

It's All Who You Know (And Who Knows You)

By Deirdre A. Sullivan

Recruiter Deirdre Sullivan of BCG's New York office stresses the importance of networking.

You are in line to enter a club, and the group ahead of you gets a hearty welcome from the matre d' and is seated at a table in the front by the stage. When your turn arrives, you are greeted indifferently and seated in the back by the bathrooms. Your companion turns to you and says, "They must know someone."

You hear about a former colleague who just has taken a fantastic job with a great title and even better pay. Your former colleague is now light years ahead of you on the **career path**. You think, "She must know someone."

In both scenarios, you are right! It is all who you know (and who knows you).

The idea of networking is as scary as public speaking to most people. But a network is nothing more than a circle of friends.

Family and Friends

We all have a personal network of family and friends. Some of our friends we consider really close friends, practically family. Some of our friends are merely acquaintances whom we see maybe once a year, and some are colleagues with whom we have lunch. Our family members are similar in that we may be very close to some and less close to others.

Your family and friends are the people you call to:

get advice from

complain to

confirm your thought processes

ask for referrals

just chat

Your personal network gives you access to the people known to the people you know AND to the people they know AND then to the people they know AND then to--you get the idea. If you need a recommendation for a caterer for your parents' 50th wedding anniversary, your Aunt Barbara may have a friend who just threw a party for her parents (which was soooo beautiful, according to Aunt Barbara); and she can recommend her caterer. You may now get special treatment because you were referred to that business by Aunt Barbara's friend.

Your personal network need not be limited to your family and friends. Just think about all the other people you come in contact with in your daily life. Your dentist, doctor, and deli man are all part of your network and can give you referrals.

It works the same way in the world of work. While you may have access to some great work advice and maybe even some business contacts through your personal family/friends network, you still need a business/career network.

Business and Career Colleagues

The building of your career network should start no later than college; for many, it starts in high school or earlier. People are the lifeblood of your network. The more people you know, the more information you have; and the more people and information you have access to over time, the more successful your network.

All of these people can and should be part of your network:

people you went to school with

people you work with

people you meet at conferences or seminars

people you meet at social gatherings

people who support the same organizations that you do

Are you getting the idea that it can be anyone and everyone you meet? You're right.

Just as your friendships move along the spectrum from casual to "I wish we were sisters," your business/career network relationships will also range from non-essential to vital. And, just as with friends, people may drop in and out of your network.

Maintaining Your Network

Just as you have to develop and maintain your family and friends network over the life of those relationships, the same is true of your career/business network. Your family and friends expect a certain level of communication on your part in order to maintain the connection. Some of this will be in-person visits. Some will be by phone or the annual holiday newsletter. However you do it, there is an ongoing communications between you and your family and friends. You have to let them get to know you.

You need to do the same for your business/career network. Keep in touch with people from school that you like and respect. Keep them current on your career changes, and keep yourself current on their career changes.

As you meet people throughout your working life, maintain a detailed contacts database with information you gather over time about their careers, families, interests, and anything else that gives you a connection to them.

People maintain their networks in a variety of ways, such as:

sending birthday cards/gifts

sending articles of interest

meeting for lunch, dinner, and/or drinks

attending sporting or arts events

calling occasionally to chat

For some people in your network, you may do all of these things and more! For others, it may be a once-a-year holiday card and phone call. Remember two things: First, your contact should always be sincere and well thought out in terms of who this person is and your relationship to him/her; and second, the idea is to keep the lines of communications open so when you really need to talk to that person, your call will be taken.

Other Peoples' Networks

You've started your network and have been maintaining it, and one day someone calls you to see if you have any information about a job at your company. It is now time for you to realize that in creating your network, you have become part of the networks of the people in your network. It is important that you provide some "value" to the person calling you because you will expect the same if you call that person. Depending on who the person is and how important he/she is to you within your own network and **career goals**, you may provide different information. This is okay. If the person is a fairly casual member of your network whom you

do not know very well, you may refer him/her to the human resources department and give him/her the name of the person to call and permission to mention your name. If the person is very important to your network, you may ask for his/her resume and personally deliver it to the person making the hiring decisions and give your personal recommendation.

Remember, you will also be ranked within the networks of others and may get different levels of assistance. This is why it is so important to devote time and energy to building and maintaining your networks. What you get out of your network is only as good as what you put into your network.

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