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Learning The Art of Networking: A Critical Skill for Enhancing Social Capital and Career Success

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In this era of boundaryless careers, with individuals making frequent career moves and needing to get up-to-speed quickly, networking is seen as a critical competency. Developing and maintaining relationships with others for the purpose of mutual benefit can help individuals search for and secure employment opportunities, gain access to needed information or resources—especially on short notice—and obtain guidance, sponsorship, and social support. Such networking skills are crucial for enhancing social capital and career success; however, many individuals feel uncomfortable with, or unskilled in, networking. Given the importance of networking for business students, we discuss the benefits and challenges of networking and then share a set of exercises and experiences that have been effective in increasing students' networking abilities.

Keywords: networking; social networks; social capital; career; business students

In today's fast-paced, global, high-tech environment, one's willingness and comfort with networking can significantly impact one's ability to establish contacts, get interviews for jobs, and identify and cultivate mentors. Such networking skills are crucial for career and personal success. For example, prevailing wisdom suggests that 70–80% of all professional jobs are not obtained through classified advertisements; rather, they are obtained through effective and consistent networking (Koss-Feder, 1999). Despite this wisdom, many students lack the knowledge and skills needed to effectively network. Still others choose not to engage in networking behaviors for a variety of conscious and unconscious reasons (de Janasz, Dowd, &

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Schneider, 2006). Given the increasing importance of networking, and the need for management educators to help students learn these skills, this article offers conceptual and hands-on tools that have effectively facilitated networking skill acquisition in undergraduate and graduate students.

Formal educational systems are primarily designed to focus on the development of our human capital, that is, the investments we make in ourselves to build skills and abilities that help us become marketable. Our education, as well as our prior work experiences, training, knowledge, and abilities represent critical sources of human capital that determine our value in the workplace (Becker, 1975; Blau & Ferber, 1987). However, managers and professionals need to consider their "social capital" as well, especially for individuals in protean careers who need to be adaptable, self-directed, and focused on their employability (Hall, 1996; 2002). Baker (2000) describes social capital as the resources available to an individual as a result of his or her personal relationships. Networking is a key human capital skill that is unique in its ability to increase an individual's social capital. In the next section, we define networking and show how improving this aspect of human capital can positively enhance an individual's social capital.

Networking

Networking represents proactive attempts by individuals to develop and maintain personal and professional relationships with others for the purpose of mutual benefit in their work or career (Forret & Dougherty, 2001). In light of our boundaryless work environment characterized by frequent movement within and across organizations (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Sullivan, 1999) and the fact that the burden of responsibility for one's career has shifted from the organization to the individual (Hall, 1996; 2002), forming multiple developmental relationships through networking to support one's career has taken on greater emphasis (de Janasz, Sullivan, & Whiting, 2003; Higgins, 2000; Higgins & Kram, 2001). Multiple developmental relationships build on Kram's (1985) concept of the relationship constellation, which proposes that career and psychosocial support can come from a multitude of people both inside and outside one's organization.

Such developmental relationships enhance our social capital. That is, our relationships with others are a resource that can provide new ideas, timely information, job opportunities, business leads, influence, and social support (Baker, 2000). Relationships built through networking make it easier to contact people who can share information about potential opportunities or introduce

individuals to others who have this information. Whether through face-to-face, phone, written, or electronic means, individual attempts to "connect" with others who can provide needed information and opportunities. Effective networking relationships are built on trust (Baker, 2000) which develops over time as individuals have positive interactions and support one another. Developing trusting relationships increases the likelihood individuals will provide assistance when needed and lessens fears that an individual might try to exploit the relationship for personal gain (Gouldner, 1960).

Social capital can provide individuals with a substantial advantage in their careers (Adler & Kwon, 2002). For instance, Seibert, Kraimer, and Liden (2001) found that the structure and content of an individual's network provided access to information, resources, and career sponsorship, which in turn were related to salary, promotions, and career satisfaction. Moreover, because social capital is more difficult to imitate than human capital (Forret & Sullivan, 2002), the quality of unique relationships with individuals in our network represents a valuable and distinctive resource. In today's knowledge economy, people and their knowledge are an organization's primary asset and source of competitive advantage (Drucker, 1992). Because of its focus on building and nurturing personal and professional relationships to create a system or chain of information, contact, and support (de Janasz et al., 2006), networking has become critical for individual, as well as organizational, success.

