


# It's Who You Know *Networking that works*

 by Janine Garner



**N**etworking is essential for business growth and personal success. 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 sell reliance are no longer enough to survive in the fast-moving business landscape in which continued relevance, agility and innovative thinking are key.

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% 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 successful network 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.

Here are four tips for building a network:

### 1. IDENTIFY THE CRITICAL FEW

British anthropologist Robin Dunbar said there is a limit to the number of relationships humans can comfortably maintain – 150, to be precise. He suggested this is 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 provide 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 thoughts 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 that 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.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Janine Garner is a Fortune 500 mentor, partner at Thought Leaders Global, and CEO of the LBDGroup. She is also the author of *It's Who You Know: How a network of 12 key people can fast-track your success* (Wiley) and *From Me To We: Why Commercial Collaboration Will Future Proof Business, Leaders and Personal Success* (Wiley). Visit

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