

A SYSTEMATIC STRATEGY FOR BUILDING AND MAINTAINING A NETWORK

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

Our book, *Power Your Career: The Art of Tactful Self-Promotion*, is organized around three core strategies: Position Yourself, Cultivate Strategic Relationships, and Increase Your Visibility.

This outline focuses on the second strategy, which involves talking to people, and that means networking. If you're reading this guide, we assume you are convinced that building professional relationships is a good idea. But even those who believe in networking don't always do it.

For many, the time and effort needed to build relationships can feel overwhelming. Full time jobs often require 50 or more hours per week. Consultants are juggling delivery with administration and marketing roles. Single parents – any parents, actually – are trying to balance time demands. Life is crowded with activity, and yet if you want your career to move forward, getting to know people must be a priority. But if you plan just a little bit, it doesn't have to be a full time job.

If you're committed to building your network, but feel time and energy constraints, how do you go about it? Where do you find the time? Here is an approach that we've seen make a huge difference in the size and quality of our clients' networks (and therefore their success)– *in just one year*.

If you're looking for advice about building a network quickly (for example you find yourself in a job search without a lot of contacts), take a look at our guide *A Fast Start Networking Guide*.

Take these ideas and adapt them to your situation, your time constraints, and your personal style.

1. Determine how much time you can devote to networking.

Remember that this is an important career – and life – skill. People who are working on physical fitness often spend an hour or more *each day* exercising (and good for them!). We suggest that you devote *at least* an hour a week to building and maintaining your network. More would be better, and if an hour a week feels like too much, can you put aside a half-hour a week – two hours a month – to do *something*?

What's a good time for this? Friday afternoon when you're winding down at the end of the day? Early some morning before the phone starts ringing? Week-ends, e.g. late Sunday afternoon when your mind is already getting into the work mode?

Building a network is about building consistent habits, and using the moments that you have or opportunities that present themselves. Split your networking time between internal contacts (people who work in the organization that you do) and external contact (everyone else), especially if you work in a large organization.

2. Identify and prioritize your contacts.

Start by listing 10 names in each of these three categories:

“A” contacts – these are people who are already advocates of yours, or very close to being advocates. Select the ten that relationships that you want to nurture and deepen in the next year.

“B” contacts – these are people who are allies or acquaintances where you want to cultivate and strengthen the relationship over the next year. Select ten people that are priorities for you to get closer to in the next year.

“C” names (titles) – these are people whom you don’t know and who don’t know you at this point. In fact, at the beginning of the year, you might not be able to name specific people, but you may have some ideas for the type of people that you’d like to know. These are people you will want to “lock into your network.” For example, if you are in marketing, you may list:

- “Chief Marketing Officer” at two of the large companies in your area, who are known for doing cutting edge marketing.
- The head of one of the local advertising agencies.
- One or two executives in your own organization, especially areas that you are interested in learning about or working in someday. If you are early in your career, you may just want to meet someone more senior than you, not necessarily top executives.
- A marketing person in your market who is considered one of the “hot” up-and-comers.
- A reporter at the local newspaper who reports on business.
- The president of the local chapter of a professional or industry association who seems to have a good reputation.
- A “thought leader” in your profession.
- Principals at respected search firms that specialize in your profession and/or industry.

You don’t have to be specific about all ten slots at the beginning of the year – leave some room for serendipity to help you out...perhaps you’ll run into someone to add to your network at an event you attend.

3. Craft a plan for each of the three major types of connections.

There are more ideas for expanding your network in the book, but here are a few to consider:

A. “Advocates”

- Think about each of your advocates individually: what do they do for you, what do you do for them, what are their interests.
- Plan to have at least 3 interactions with each advocate during the year.

Some ways to interact:

- Asking for advice or feedback.
- Sending them a book that you’ve found particularly good (if you have the funds, you could send one to all your advocates, doing one contact with each in one easy step!).
- Writing a very thoughtful note (with or without a book) by email or snail mail to let them know you are thinking of them and about how much you appreciate what they’ve done for you.
- Attending an event at which they’ll be present, so you can make a point of connecting in person.

B. “Allies and Acquaintances”

Plan to connect with each of these people twice during the year. In addition to some of the suggestions for advocates, you might consider:

- A quick email stating that you were thinking of them when you read something about their organization or an interest of theirs.
- Sending a copy of an article on a subject they’re interested in.
- Paying close attention to LinkedIn updates, and sending notes when you see change in their status, or an intriguing post they initiated, etc.

C. “Those you want to add to your network”

Do some research on the people you’d like to meet. What are their interests – corporate, non-profit, hobbies, etc.? There might be a very natural link to something you share an interest in.

- Using LinkedIn and other resources, see if you have a connection who can introduce you. If so, write an introduction about why you want to meet this person, so that your contact can forward your request with a cover note.
- If you don’t have someone who can introduce you, get the email and phone number of the person you’d like to meet. Write an email followed by a phone call. If you can’t find the email, try using an InMail on LinkedIn.

4. Use a tool to track your relationship building/networking.

All you really need is 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:

Networking plan for (date) _____ to (date) _____

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						

In the Resources section of TactfulSelfPromotion.com you can download our “Networking Contact List” for a more thorough description and detailed example of this step.

5. Create a schedule.

This is what will make relationship building a habit for you. Schedule time each week to review what you’ve done and what you need to do in the next week. You might do this on Monday morning, Friday afternoon, whatever works with your work and life rhythm. It should only take 15 minutes or less to review and plan what you’ll do in the next week/month.

Here are reasonable benchmarks for most people:

- Two breakfast/coffee meetings each month
- One new relationship built each month
- Contact your advocates at least three times during the year
- Attend a professional event at least six times a year

Build in some time every month or two to see how you're doing on your goals and to plan your priorities and activity for the next few months.

6. Engage in a professional association.

Select one professional and/or one industry association to join and/or to become involved in for the year. This will make it easy to broaden and deepen your network, and do the rest of the work we're suggesting in this section. Getting involved means not only attending the meetings, and working the room, it ideally means taking on a leadership role—get on the Board, volunteer to be the volunteer coordinator, sign up for a subcommittee where you can add expertise (and build relationships). Working with people on projects is a terrific way to build your network and reputation.

If you aren't aware of professional organizations, ask your colleagues, or search Google or LinkedIn for ideas. Try out a few of them by attending a meeting or two, and see which of them offers interesting information, has members at your level and the level you aspire to, and provides opportunities to become active at the level you are able to commit to.

7. 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.

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. 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.

8. Enjoy the process and the results!

You can actually do all this in little more than an hour per week. And, at the end of a year, you will have vastly expanded and strengthened your network and relationships. And we believe you'll end up enjoying yourself (at least much of the time), and we hope you'll appreciate the joy and value of relationships.

For more ideas, strategies 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 book sellers. And if you've found value in this document, or have questions or comments, please get in touch with us at info@TactfulSelfPromotion.com.