Building Social Capital

Networking can improve individuals' social capital by influencing (1) the size of their social networks, (2) the strength of their relationships in the social network, (3) their pattern of relationships in their social network, and (4) the resources of their social network (Forret, 2006).

First, size refers to the number of members in a social network. Through networking, individuals expand their relationship constellation by forming relationships with those internal to the organization (e.g., peers) and those external to it (e.g., members of professional associations; Higgins & Kram, 2001). Forret and Dougherty (2001) identified five types of networking behaviors to help individuals increase and maintain the size of their networks: increasing internal visibility (e.g., joining organizational task forces), engaging in professional activities, participating in social gatherings, becoming involved in community events, and maintaining contacts with others by sending cards or e-mail to keep in touch. Larger networks have been associated with a variety of

benefits. In her research on the socialization of auditors, Morrison (2002) found that having a larger friendship network was positively related to social integration, and having a larger information network was associated with increased organizational knowledge and task mastery. Similarly, Podolny and Baron (1997) found that the size of one's strategic information network was positively related to number of promotions. In sum, building and maintaining relationships with others results in a larger network that individuals can turn to for social support, ideas, advice, or sponsorship.

Second, strength of relationships in a social network refers to the degree of closeness that characterizes a relationship. The strength of a relationship can be assessed on a continuum based on the frequency of contact, degree of intimacy, and emotional investment (Granovetter, 1973) with weak ties on one end of the continuum and strong ties on the other. Both types of relationships (weak ties and strong ties) can be of assistance. For instance, Granovetter (1974) found that our acquaintances were more helpful than our close friends for finding jobs because our acquaintances are a source of more unique information (i.e., our close friends tend to know about the same job openings). Furthermore, in a study of new product development teams, Hansen (1999) showed that weak ties were beneficial for accessing routine information, but strong ties were necessary for obtaining complex knowledge. Strong relationships may be more important for the transfer of sensitive or complex information than weak relationships because of the higher risk and effort involved (Seidel, Polzer, & Stewart, 2000). Networking relationships are typically considered to be weak ties (Keele, 1986), and hence, a good source of information about job opportunities and other assistance. Moreover, networking relationships may evolve into stronger ties (possibly becoming mentoring relationships) if contact becomes more frequent and the relationship becomes characterized by greater familiarity and comfort.

Third, Burt's (1992) structural hole theory focuses on the pattern of relationships in a social network, i.e., whether the members of an individual's social network are connected to one another. A structural hole exists when there is no connection between two members of a social network. One key advantage of having structural holes is that members of a network who do not know one another are more likely to provide access to diverse information. Researchers have found that structural holes are associated with upward mobility and greater managerial performance (Burt, 1992; Podolny & Baron, 1997; Rodan & Galunic, 2004). Based on an individual's career goals, Forret and Sullivan (2002) advocate aligning networking efforts to build

relationships with individuals in one's organization, profession, and community. Because individuals in these three domains are less likely to know one another, they constitute structural holes with the ability to provide distinctive benefits.

Fourth, resources of a social network refer to the benefits that may be derived. In particular, developing relationships with high-status individuals has the potential to provide valuable outcomes. In their study of job seekers, Lin, Ensel, and Vaughn (1981) found that the status of the contact had a strong positive effect on the prestige of the attained job, indicating the ability of powerful contacts to exert influence on one's behalf. Networking has been found to be related to career outcomes of managers such as promotions and salary progression (Forret & Dougherty, 2004; Gould & Penley, 1984; Luthans, Hodgetts, & Rosenkrantz, 1988; Michael & Yukl, 1993), as well as to more immediate benefits such as information and ideas, social support, job search assistance, and business assistance (e.g., providing business leads, gaining access to financial resources) (Forret & Dougherty, 1997). Having multiple developmental relationships has been shown to be associated with greater work satisfaction, career progress, and retention (Higgins 2000; Higgins & Thomas, 2001). Overall, the results on networking show the powerful impact that relationships with others can have on one's career.

Barriers to Networking

Even though networking is highly beneficial for one's career, many individuals seem to find the idea of networking uncomfortable or intimidating (de Janasz et al., 2006). In particular, the prospect of networking can be rather scary for some individuals who may consequently refrain from networking with others. On the other hand, there are other individuals who appear completely comfortable with walking up to strangers at an event, introducing themselves, and starting a conversation to find mutual areas of interest. We liken networking skills to athletic ability or musical talent. Some individuals have more "natural talent" than others, but these skills and abilities can be developed through education, practice, and feedback.

