calls do not replace it, I have had plenty of those every day.

As I mentioned in point 6, I do think that we might reassess many of the meetings we currently hold in person and move them to video calls in the future. But we will still value real life human connection and I don't think most people will want to fully remove them from our schedules again.

10. *The importance of perspective and patience*

Whatever is happening to your business at the moment – and I know it is traumatic for many – it doesn't compare to the impact that Covid-19 is having on the health of

people around the world. While hundreds of thousands of people are dying, we have to allow a healthy dose of perspective to frame our own challenges.

Taking a step back and looking at the issues we face in context of what is happening in the wider world has a positive impact on the way we engage with others. Desperation and a scarcity mindset ease off and short-term thinking starts to take a back seat.

We engage better with others when we see the bigger picture, including what is happening in their world as well as our own. That allows us to be more patient, developing relationships for long-term mutual benefit, rather than seeking what we can get in the moment.



We engage better with others when we see the bigger picture, including what is happening in their world as well as our own.

The Covid-19 crisis has seen people put their own needs to one side and seek to help and support those around them. That is a fundamental prerequisite for strong professional relationships. That ability to think ‘us’ rather than ‘me’ leads to happier, more substantial and longer term professional relationships.

And that is to the benefit of everybody.

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.

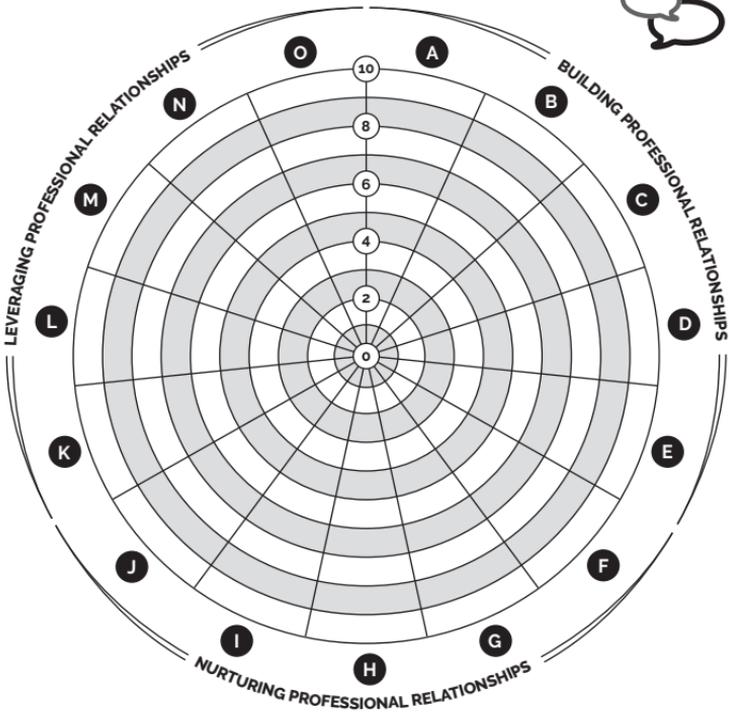
In the first Wheel, complete each section by scoring out of ten how comfortable you feel with the question and sharing in your scores.

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?

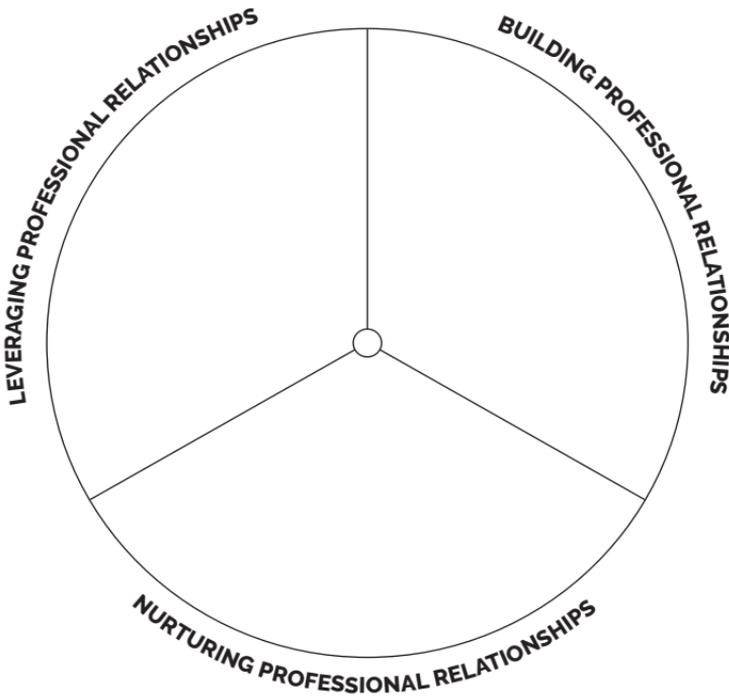
LEVERAGING

- 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 *Connected Leadership*, I hope you found it useful and insightful.

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 but we can also 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 there to give me some background before we speak and you will be able to book your call.

Over the course of these pages, I have mentioned other books that I have written. The links are in the footnotes but you're also welcome to visit www.andylopata.com/shop where these books are available, alongside other resources including tips, books and online learning.

Also, while on my website you will be able to access blogs, podcasts, videos and other further insights to help support you. I also recommend signing up to my **three-weekly newsletter** '*Connecting is not Enough*' while you are there.

Best of luck on your journey and I hope that we get to meet and possibly work together as your next step.

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.