

Managing Yourself: A Smarter Way to Network by Rob Cross and Robert J. Thomas FROM THE JULY–AUGUST 2011 ISSUE Listen to an interview with Rob Cross. She points to her boss, the CEO, a mentor who "always has her back"; Steve, the head of a complementary business, with whom she has monthly brainstorming lunches and occasional gripe sessions; and Tom, a protege to whom she has delegated responsibility for a large portion of her division. Outside the company, Deb's circle includes her counterparts in three strategic partnerships, who inspire her with new ideas; Sheila, a former colleague, now in a different industry, who gives her candid feedback; and her husband, Bob, an executive at a philanthropic organization. She also has close relationships with her fellow volunteers in a program for at-risk high school students and the members of her tennis group and book club.

<https://hbr.org/2011/07/managing-yourself-a-smarter-way-to-network> Page 1 of 13 Managing Yourself: A Smarter Way to Network – HBR 4/12/15, 6:50 PM This is Deb's social network (the real-world kind, not the virtual kind), and it has helped her career a lot. But not because the group is large or full of high-powered contacts. Her network is effective because it both supports and challenges her. Deb's relationships help her gain influence, broaden her expertise, learn new skills, and find purpose and balance. Deb values and nurtures them. Over the past 15 years, we've worked with many executives like Deb, at more than 300 companies. What began as organizational research—helping management teams understand and capitalize on the formal and informal social networks of their employees—has since metamorphosed into personal programs, which teach individual executives to increase their effectiveness by leveraging their networks. The old adage "It's not what you know, it's who you know" is true. (See the sidebar "Are You Networking Impaired?") These people might remain successful for a time, but often they will hit a plateau or see their career derailed because their networks couldn't prompt or support a critical transition. Consider Dan, the chief information officer of one of the world's largest life sciences organizations. He was under constant pressure to find new technologies that would spur innovation and speed the drug commercialization process at his company, and he needed a network that would help him. Unfortunately, more than 70% of his trusted advisers were in the unit he had worked in before becoming CIO. Not only did Are You Networking Impaired? In our work, we have identified six common managerial types who get stuck in three kinds of network traps. Do any of the descriptions below fit you? The Wrong Structure The formalist focuses too heavily on his company's official hierarchy, missing out on the efficiencies and opportunities that come from informal connections.

<https://hbr.org/2011/07/managing-yourself-a-smarter-way-to-network> Page 3 of 13 Managing Yourself: A Smarter Way to Network – HBR 4/12/15, 6:50 PM they reinforce his bias toward certain solutions and vendors, but they lacked the outside knowledge he needed. But I needed to be more targeted in who I let influence my thinking." Alan, a top executive at a global insurance company, realized that although he had a good network, he was still making decisions in relative isolation. After giving it some thought and observing his peers' networks, he realized he was missing links with several important types of people: colleagues focused on financial offerings outside his own products, who could help him deliver broader financial solutions to customers; coworkers in different geographies— particularly London and Asia—who could enhance his ability to sell to global clients; and board-level relationships at key accounts, who could make client introductions and influence purchasing decisions. Four Steps to Building a Better

Network Analyze Identify the people in your network and what you get out of interacting with them De-  
layer Make some hard decisions to back away from redundant and energy-sapping relationships  
Diversify Build your network out with the right kind of people: energizers who will help you achieve your  
goals Capitalize Make sure you're using your contacts as effectively as you can Start by looking at the  
individuals in your network. people who offer them new information or expertise, including internal or  
external clients, who increase their market awareness; peers in other functions, divisions, or  
geographies, who share best practices; and contacts in other industries, who inspire innovation; 2. When  
he analyzed his network, he realized that he was missing "people and initiatives one or two levels out."  
To address this, he decided to delegate--stepping away from interactions that didn't require his  
presence and cultivating "go to" stand-ins in certain areas of expertise. He also changed his leadership  
style from extraordinarily accessible to helpful but more removed, which encouraged subordinates to  
solve their own problems by connecting with people around

<https://hbr.org/2011/07/managing-yourself-a-smarter-way-to-network> Page 9 of 13 Managing Yourself:  
A Smarter Way to Network – HBR 4/12/15, 6:50 PM him. The executives who consistently rank in the top  
20% of their companies in both performance and well-being have diverse but select networks like  
Deb's--made up of high-quality relationships with people who come from several different spheres and  
from up and down the corporate hierarchy.--R.C and R.T.