Introverted individuals and those with low self-esteem are much less inclined to engage in networking (de Janasz et al., 2006; Forret & Dougherty, 2001). For instance, Forret and Dougherty (2001) found that those who were extraverted and had higher self-esteem were more likely to maintain their external contacts, engage in professional activities, and take steps to

enhance their visibility in their organizations. Furthermore, research demonstrates that extraverted individuals are more intense in their networking efforts (e.g., frequency and thoroughness) than introverted individuals (Wanberg, Kanfer, & Banas, 2000) and are more comfortable meeting new people (Digman, 1990; Goldberg, 1993; McCrae & Costa, 1987). Those with low self-esteem have a lack of confidence in their personal skills and abilities (Brockner, 1988), may experience difficulty in asking others for assistance, and believe they will be unable to return any favors received, thus violating the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960).

By providing education and training, opportunities to practice, and feedback, we believe that individuals can become more comfortable and effective in their networking behaviors. Skill-building opportunities in how to approach other people and introduce themselves, as well as opportunities to learn how to engage in "small talk" to help find areas of common interest can enhance individuals' networking abilities. Providing education on the myriad ways individuals can offer assistance (e.g., encouragement and support, sharing your knowledge, introducing them to people you know) can help them become valued partners in the relationship (Barton, 2001).

Educating Students on the Importance and Skill of Networking

Networking is a specific career competency critical in this era of boundaryless careers (Arthur, Inkson, & Pringle, 1999; DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994). Networking may be taught in interpersonal skills courses or the concepts discussed in textbook chapters addressing power and influence processes. In view of the importance of networking for business students, we share a set of exercises and experiences aimed at increasing students' awareness of, comfort with, and skill in networking. We offer the following exercises, which have been developed and utilized in undergraduate and graduate business programs to assist students by building awareness of the importance of networking for their careers and to build skills in developing relationships with others.

Introduction: Demystifying The Notion of Networking

Many students, particularly traditional-age undergraduates, do not fully understand the practice or value of networking. They perceive it as

using or asking special favors from others to gain an unfair advantage. Some students don't even realize that they have already practiced networking. To demystify and motivate the concept of networking, tell the students, "Raise your hand if you've ever networked." Typically, fewer than half of our traditional-age students, and between two thirds and three quarters of graduate students, will raise their hands. Ask them to keep their hands raised, while you ask, "When you came here (e.g., new school, new town), how many of you asked someone for a recommendation for a hairdresser, restaurant, or mechanic?" and "How many of you asked roommates or friends for information on the 'good' teachers or classes you should take?"

Our experience suggests that after these questions are asked and answered, all hands are raised. We acknowledge that these examples constitute networking, and by so doing, we begin to clarify the goals and value of networking, and build students' confidence in a skill they unknowingly have actually practiced. Next, we share a list of benefits of networking with them (see Appendix 1 for a sample slide), and ask small groups of students to share personal examples or successes resulting from networking. The stage is set, and the students are motivated to learn.

Exercise 1: The Handshake Exercise

The handshake is one of the very first ways in which we develop impressions of other individuals (Shipps & Freeman, 2003). It is also an integral part of face-to-face networking in many cultures. The goal of this exercise is to reintroduce students to the importance and implications of this simple, common gesture. To conduct the exercise, ask the students to "greet" and shake hands with all (or a subset if class is larger than 25 or 30) individuals in the room. You might suggest that such a process would take place at a first-time meeting between employees of two or more companies or at a career fair or convention. Afterwards, discuss students' responses to the following sets of questions:

1. "What did you notice about others you met and whose hands you shook? For example, did they smile, look you in the eyes, give their/ask for your name?" Discuss students' perceptions of others' behaviors, e.g., "How did you feel when others did or didn't make eye contact?"
2. "Describe the differences (without identifying individuals) in the handshakes you received. For example, did some involve sweaty palms, bone-crushing squeezes, or limp grips? If you were meeting these individuals

for the first time, what might you infer about the individual from his or her handshake?" Discuss their perceptions/impressions, e.g., fear, confidence or lack thereof, strength, power, need to dominate. Inform the class that experts consider a firm handshake to be most effective in most Western cultures; however, many Asian cultures greet with a bow instead of the "traditional" firm handshake, whereas Native Americans use a gentler handshake.[1]

3. "What differences, if any, did you notice between men's and women's handshakes? We have found that some men note that they use a gentler handshake for women than with other men. Explain that firm is ideal, but too gentle may be misinterpreted by the female receiver. That is, the intended message (e.g., "I'm being a gentleman and don't want to hurt you.") may be received as "He's not very confident."

