

PMI-NEW Presentation 1/12/2010

Some people have difficulty talking to strangers. My wife and I grocery shop together and often I will strike up a conversation with someone. After ending the conversation, my wife will ask me; “Who was that” or say, “Why didn’t you introduce me?” The simple answer is that I didn’t know that person. I just struck up a conversation with them. I’ve learned to ask questions of people in part to validate my networking premise and in part to learn more about other people.

We can make these conversations comfortable (even for introverts) by developing an approach where the other person does all the talking. We can call this; “**Tom’s 10/50 Rule.**” Using the 10/50 rule means that for every sixty minutes of conversation, you will learn to talk for ten (10) minutes, while the other person talks for fifty (50) minutes. Believe me; if you’re doing all the talking you can’t abide by the 10/50 rule. If you learn to ask more questions, you won’t need to fumble for answers.

When you consider employing networking as part of your career search (or any other purpose), it’s important to understand that networking is an altruistic activity not an egocentric activity. That is to say, most of us were told to sell ourselves during the job search process which is an *egocentric* activity, and not learn about the person we’re talking to or their needs, which is an *altruistic* activity. To network effectively and gain all the benefits available to you, you must re-orient your thinking and focus on the needs of the person you are networking with rather than focus attention on yourself.

You remember hearing about the importance of “*selling yourself, tooting your own horn, or telling your story.*” Have you tried that lately? If you have, I’m certain that you’ve received any number of quizzical looks and heard the deafening sound of the rolodex slamming shut. You’ve met nice people that should be able to help you but for some reason they’re not inclined to share any contact information with you or promise they’ll get some names to you later but never do. This is because selling yourself is an *egocentric* behavior and yields little in terms of results.

Over the past few years, I have sat through countless meetings with job seekers who have introduced themselves to me and talked (some seemingly without breathing) for twenty minutes. They begin their story (uninvited) at about the time the earth was formed and usually get to their freshman year in high school before I stop them. Believe me it’s not that I’m uninterested in their story, but most of what they’ve said is irrelevant in every context, save their family and marital relationships.

My visualization of this diatribe is; “If he/she worked with me, would I avoid getting coffee when I saw them near the coffee pot?” If they came to my door and asked; “Do you have a minute?” I’d know that conversation would last at least 45 minutes! I don’t have that kind of time and neither do most hiring managers.

More importantly, this is not the kind of impression you’ll want to make. You’ll want to be remembered as the good thinker, the person who was easy to talk with, and led the conversation to what others will consider to be more important topics themselves.

To achieve this, what if we concentrated on the other person instead? What if we got to hear their story rather than telling them ours? What if they began to feel comfortable enough with us to share problems in their industry, or their company? Would the identification of these problem areas further our search? I think it would.

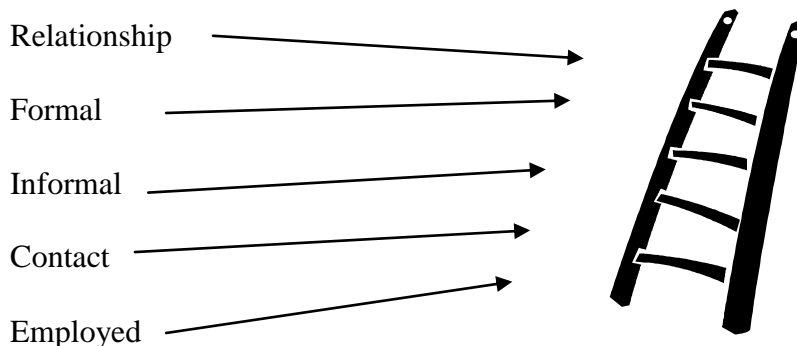
As you think about the real strategy of networking and the tactics you'll need to employ it will be helpful to understand the hierarchy of the relationship you are trying to build. Some people suggest that an alpha tracking system works, that is ranking contacts as an A, B or C. An A contact is someone who are connected to the industry or a company that you are interested in. B contact is someone who you might be able to help by connecting them to someone in your network. And a C contact would be everyone else.