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started rowing with their daughter. He therefore decided to devote less time to projects and committees  
that would involve the negative contacts and to avoid dwelling on any sniping comments they subjected  
him to. Within a year he was much more productive and

happy. <https://hbr.org/2011/07/managing-yourself-a-smarter-way-to-network> Page 2 of 13 Managing  
Yourself: A Smarter Way to Network – HBR 4/12/15, 6:50 PM The data we've collected point to a  
different model for networking. Another overarching mistake we often see in executives' networks is an  
imbalance between connections that promote career advancement and those that promote engagement  
and satisfaction. The biased leader relies on advisers much like herself (same functional background,  
location, or values), who reinforce her biases, when she should instead seek outsiders to prompt more  
fully informed decisions. <https://hbr.org/2011/07/managing-yourself-a-smarter-way-to-network> Page 8  
of 13 Managing Yourself: A Smarter Way to Network – HBR 4/12/15, 6:50 PM John, an academic,  
realized that two university administrators in his network were causing him a great deal of anxiety. Joe,  
the investment banker, identified counterparts in the Asian and European operations of his company who  
had relationships with the clients he was focused on and then scheduled regular calls with them to  
coordinate efforts. But what really matters is structure: Core connections must bridge smaller, more-  
diverse kinds of groups and cross hierarchical, organizational, functional, and geographic lines. More  
specifically, our data show that high performers have strong ties to

<https://hbr.org/2011/07/managing-yourself-a-smarter-way-to-network> Page 5 of 13 Managing Yourself:  
A Smarter Way to Network – HBR 4/12/15, 6:50 PM 1. people who promote their work/life balance,  
holding them accountable for activities that improve their physical health (such as sports), mental

engagement (such as hobbies or educational classes), or spiritual well-being (music, religion, art, or volunteer work). "De-energizers," by contrast, are quick to point out obstacles, critique people rather than ideas, are inflexible in their thinking, fail to create opportunities, miss commitments, and don't show concern for others.

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Next, classify your relationships by the benefits they provide. Through our work advising individual managers, we've also identified a four-step process that will help any executive develop this kind of network. They go astray by building imbalanced networks, pursuing the wrong kind of relationships, or leveraging relationships ineffectively. He was 40 pounds overweight, with alarmingly high cholesterol and blood sugar levels, and prone to extreme mood swings. "Physically, I'm in much better shape and probably staved off a heart attack. But I think I'm a better leader, too, in that I think about problems more broadly, and I'm more resilient. Our peer feedback systems are also clearly indicating that people are more committed to the new me."

formally powerful people, who provide mentoring, sense-making, political support, and resources; and informally powerful people, who offer influence, help coordinating projects, and support among the rank and file; and 3.

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Analyze. First, look at eliminating or minimizing contact with people who sap you of energy or promote unhealthy behaviors. You can do this by reshaping your role to avoid them, devoting less time to them, working to change their behavior, or reframing your reactions so that you don't dwell on the interactions. One of the big challenges for Paul, the consumer products executive, was managing a new facility and line of innovation in China.

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Write down three business results you hope to achieve in the next year, and then list people who could help you with them. "But she hadn't been able to get the right people to listen. I was able to step in and help make things happen. To me the right way to be tapping into people is in this exploratory way --whether it is about strategic insights or just how they think I'm doing on some aspect of my job. That's how I get to new ways of thinking and doing things, and I know it makes me much more effective than people who are smarter than me." These high performers, we have found, tap into six critical kinds of connections, which enhance their careers and lives in a variety of ways. "I had started to mistake friendship, trust, and accessibility for real expertise in new domains," he told us. "This didn't mean I was going to dump these people, as they played important roles for me in other ways. With her

The overloaded manager has so much contact with colleagues and external ties that she becomes a bottleneck to progress and burns herself out.