4. "Why is the handshake important?" We explain how it helps form first impressions, establishes a physical "connection," and is the accepted business greeting in North America, Australia, and many European countries. You might consider discussing handshake etiquette and meaning in other cultures.

Exercise 2: The Career Fair/"30-Second Commercial"

An important skill for effective networking is the ability to clearly and succinctly articulate who you are, what you offer, and what you are looking for. In the earlier example of asking fellow classmates for recommendations for which classes to take, the asker would find more useful information if she were specific about her needs, such as a professor who gives easy (or no) tests or who teaches at night. Similarly, networking for a job opportunity will be more fruitful if the person looking provides specific information about his needs, desires, and marketable skills. In this next exercise, we ask students to imagine they were attending a career fair and noticed a representative of a firm at which they would like to work someday. In response to the recruiter's greeting (e.g., "Hi, I'm Martha. Tell me about yourself and your interest in our company . . ."), what should students say? Do they need to say anything? After all, isn't handing the recruiter a resume sufficient? As we explain, recruiters get many similar-looking resumes at career fairs. A student/prospective employee who takes the time to introduce him- or herself and entice the recruiter to take a serious look at the resume will fare better than those who simply hand over a resume and proceed to the next table. We call this introduction the "30-Second Commercial," and then explain what it is, why it is important in networking, and what it should include.

What it is. It's a short elevator pitch or sound byte designed to pique the interest of the recruiter/company representative. It is a thumbnail sketch of yourself, the skills and experience you offer, and any other special or pertinent information related to your interests. It is not a life story! Your goal is to get the representative to ask additional questions, actually look at (as opposed to file) your resume, and generally take an interest in learning more about you.

Why it is important in networking. The market for the most desirable jobs is competitive. Nearly all the job seekers at a career fair will have a resume, a suit, a business card, and an interest in securing multiple interviews. Although the resume lists courses students have taken and jobs they have held, it is limited in that the information included is by design fixed and untargeted to any specific company in which the student is interested. The commercial is an opportunity for students to quickly and succinctly highlight particular skills or characteristics likely to interest a recruiter. It helps the recruiter ask directed follow-up questions, ascertain potential fit, and, if a positive impression is made, identify that resume as one of the many deserving a closer look.

What it should include. The pitch should demonstrate how your students are distinctive from and better "fits" than other candidates. It should include a brief introduction of the student and what she or he can offer the company, beyond what appears on a resume. Rather than a string of adjectives, the best commercials contain two or three important (to the company) skills or abilities, backed up by illustrative examples (e.g., "When I was in the Peace Corps, I had to lead others without the benefit of a title. . . . I knew I was effective in this role because . . ."). We refer to each of these skill/ability illustrations as mini sound bytes that can be reordered and used earlier or later in the pitch or expanded in a follow-up meeting or interview.

After writing their commercials, students are instructed to pair up and deliver the pitch to their partner using a normal rate of speech. The instructor will time the commercials and subtly inform the students once the commercials reach 20, 30, and 40 seconds.[2] Listeners, acting as potential employers, are informed that they will be providing positive and constructive feedback on the pitch,[3] including suggestions for prioritizing the content based on the time used. Time permitting, students may revise and deliver the updated version—possibly to another student, if desired. Then, the role play is reversed, and the previous "pitcher" is asked to act as the recruiter while the previous

recruiter is asked to deliver his or her pitch. The same process of timing, feedback, and revision is then followed. Students are then asked to note desired changes based on the "recruiter's" feedback and to type and revise their commercials before the next class session. We inform students that these commercials can and should be modified, depending on the potential contact and opportunity sought, by customizing and reordering the sound bytes within the commercial. We also note that all or part of these commercials may be used when using non-face-to-face networking methods.

The exercise and debrief, discussed in groups or the entire class, help achieve several goals:

1. Helping students, particularly those who are shy or hesitant about networking, reduce their fears of networking by practicing in a nonthreatening environment. Many students comment that doing the pitch "wasn't as hard as they thought it would be" and that the second time through "was much more comfortable than the first time." We reinforce this idea by reminding them that practicing the pitch increases their ability to ad lib from a known starting point, and importantly, enables them to perform it effectively especially when under the pressure of an interview-like situation (Friar & Eddleston, 2007).

