

BUILDING A NETWORK QUICKLY WHEN YOU NEED TO

NOTE: Many of the ideas in this plan were drawn from our book, *Power Your Career: The Art of Tactful Self-Promotion at Work*, in which you can find many more suggestions and examples. We hope this shorter guide helps you get started. Feel free to reach out with questions or comments.

—Richard Dodson & Nancy Burke • TactfulSelfPromotion.com

In our book, *Power Your Career: The Art of Tactful Self-Promotion at Work*, one of the three core strategies we emphasize is to Cultivate Strategic Relationships. Networking is a key part of this work. In a separate document, *A Networking Plan for a Year* (available as a free download on our website) we have laid out a plan for building your network when you have the luxury of time – when it’s important, but not urgent.

But what about the large numbers of people who have not been focused on cultivating or maintaining a network and now need to tap into a network immediately? For example, if you find yourself suddenly out of work or trying to start a business, haven’t really cultivated your network, but you need one now. You don’t have a year to build it – what do you do?

First of all, know that you are not alone, In fact, the majority of people we’ve worked with who are in career transition believe that they have a meager network.

Well, you’re in luck. While, as we’ve said, it’s better to build your network when you don’t *need* it, it is possible to start from scratch and build a network quickly. Nothing like fear and financial pressure to get you over your resistance or aversion to networking!

The steps are similar to those in *A Networking Plan for a Year*, which would be worth referring to. But there are some things you do differently when you need to move quickly. These are the major steps we recommend:

1. Use a tool to record the network you have now.

It can be a simple spreadsheet, or a contact management system that will help you see visually what you need to do each day/week/month. Here’s an example:

| LAST NAME (sortable) | FIRST NAME (sortable) | TYPE OF CONTACT* (A, B, C or whatever helps you) | EMAIL ADDRESS | PHONE NUMBER | LAST CONTACT DATE | NEXT DATE TO CONTACT (sortable) | NOTES (information about the person, e.g., their interests, names they gave you, where you got their name, information they've given you...) |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|---|---------------|--------------|-------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| Tam | Peter | | | | | | |
| Johnson | Mary | | | | | | |
| Parks | Lily | | | | | | |

Write down the names of *everyone* you know: former bosses, co-workers, vendors, customers, consultants, family, friends, neighbors, soccer parents, former classmates, teachers, co-volunteers or board members, alumni connections, people in

your church or synagogue, etc. *Everyone!* Don't evaluate whether you think they can be helpful or not, or eliminate anyone because you haven't talked with them in a while. Just write. Keep adding to it as new names come to mind. Most people who have been working for a while should easily be able to list 150-200 names.

Now mark the type of contact – A, B, or C. There are various ways to define these, but the idea is to prioritize your list so you know whom to reach out to first. Here is one way to think about them:

- **“A” contacts** – These might be people you know that work in your profession, or are leaders in your industry, or employed at an organization of interest to you. Basically people you believe might be able to help you learn about the marketplace, and possibly make a referral. This is a way to prioritize those you might reach out to first.
- **“B” contacts** – These are professional contacts, or friends that you believe might be able to provide advice and referrals. This is not “B quality” people – just those who are not directly in positions that you *believe* can hire you or who are necessarily close to hiring managers.
- **“C” contacts** – This is everyone else – relatives, friends from church or school or volunteer experiences. You may have no idea what these folks do for a living, or who they know. But they may well be able to help. At the very least they can provide morale support, advice and perspective.

2. Get a planner with a tickler (or come-up) file.

If you are off to a “Fast Start,” this can quickly get out of control. In fact, if you really want to make progress, it *will* feel like it's out of control. Schedule your appointments, and, equally as important, schedule follow-up actions with people after your first meeting. Many people are more productive with a traditional paper system, and others prefer to use an online system. Either will do, if you use it.

3. Have business cards made.

It is critical to be able to share your contact information whenever you happen to meet someone, so professional-looking business cards are a must. They should reflect your current situation and contact information. If you don't have a current job title, use your profession instead (Mechanical Engineer; Marketing Leader; Financial Analyst). And leave off a company name. These will cost less than \$40 and is money well-spent.

Consider putting your positioning or branding statement, or some bullets that highlight your key selling points or competencies, on the back of the card. If you're slightly technical, feel free to experiment with the emerging apps that let you share contact information more easily electronically (as simple as bumping phones). Some people print a QR Code on their cards (if you don't know what this is, just Google it) to drive people to their LinkedIn profile or website.

See Chapters 2 and 3 in *Power Your Career* if you need more information on this topic.

4. Polish your LinkedIn profile.

LinkedIn is a powerful tool for finding and connecting with others, especially in a professional context. Of course you want to represent yourself well on LinkedIn, crafting a powerful profile that positions your value is critical. People you reach out to (even those you meet at a party, or are introduced to by a friend) will most likely go to LinkedIn to learn more about you, so you want to make a good impression.

5. Be prepared before you start networking, and be clear on your goals for networking meetings.

Make sure you know your value proposition, positioning (branding) statement, and how to talk about your accomplishments (see Section One, Position Yourself, of *Power Your Career*). You can do this quickly, get started networking, and then polish it as you move forward.