The Wrong Behavior The superficial networker engages in surface-level interaction with as many people as possible, mistakenly believing that a bigger network is a better one. As a result, his social network expanded to include people with different perspectives and values, who helped him focus on more healthful and fulfilling pursuits. He realized he would need to focus on cultivating a network rather than allowing it to organically arise from the day-to-day demands of his work. These conversations led him to streamline decision making and uncover innovation deep within the firm's hierarchy. In fact, we've found that individuals who simply know a lot of people are less likely to achieve standout performance,

because they're spread too thin. Yes, it's important to know powerful people, but if they account for too much of your network, your peers and subordinates often perceive you to be overly self-interested, and you may lose support as a result. Numerous studies have shown that happier executives are higher-performing ones. The chameleon changes his interests, values, and personality to match those of whatever subgroup is his audience, and winds up being disconnected from every group. She has a small set of core contacts--14 people she really relies on. Effective core networks typically range in size from 12 to 18 people. At an early career stage, an employee might get this from a boss or customers; later, it tends to come from coaches, trusted colleagues, or a spouse. People who add a sense of purpose or worth, such as bosses and customers who validate their work, and family members and other stakeholders who show them work has a broader meaning; and 3. We recommend a four-point action plan: analyze, de-layer, diversify, and capitalize. They're people who always see opportunities, even in challenging situations, and create room for others to meaningfully contribute. Good energizers are trustworthy and committed to principles larger than their self-interest, and they enjoy other people. And our own research suggests that roughly 90% of anxiety at work is created by 5% of one's network--the people who sap energy. Categorizing your relationships will give you a clearer idea of whether your network is extending your abilities or keeping you stuck. His insularity was limiting his options and hurting his chances of promotion to managing director. Here's another simple exercise: Write down three specific business results you hope to achieve over the next year (such as doubling sales or winning an Asia-based client) and then list the people (by name or general role) who could help you with them, thanks to their expertise, control over resources, or ability to provide political support. "In a couple of cases this helped me identify opportunities I could pitch proactively. In others it just helped us appear more coordinated when we were competing against other banks," he says. Our research shows, for instance, that high performers at all levels tend to use their information contacts to gain other benefits, such as new ideas. Reciprocal relationships also tend to be more fruitful; the most successful leaders always look for ways to give more to their contacts. He failed to elicit insights from others and, as a result, wasn't making enough progress toward his goals. The Wrong Relationships The disconnected expert sticks with people who keep him focused on safe, existing competencies, rather than those who push him to build new skills. The people in your inner circle should also model positive behaviors, because if those around you are enthusiastic, authentic, and generous, you will be, too. These people aren't necessarily extroverted or charismatic. Unfortunately, energy-sapping interactions have more impact than energizing ones--up to seven times as much, according to one study. Generally, benefits fall into one of six basic categories: information, political support and influence, personal development, personal support and energy, a sense of purpose or worth, and work/life balance. If he eliminated those redundancies, his network shrank to five people. "By shifting my role and how I reacted to the idiots, I turned a negative situation around," John says. Early-stage leaders, for example, tend to focus too much on information and not enough on personal development and might want to shed some of the contacts who give them the former to make more time for those who give them the latter. Beyond this, consider which individuals--and types of people as determined by function, hierarchy, or geography--have too much of you, and why. Too often we see leaders fail because they accept or create too many collaborative

demands. Remember to focus on positive, energetic, selfless people, and be sure to ask people inside and outside your network for recommendations. Because none of his trusted advisers had ever even been to that country, he reached out to the head of R&D at a major life-sciences organization that had undertaken a similar effort. So he started inviting his more-junior contacts, who were informal opinion leaders in his company, to lunch and asking them open-ended questions. Getting It Wrong Many people take a misguided approach to networking.