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Start Networking Right Away (Even If You Hate It)

by [William C. Byham](#)

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Even if you have an aversion to networking—as many people do—it’s imperative to start forging deliberate connections within the first 30 to 60 days after a promotion, the period when people in a new division or company are making up their minds about whether you’re dependable—or a loser who should never have been hired.

Most people don’t take to networking naturally, which is why it’s often tough for rising executives to be systematic about reaching out to people who can help them. But networking is the best way to acquire crucial information about the job and succeed early. Otherwise, you might lack the facts needed for an important proposal, for example, or might bring up a smart “new” idea that has failed in the past. This “courageous networking,” as I call it, requires recruiting networking targets both inside and outside the firm—even at competitors.

So if you’re newly hired or promoted, here are a few things to do right away:

Figure out who should be in your network.

It shouldn’t be just the people who eat lunch at the same time and in the same place you do. Ask yourself, Who can help me? Who knows what’s going on? Who gets around roadblocks? Who are the critical links in the supply or information chain? Your boss can be a big help by identifying people, setting up meetings, going with you to conventions, and making introductory phone calls. But your boss isn’t the only one with valuable information. One of the best contacts I made in an early job at a retailer was the person who implemented office moves—he always knew who was on the way up. I also got useful advice from friends in the legal department, who told me, in broad terms, about the major problems the organization was facing. And a good friend who managed the company’s lobbyists in Washington informed me about impending government regulations.

Dare to introduce yourself.

Most people will be more receptive than you think. No one turns down a call from someone who starts the conversation with “I’m new in my job, and I’m trying to get to know people who....” When a competing firm in my industry hires a new chief, I write a congratulatory note and say I’d like to drop in. I’ve never been turned down. Knowing these CEOs makes it easy to fix problems, such as a competitor’s salespeople spreading false rumors about my company. I pick up the phone, explain the situation, and it’s fixed.

Remember that networking is not a one-way street.

Reciprocate by sharing information you know will be useful, and stay in touch by, for example, sending people relevant articles once a quarter or congratulating your contact about a job change. Many executives spend about an hour a week maintaining their networks, but greater effort yields greater payoff. The marketing manager of one large company claims he spends two hours a day at it.

As horizontal relationships become just as vital as vertical ones in global organizations and companies change direction ever more frequently, it’s critical to maintain a good network of contacts. Time spent in the early days building a network will save time down the road when you’re trying to solve problems, leverage resources, and achieve success.

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Written By

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