Before every networking meeting, think about your goal for this particular person at this particular time. In general, during a networking meeting you have only three goals:

1. Develop / deepen a relationship

Network is all about relationships, so each conversation should be about the other person – their interests and needs – before it is about you and your needs. Chapters 7 and 8 in the book will be great help in this regard.

2. Gather information

- “What trends are you seeing in the market right now?”
- “How are you/your organization addressing this issue?”
- “Other companies/people I’ve talked to are facing this challenge...would you say it’s the same for you?”

3. Get more contact names:

- “If _____ is my goal, who else should I be talking to?”
- “Who are the best people in the market who do _____?”
- “Do you know anyone who is particularly good in this area? Particularly connected?”

Practice your introduction and plan your questions.

Before the meeting, always think of what you have to offer this person, then, if it doesn’t come up in the conversation, ask what you can do for them, and even offer a few ideas.

6. Search on LinkedIn to find your A and B contacts.

If you want to find the people that you you’d like to know, connect with them, and cultivate relationships, becoming proficient and using LinkedIn for this purpose is essential.

Search LinkedIn to find the people you want to reach. Learn about them, and invite them to link with you. Once they accept, reach out and ask them if they’d be willing to have a 20 minute conversation with you – on the phone or over coffee.

There is a lot of information out there on the wise use of LinkedIn. Chapter 11 of *Power Your Career* is all about LinkedIn and Social Media, and the resources section of our website can also direct you to quality content.

7. Join 2-3 professional or industry associations, and BE ACTIVE.

People who have not joined their professional associations before often feel guilty about joining when they are in real need. GET OVER IT! It’s OK that you haven’t joined one of these before – they will welcome you as a member and appreciate your willingness to do some committee or board work with them.

This is an ideal way to stay current, and to meet people who are closer to other people you’re trying to connect with. Attend the meetings and take on a role – greeting, registering, handing out nametags. What better way than to meet large numbers of people and know with whom you want to follow-up.

If you are uncomfortable with networking conversations, we have some suggestions in Chapter 9, Maximizing Meetings and “Working the Room.” Or find a few books or articles on this topic and get some ideas about how to have engaging, compelling conversations in a group context.

8. Join two networking groups.

These might be business groups (Rotary, Chamber of Commerce), or community networking groups. You can find them in the local paper business section (now online of course, but we still call them papers) at least once a week, and at workforce centers. Our suggestion is that you *not* stick with community groups of mostly people in transition. Join no more than *one* of these groups, as you need to be meeting a diverse group of people, including those that are already employed.

Become active, and follow-up with at least two people after each meeting you attend

9. Volunteer in a non-profit organization.

Putting in some time volunteering for something you’re passionate about may save your sanity when you’re spending a lot of time networking. And you may well meet like-minded people who will take an interest in you and help you connect with others.

Volunteering can also be a lifesaver emotionally for those in job search. Our clients constantly report that getting out and working with others rebuilds their confidence and provides some quality social time. And it feels good to make a contribution. It also gives you something to talk about when people ask what you’re up to.

10. Follow-up with those you’ve talked with.

One conversation is not going to be enough for many people to become your advocates and refer you on. Building a relationship takes time, and multiple contacts. You’re the one initiating the relationship, so it’s on you to keep finding ways to reach out and connect. Keep is simple, but consistent.

You can find more detail, and many specific examples, of follow up strategies and communication in *Power Your Career*.

11. Set benchmarks and track your progress.

Especially if you want to build a network quickly, you’ve got to have some numbers that you’re trying to hit. Networking is about quality, but quantity matters too. We think of it like setting a pace, and you have to know if you’re moving at the rate you want to.

We recommend that you set a goal for 20-30 conversations each week. At the beginning you won’t be doing this many, but you will be able to build up to it. It’s hard and it takes a lot of effort, but there is no better way than quantity of networking to get your quality built up.

Track whether you are staying with people you know...how many rings out from your core network can you get? Are you getting closer to the companies/organizations you’re trying to penetrate? Are you getting closer to decision makers?

Review weekly, and set goals for the next week.

Schedule follow-up times to re-connect with people with whom you should be communicating regularly.

Our measure of whether you’re doing enough networking is whether it feels like it’s a little out of control.

12. Enjoy the process!!

Building a network quickly is a lot of work, but there is much to enjoy in the process, even though it may feel uncomfortable at times. Consider getting a networking buddy, or several, who you can go to events with, discuss them afterwards, and keep each other accountable – it makes it more fun, and often more productive.

By following this plan you will quickly expand and strengthen your network and relationships. And we believe you'll end up enjoying yourself (at least much of the time).

For additional information and resources, visit www.TactfulSelfPromotion.com.

And please check out our book, *Power Your Career: The Art of Tactful Self-Promotion at Work*, available on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and your local bookseller (ask them to order it for you!). And if you've found value in this document, or have questions or comments, please get in touch with us at info@TactfulSelfPromotion.com.
