



How to Build a Business Network from Scratch

ReallyLinked Whitepaper

By Jerry Acuff

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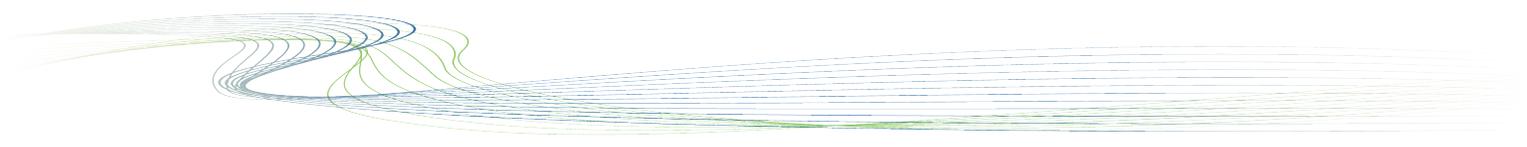
No one achieves success in life without the help of others. Just acknowledging this fact may be that tipping point that leads you to search for new ways to connect with others. Business relationships don't just happen—they require nurturing and time to develop.

How do you begin to build a successful network of business relationships? You want to identify people who could help you be successful—a network of potential powerful connections. Try to imagine who can help you develop your talents or provide you with a job or introduce you to someone who can help you succeed in your career.

Looking at this strategically, a good place to begin is to create a list of everyone that you know who may potentially contribute to your growth, development, and success. Create a master list first, and then identify those people with whom you'll want to build more meaningful relationships.

To create that master list, write down the names of as many people as you can that fit within the following categories:

- Professors and teachers that you really connected with (college, high school, even middle school)
- Coaches that have helped guide you
- Scout or Brownie leaders from the past, including those from other groups: 4H, YMCA, Boys'/Girls' clubs
- Christmas Card list or Happy New Year list
- Neighbors (include former neighbors that you've kept in contact with)
- Good family friends. These can include friends of your siblings, parents, grandparents, and other relatives (no matter where they live)
- Friends (from school, outside clubs, sports, any social activities, or your youth)
- Parents and close relatives of friends
- Classmates you knew well
- Fraternity or sorority contacts
- Colleagues you worked with in the past whom you liked
- Former bosses, supervisors, managers you worked for in the past
- Religious leaders (ministers, rabbis, priests, etc.)

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- People who attend worship services with you (members of your church, synagogue, mosque)
 - Relatives: aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.
 - Your "real" friends on Facebook
 - Any meaningful contacts from LinkedIn that are in none of the above categories

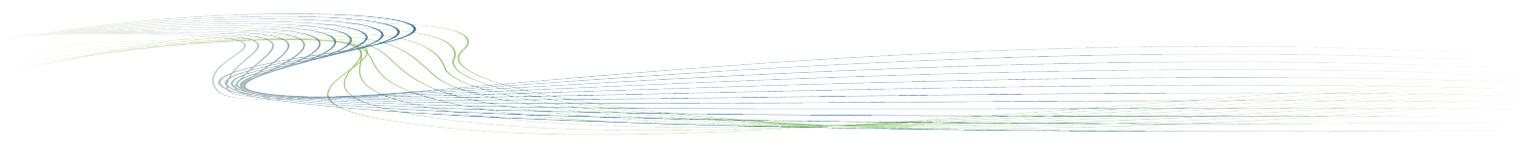
The Next Steps

If you are like most people, you have identified quite a few people who may potentially help you in your career. Recognizing that business relationship building requires both time and effort, it is not practical for you to try and build a quality business relationship with all of these people. Some you may want to contact just for fun because you have lost touch with them and were close at one time. But now is the time to think strategically. Your goal is to advance in your career. Now review this list and ask yourself the following questions:

- Who is already successful in the industry I'm in or want to pursue?
- Who is working in the field that I'm interested in—or in the specific role I'm interested in?
- Who can introduce me to someone who may be able to hire me—or at least provide some insight about the industry or career path I have chosen?
- Who would I be comfortable contacting that I can confide my doubts and fears to?
- Who could be a possible mentor for me?
- Who thinks highly of me and will likely make me feel good when I'm faced with failure?
- Who can help guide me in terms of learning what I need to know? (Sometimes it is difficult—you don't know what you don't know.)
- Who has been successful in climbing the corporate ladder who would likely share their insights and learning with me?

Some of the answers to these questions may come from people that you already have strong relationships with (such as someone that you can confide your doubts and fears to). However, you are not looking at this list from a personal sense as much as from a business sense. If the person you turn to for guidance has no experience in the business world, how relevant can their advice be? Is there someone else who has that knowledge that you may be able to develop a relationship with?

Now that you have whittled down the original list to something more manageable, how do you begin? Recognize that each person is an individual and may be approached differently, depending upon your connection to them. You may already have some ideas in mind as to how to approach an individual. You may want to call them, text them, or drop by to see them in



person. If you feel you could use some more direction, here are some suggestions to make that initial contact:

- Ask to learn something based on that person’s expertise
 - I’m interested in pursuing a career in xxx. I know you’ve been successful in this career field, and I was wondering if we could meet for lunch so you could share your insights
 - My dad often talked about how much [insight, experience, wisdom...] you have in [this particular area...]. I could really benefit from learning from someone with your expertise. Would you be willing to meet with me to share your thoughts?
- Leverage the connection that you have
 - As my neighbor growing up, you always impressed me with how.... Now my situation is a bit different. I’m [thinking about a job change, looking to start my own business, feeling stuck in my current role, etc.] and was thinking that you would be a good person to talk to steer me in the right direction. Is there any time open on your calendar in the next week or two when we could get together and chat?
 - When you were [my scout leader], I was always impressed with how organized you were. I feel that this is one area that I need to improve. Is it possible that we could get together so you could share some tips to help me?