It's easy to know what to do with A contacts; you need to follow-up with them to further your search. B contacts take a secondary but important role in your ability to pay it forward. That is to say by helping someone else, they will be more interested in helping you. C contacts are people you're not sure what to do with. They can't help you and you can't help them. Do yourself a favor by throwing their cards away and don't waste any of your precious time trying to develop a relationship with them.

Speaking of relationships, it's important to understand how to move people from being a contact to a connection; the place where they can really help you. There are several steps involved in moving someone from that contact category to a connection.

Building relationships doesn't happen overnight. It will take immense effort on your part to build new friendships and relationships. If less than fifteen (15) percent of job placement occur as a result of recruiters and less than fifteen (15) percent as a result of job postings (from Internet/Published markets), then the other seventy (70) percent comes as a result of building relationships or networking.

The graphic representation below shows you the path of building this relationship.



Networking requires building stronger relationships with people so that they feel comfortable introducing you to people they know.

At the lowest rung of the ladder (Level One), you're employed and you believe that networking offers little if any value, You're just too busy. Work, family, and other commitments keep you from building your network before you need it. The lesson to be learned here is that it is much

easier to maintain your network than build a new one. Once you've built your network keep your network active!

The next level, (second rung) is what most people associate with the word "networking." It's where you make an initial contact with someone. If this occurs at an event, it is typically accomplished with a business card. This physical exchange lasts several minutes but will only last about ten to fifteen minutes in the other persons mind.

The third level (third rung) is interaction, which is considered informal, and usually accomplished with a phone call or email contact. This exchange is momentary but will last no more than twenty-four to forty-eight hours in the other person's memory. You'll need to be remembered longer than twenty four hours for them to be of any value to you or you to be of any value to them.

The fourth level (fourth rung) is where networking begins to get interesting. This is more formalized and includes face-to-face meetings where each of you gets to know the other better. Here is where you have the opportunity to ask questions, gain industry insight, and begin learning about the other person and their needs.

At the top of the ladder is the level five relationship or connection—a friend for life or career. Relationships that reach this level end up as bonds represented by a strong understanding of each other's backgrounds, strengths and leadership capabilities, all at a personal level. These connections are willing to help you in any way they can, just as you would be willing to help them. Together, you can share problems, brainstorm solutions and celebrate each other's successes.

The steps you take to move up the levels of the ladder are based on a progressive development of trust. For each person you network with, you'll need to make an investment of your time. The more you connect with someone, the greater the investment. Very few relationships will reach level five. But building trust and investing time in your network will help you create a more effective network for the future.

A word about social media

Any book written after 2007 would be remiss if it didn't include a discussion of social media sites. The exponential growth in sites such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, and others yet to achieve commercialization, will lure the unsuspecting job seeker with their claims of connecting people to one another. I must confess that I am not a fan of these sites for use by the job seeker. The reason is simple; there are no shortcuts to or replacements for human to human interaction. Human to human interaction is the only basis on which meaningful relationships are built.

These electronic tools may provide some information that is useful to the job seeker but in the end, you are still required to meet face-to-face with someone and have a productive conversation. As an example you may spend some time scouring your contact list in LinkedIn looking for one of your contacts to connect you with one of their contacts at an employer that is on your target list. The 2nd contact will likely not be the party you need to talk to, though they may know them.

How likely is one stranger going to be to connect you with another stranger? Probably not too likely. Wouldn't it just be easier to make the connection you need directly?

In writing this, I understand most people's reluctance to cold call other people. This powerful fear is related to two things; first, "*How do you start a conversation with that person (someone you don't know)?*" And secondly: "*Why will that person want to talk to me?*" The answer to both of these questions is the same; most people like to connect with interesting people, who show interest in them, and their organization. Social media will never help the person you want to contact understand if you are an interesting person. You will never be more than a secondary connection (at best) within their electronic network. I'll suggest that connecting through a social network is little more than a time-wasting duplication of effort that could have been completed by just picking up the phone.

Let's look at the process by which we move contacts to connections. Assuming we have a name, (a contact), how do you move them to the informal stage and beyond? We'll begin by examining the elements that will become our networking objective: Build rapport, give and get information, get advice, gain referrals, engage the other person in your search, and be remembered favorably and actively.