

# Your network matters more than networking

**Networking still matters, but it's the network leaders build around themselves that matters more, writes Janine Garner.**

**N**etworking is essential for business growth and personal success. Yet the adage "it's not what you know, it's who you know" seems to have significantly more weight in this 21st Century world of busyness, where jobs are filled before they are advertised and previously unthought-of collaborations appear out of nowhere to create new and competitive markets and steal market share.

Individual talent, previous performance successes, educational achievement or even good old self-reliance is no longer enough to survive in the fast-moving business landscape in which continued relevance, agility and innovative thinking are key.

Sure, networking still matters – but it's the network leaders build around themselves that matters more.

The *Harvard Business Review* article "Managing Yourself, A Smarter Way to Network" found that, "The executives who consistently rank in the top 20 percent of their companies in both performance and well-being have diverse but select networks ...made up of high-quality relationships with people who come from several different spheres and from up and down the corporate hierarchy."

Building a network that works is both an art and a science. It is an art in that it requires basic human skills in communication, connection, authenticity and the ability to be 'in the present' and engaged with people and conversation.

It is a science in that building a network strategically requires an ongoing analysis and audit of the people within the network and a sustained curiosity around the levels of diversity and connectivity within the group. It's about seeing the lines that connect people and ideas to create opportunity.

**1. Identify the critical few:** British anthropologist Robin Dunbar said there

was a limit to the number of relationships humans could comfortably maintain – 150, to be precise. He suggested this was the amount with which we could maintain stable relationships, remember each other's names, keep in contact and do each other favours. Anything larger than this, he said, results in the creation of other sub-groups and tribes.

Momentum, however, starts with a significantly smaller circle of influence. Engage with a smaller group of people who providing quality thinking and behaviours. Individuals that can push and stretch thinking, that can open doors and teach mastery and knowledge. Identify the quality of people and stop obsessing about the quantity.

**2. Undertake a network audit:** The ideal is a balanced and integrated network that bridges smaller diverse groups and is cross-hierarchical, cross-functional and cross-organisational. A balanced, interconnected network enables diversity of learning, reduces bias in decision-making and increases opportunity for personal growth and success. Successful networks provide:

- Company, market or wider industry information.
- Influence through sharing insight, experience and connections.
- Mentoring to accelerate personal growth.
- Accountability for action .
- A sense of purpose, of balance and worth.

**3. Value exchange is key:** Value exchange, the cross-fertilisation of intelligence and sharing of skills and knowledge, is the new currency. Each party involved gains knowledge, information and eventually perhaps even financial reward for their involvement, but the priority is the sharing of information, the connection that is made and the network that is built. The use of skills and thought as currency is something that is only going to increase in a future where knowledge means money. Make

connections that matter, share information that matters and foster a pay-it-forward relationship.

**4. It's time to sink a few:** Knowing who to cut from a network is as important as knowing who to keep. Sometimes hard decisions have to be made to sink the energy zappers, the under miners, the dream stealers. The antithesis of networking, these people zap positivity and don't add constructive thinking, ideation of strategic planning. They dampen the collective conversation, instead stealing ideas and snuffing them out – or worse, stealing them for themselves.

**5. Be brave and diversify:** Be brave enough to seek out new individuals, be brave enough to connect. Strategically expand networks by diversifying connections, exploring other people, businesses and experiences. Successful networking is about understanding the connections that should be made, as opposed to those that are being made.

It was Richard Branson who said, "Nobody can be successful alone," and in our fast-moving business world, a network that works is critical to fast-track personal and business success. Choose to network wisely, building a circle of influence that allows transformational connections to be nurtured and business growth opportunities to be fostered. **M**

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