## NETWORKING

## How to Radically (and Easily) Shift the Way You Approach Networking

Posted on December 28, 2012 by [Greg](http://blog.ivyexec.com/author/greg/) in [Networking](http://blog.ivyexec.com/category/networking/)

Whenever I bring up networking with my clients, I usually hear a loud sigh followed by, “I know…I need to get out there.”  There seems to be a stigma around networking that it is slimy or self-serving and it certainly isn’t fun.  It suggests that we’re falsely attempting to build a professional relationship in order to gain something from it.  In reality, that’s not really true.  When done thoughtfully, networking is the give and take of helping one another out within the context of our [careers](http://blog.ivyexec.com/2012/12/28/how-to-radically-and-easily-shift-the-way-you-approach-networking-part-i/?lt=a2682274f9c9beb5fd5f283f8ddfbb9c&lt2=Richard.R.Bahner@gmail.com) over time.

I recently came across a fantastic article through [Harvard Business Review](http://blog.ivyexec.com/2012/12/28/how-to-radically-and-easily-shift-the-way-you-approach-networking-part-i/?lt=a2682274f9c9beb5fd5f283f8ddfbb9c&lt2=Richard.R.Bahner@gmail.com) called [How To Build Your Network](http://www.kellogg.northwestern.edu/faculty/uzzi/ftp/uzzi%27s_research_papers/uzzi_dunlap%20hbr.pdf)that sheds light on the importance of being an “information broker.”  The concept is that you can have wider reach and influence if you construct networks of multiple clusters of people versus one big cluster.  By building relationships with a wider range of people, you greatly enhance your ability to tap into resources, gather public and private information, and ultimately, increase your power and visibility.

Another way to look at networking is if you compare it to developing friendships.  If you reflect for a moment, you will notice that you have a range of different types of friendships – a best friend or two, close friends, those you only see or talk to once a year, those you know peripherally through other friends, etc.  You have friends who [go back](http://blog.ivyexec.com/2012/12/28/how-to-radically-and-easily-shift-the-way-you-approach-networking-part-i/?lt=a2682274f9c9beb5fd5f283f8ddfbb9c&lt2=Richard.R.Bahner@gmail.com) 20+ years and those you’ve only known for 2 months.   If you look closer, is your network of friends wide or small?  Do you tend to hang out with the same people over and over again or do you find yourself having plenty of opportunities to do different things with different sets of friends?

Let’s look at it another way.  Have you ever known someone who was in a serious relationship and seemed to have completely forgotten about their friends – well, until they breakup? Then, they come crying to you and suddenly want to hang out all the time!  They soon realize they don’t have many close friends anymore and feel as if they have to start over re-building them or getting new friends altogether.  It’s not that different than losing or quitting your job and realizing you forgot to network beyond the water cooler all that time.

If you’re not regularly developing and maintaining relationships both inside and outside of your current employer, you’re going to have a hard time gaining and maintaining momentum in your career.  Networking is especially crucial for those who have been working at the same company for more than 3 years.  You never know when you might get [laid off](http://blog.ivyexec.com/2012/12/28/how-to-radically-and-easily-shift-the-way-you-approach-networking-part-i/?lt=a2682274f9c9beb5fd5f283f8ddfbb9c&lt2=Richard.R.Bahner@gmail.com), your department will go through another reorg (and decide it may be time to leave), or you get a new boss whom you really don’t like.  Nothing ever stays constant.  Yet, networking is the one constant you should consider nurturing consistently.

Networking is the give and take of helping one another out within the context of our [careers](http://blog.ivyexec.com/2012/12/31/quick-and-easy-ways-to-develop-more-clusters-of-people-in-your-network-part-ii/) over time. Whether you are looking for a job, contemplating making a transition in the coming year, or are happy as a clam in your current job, consider some quick and easy ways to develop more clusters of people in your network:

**Get to 500+ connections on LinkedIn**

Get a heck of a lot less picky about who you’ll add as a connection on LinkedIn. If it’s been a while since you’ve communicate with someone, include a personalized note.  It’s a great way to reconnect in seconds.  Meet someone new?  Add them on LinkedIn the next day.  Side note: if you’re not on LinkedIn, you might as well as not exist as a professional.  Seriously!

**Reconnect with old acquaintances**

Make a list of people you haven’t seen, emailed, or communicated with in the last year with whom you’d like to reconnect.  All you need to do is let them know you were thinking about them and wondered what they were up to.  Think globally, across industries, and career types.  Then, make a modest goal of reaching out to 4-6 per month.  That’s only 1-2 per week.

**Get Social**

If you’re not leveraging any social networks or participating in them, you are essentially “off the radar.”  Rather than [be a social](http://blog.ivyexec.com/2012/12/31/quick-and-easy-ways-to-develop-more-clusters-of-people-in-your-network-part-ii/) media voyeur, take a chance and put some of your ideas and thoughts out there.  Let people know what you’re up to.  Share an article, comment on others’ posts, or write about something that made you stop and think (or laugh).   Just by engaging, it gives others an opportunity and encouragement to reach out to you.

**Do unto others…**

Think of someone you’d like to introduce to another person.  Be the generous one, the connector, who says, “Oh, there’s someone I’d like you to meet!  I think you’d really enjoying talking about X and Y. Let me put you in touch.” Then, follow through.

If you find yourself saying, “It doesn’t feel genuine”, “I like my privacy”, or “I don’t like attracting attention to myself,” then I would try experimenting with methods to connect with more people in a way that feels most authentic to you.  But for god’s sake, do it! Put yourself out there in small ways and watch all sorts of interesting new opportunities and experiences open up.

My challenge to you within the next week is to post at least one status update on Facebook, add 3 new connections on LinkedIn, and make one introduction between two people.  That’s all it takes to get the networking cycle started. Networking is like good karma…what you put out there usually comes back to you in unexpected and delightful ways.

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