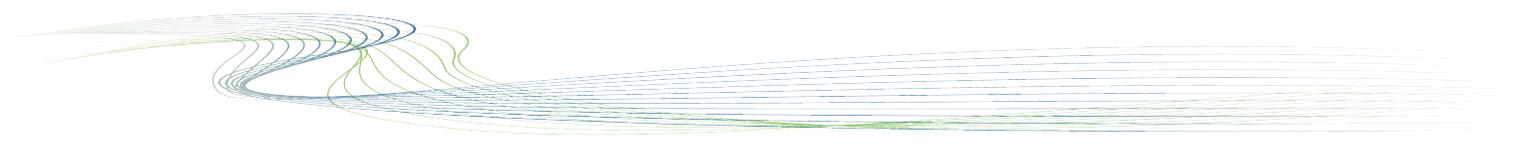
Another important thing to remember is that you want to continue to build the relationship. This is not a one-time event. Thank the person for their help, and then think about what an appropriate next step would be.

- Should you get together again in a few weeks?
- Should you start to send each other emails/texts?
- Do you want to give this person a progress report as to how their suggestions are working?

Only you will know, based on the individual you meet with, what would be most appropriate in terms of keeping in touch. But search for ways that you can help that person. And apply this in your new role/job position.

Reciprocating

Business relationships are like great personal relationships- they are a 2-way street. Before you ask something of someone, you should be willing to give something to them first. Now in some cases, you may contact someone due to their expertise and ask them to share their insight and knowledge with you. You are acknowledging that you recognize their skill/proficiency—and



likely, this will be viewed as flattering. (And many people do enjoy talking about themselves and sharing what they know.) But you also need to be willing to give of yourself.

Try to think of what you can give and share to those you meet. What special knowledge, skills, contacts, etc., can you share? We recommend that before you meet with anyone on your list, spend some time thinking about this. Make a list of what you do well. Is there some way that you can help the person you are meeting with?

Let's take the example that you are a recent college graduate who is trying to land that first professional job. You may be meeting with a friend of your parents who has been successful and may be wondering what you can offer this person. Think of all that you know about this person. Does this successful executive have a child who is struggling with math or needs some help in soccer—and this is something that you could help with? Think outside the box.

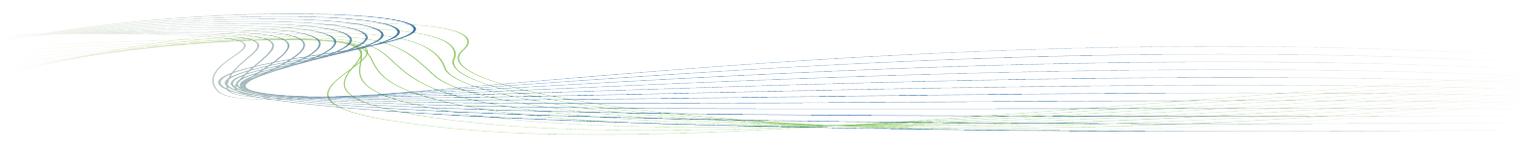
When in doubt, you can always ask: "I'd really like to thank you for meeting with me today. I'll definitely take your suggestions and work on them—I think they'll make a difference. I was wondering—is there anything that I could help you with?" You may be surprised at the response.

Enjoy the Benefits

Relationships are essential in our lives. In the business sense, no one can succeed without the help of others. As you strengthen business relationships with those people you have identified as part of this exercise, you'll reap benefits that you were unable to foresee when you began this process. That is part of the joy of building relationships. As the business relationship progresses, you'll learn more about the other person, discover more things you have in common, and find ways to provide for each other.

Keep in mind that business relationships do require nurturing and time. When you created your original list, you likely included names of people that you have not kept in contact with. You're probably thinking, "I wonder what happened to..." That's exactly what will happen if you do not consciously and consistently plan to keep in contact with someone. You both move on. And this can be a good thing—you'll find that you may progress along different paths, and the ties that bound you are no longer strong. So, continue to seek out new opportunities for building those quality business relationships. And continue to focus on what you need to do to accomplish your goals.

No matter how much experience or tenure you have, to be successful you need to continually stretch yourself. Gain exposure to new ideas. Seek new ways of doing things. The most successful people are the ones who continually challenge the way they do things. They know if they are not growing, they are likely stagnating. Without changing what you are currently doing and trying something better, you will not be as successful as you could be otherwise.



Take risks. These, too, are essential for success. View mistakes not as failures but as valuable learning experiences. Think as Thomas Edison did when he was asked about how many times he failed when trying to invent the electric light bulb. “I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work.”

Enjoy the challenges that life and work will present. Remember, the journey is as important (if not more so) than reaching your goal.

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