

Succeed in Your Career & Love Your Work By Investing in Your Network

Courtesy David Rawles & FORBES

Having specific, unique relationships in your network will contribute to your fulfillment and your all-around success, professionally and personally.

As you appreciate your co-workers, past & present, and take extra care to maintain your network through good times and bad, remember the sort of colleagues needed most. For great career success, and more importantly, to feel fulfilled in your relationships, you'll want to have each of these individuals represented in your life. Many successful professionals build an "advisory board," while some just consider certain people mentors, and some connect with valued colleagues. The key here: there are people with whom you may wish to create strategic relationships. They will make a big difference!

1. "Encourager"

Much like we benefit from someone to point out obstacles in our path, we also need someone who will motivate us to climb to new heights ahead. The encourager is a professional cheerleader who sees the positive in any situation and "pumps you up." This person *always encourages you and your team*, adds appropriate humor or distractions at the perfect moment, and improves your mood. This fellow colleague is a boat-load of infectious energy that never quits. This isn't the manipulating boss giving feedback by formula or the team member who always has a story. This "encourager" is genuinely positive about you and what you contribute. Patrick is my biggest and best "encourager"!

2. "Improver"

This is the team member who is particularly adept at taking an objective look at everything around them. While you might take a positive perspective, this co-worker can point out what's not working, and all the things that can be improved. Don't mistake this person for someone who is simply negative. This is a person who can always see *ways to make progress* because they're looking for a better way, or a more positive future. This is your teammate who will give you honest feedback and will tell you when you overlooked a critical detail. This is Bryant, who can discuss a difficult faux pas and then work with you to solve the problem or cope with an unexpected situation.

3. “Life-Timer”

We all need a “I’ve known you since dirt was invented” colleague. This is the person who has known you for a really long while. It’s a person with whom you may have weathered a tough season or survived a particularly toxic leader. If you’re older, this is the person you’ve known longer than most anyone. If you’re young in your career, this is the person whom you’ve known since you began work, and the relationship you’ll want to maintain over time. This person is especially important because they give you a sense of continuity—*reminding you of where you’ve been and how far you’ve come*. This person helps you maintain memories of the past and milestones you’ve reached in both your personal life and career. My friend Bill is my “Life-Timer.”

4. “Refresher”

This is a colleague who is your opposite. If you’re a big thinker, pull someone into your network who is brilliant with the details. If you’re the person who lives moment-by-moment, have someone around you who is the most planned person you know. If you’re a classic introvert, spend time with the gregarious extrovert. If you’re senior in your career, connect with people who are just starting out, or vice-versa. Most of us tend to gravitate toward people who are like us, but we benefit greatly by finding people who aren’t. Reach out to those who *see things differently than you, live different lives, or are experts in functions unlike yours*. You’ll grow by gaining fresh perspectives and novel ideas coming from a “refresher.” I’m continually blessed & refreshed by Barry.

5. “Acceptor”

We all have times when we’re in a slump, or having a down day, or when advice is needed. That’s why you need this person in your close group of connections. This is a connection with whom you can be just you, get angry when you’re majorly disappointed or talk about the larger-than-life mistake you made with your boss. When this kind of person is in your network, you can display “your worst” and they’ll still accept you. Or you can celebrate your best successes and they will be happy for you. I rely on Gloria as my “Acceptor.”

Another benefit of having an “acceptor” in our network, is that we can better learn about how to better deal with negative feelings or major mistakes, growing ever-so-slowly in accepting who you are becoming. This connection is like the others: *they are a great mirror from which to learn how to grow and become more effective*.

6. “Outsider”

Some of your network will be within your current organization. It’s also crucial to have a connection who is outside your normal sphere of influence and who may often provide you more objectivity. This person may be from another sphere of your life. It’s a person who is plugged into what’s outside of your closest circle and *who can provide additional points-of-view* beyond your immediate connections. My “outsider” has been Steve ... for decades.

7. “Linker”

Often critical is that one individual who will introduce you to others who can assist with almost any need. They are so vital to a growing, changing career. Linkers sustain your network by *continually connecting you to new folks to replace those who leave your network* for various reasons over your career. Also, colleagues may overlap—your “linker” and your “outsider” person may be the same. These are the people you’ll want to have close—the people with whom you’ll want to sustain relationships. Terry is the “linker” on my team.

8. “Senior Leader”

The **senior leader** who can give you advice from atop any hierarchy. In each organization with which we associate, there are people who sit at or near the top who can *offer unique perspectives based on their experience, their exposure, and their extended influence*. These senior leaders offer a great value based on their view and their reach ... like my colleague, Gary. These individuals can give you insights not often available anywhere else. Many are not always easy to connect with, nor are many even willing to be available to those at the other end of the hierarchy, but when you find one who is both willing and able, he or she is a wonderful source of advice, counsel, insight, and support!

Important Reminder:

Critical to your success are those individuals that YOU HELP FIRST! Intentionally **add value to each network member** . Help others before you need help. Effective networking is “**sowing and reaping**” ... in that order. Do this not just for these key connections, but all those in your network.

Relationships = Network

Adding More Relationships = Building Your Network

Remain Connected to Relationships = Building Your Strong Network

Sowing Into All of These Relationships = Building Your Strongest Network