

Cultivate your network to generate opportunities

The challenge

The value of a network of contacts depends in large part on the opportunities that it enables us to identify—which we do not hear about if we limit our circle of contacts to the people immediately necessary to get the job done. An extended network is thus a factor that facilitates good luck, though chance meetings, pieces of information overheard by chance, introductions at the right time. Indeed, these are all factors which are often decisive to success. Yet, it takes a lot of time to develop and maintain a network of contacts. Experts recommend spending at least 10 percent of working hours on this. How can we optimize our time to ensure that the network we build will gene-rate opportunities and enable us to seize them more easily?

Cultivate your network

Building an effective network of contacts requires regular effort over time based on a clearly defined strategy.

- Plan regular **lunches** with the members of your network. Alternate between meetings with people from other departments in your company and contacts outside the organization.
- Use **social networks** to stay in touch, renew contact with former acquaintances and create opportunities for interaction.
- Take advantage of **events** to maintain relationships. E.g.: New Year's greetings, news about the companies of your contacts, job changes, etc.

Invest in doing favors, without expecting anything in return

The value of a network lies in an overall balance, and not in the direct value of each relationship. Doing people disinterested favors creates the good will that generates opportunities.

- Recommend people you trust to your contacts or on social networks.
- Circulate information likely to interest your contacts. E.g. Articles, conference reports, etc.
- Act as a **liaison** to bring together unacquainted people in your network who could benefit from working together.

Maintain all the branches of your network

Networks must be reactivated regularly to generate opportunities. It is thus important to beware of the propensity to maintain relationships with only a few people with whom we share common interests or affinities.

THE THREE **PILLARS OF NETWORK** DEVELOPMENT

network with a systematic approach

Opportunities are generated above all by diversity. People remote from your habitual circle are the most likely to provide new ideas and cultivate opportunities in new domains.

- Map your current network to identify areas where you have no contacts or only weak links to target your development efforts.
- Ask the members of your network to put you in contact with people in these domains.
- Participate in **events** outside your core business. Identify people you want to meet and common interests which could serve as an entry point; avoid talking too long with old acquaintances to leave time to meet new people.