2. Reinforcing the intended benefits of the commercial by hearing positive feedback from their partners about their skills and accomplishments (information that until this point has typically not been shared among students) and the resulting impression it made. We remind students that no one knows them and what they offer better than they do. We also inform them how this process mirrors that of the necessity for companies to advertise their products and services; the best products and services will go unpurchased if no one knows they exist.

3. Providing an opportunity for vicarious learning (via partnered learning). Students gain additional ideas and insights on hearing their first and subsequent partners' commercials. They also realize that the commercial tends to sound more informative than arrogant, which is a concern that several express prior to practicing their commercials.

Questions for debriefing the exercise:[4]
1. How long did it take? Discuss the importance of maintaining a 25- to 30-second timeframe; neither too short nor too long is beneficial.
2. How did it feel pitching yourself? Why?
3. How did it sound—confident but not arrogant? Explain.
4. How did it feel receiving the pitch? Have the partner explain.
5. Why is it important to have this commercial rehearsed and ready? What are the benefits and downsides to using this commercial?

Exercise 3: Networking Simulation—Utilizing Networking Skills To Make Connections5

In this exercise, students build on their previously practiced skills (a positive greeting including firm handshake and eye contact, articulating a 30-second commercial) in a simulated event that requires "speed" networking.[6] The setting is an alumni, professional organization, or community event. For example, "Imagine it is (insert actual date, 10 to 15 years in the future) and you are attending your school's alumni event, such as a wine and cheese mixer or homecoming party. Of course you plan to attend, as you have fond memories of your school." Then explain that in addition to being a proud alumnus, each student will be playing a particular role (see sample roles in Appendix 2) that specifies who you are as well as what you hope to accomplish (e.g., find a job, employee, service) at this "meet and greet." We tell the students that they should use their skills (e.g., assertive speaking, listening, empathy, professional etiquette) to find who and what they need, and note that not every need can be met directly.[7]

Role assignments are handed out, and students are instructed to read their role and consider ways to approach others about locating resources that will address their needs. After a few minutes of preparation, students are given approximately 15 to 20 minutes to network at this fictitious alumni event. They are encouraged to make a positive impression, even if the people with whom they connect are of no immediate "use" to them. In addition, students are instructed to politely ask the "unuseful" participants to direct them to others whom they may have met who may be able to provide what is being requested or mention others who might help fill their particular need. This notion is consistent with the belief that successful networking requires a positive, cooperative mindset. The most successful networkers have an attitude derived from viewing relationships as opportunities to give to, rather than take from, others (Haggerty, 1999). There are two kinds of networkers: those who are self-oriented, and those who are focused on others. In the short-term, both types of networkers may get what they want, but in the long-term, those who are focused on others are more successful. In the long-term, those who are approached by the selfish networker might feel taken advantage of by that individual. A relationship was not formed; instead, pleasantries were exchanged as a way of getting some need met. Should this networker contact the person at a later date, there's a possibility that the person will be less willing to help.

There are several possible variations for this exercise, depending on the size of class and mode of interaction (traditional or distance). We've

successfully run this exercise with 20 to 30 students. In a class of 40 or more, we'd suggest breaking the class into two rooms and running the same set of 20 roles in each room. One benefit of this variation is that the two students who play the same role (in a different room) can compare notes as to strategies which were more or less successful. In a class of fewer than 15 students, the time required to network will be shorter and students can be encouraged to spend a bit more time getting to know others at the event, because you never know when a need will arise. For an online class, the role assignments can be sent by e-mail to individual students, who would then have a fixed period of time within which to electronically locate what and who they need by sending targeted e-mails to individual classmates as opposed to blanket e-mails to the class.

This exercise can then be followed by an overview of an established public networking program (such as MentorNet—which links women students in science and technology with those employed in the field) and encouragement to join one of several commercially available networking services, such as LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com; a free online service that allows you to list all pertinent information and invite others to link to your network) or Business Networking International (www.bni.com; an organization with local chapters that if accepted and a joining fee is paid, helps businesses connect with other businesses via online or traditional referrals). Instructors might require students to upload their profile into LinkedIn, because it is free and rapidly growing in popularity. Finally, for a class of soon-to-be graduating students, another variation is to rewrite the role cards to be more realistic in terms of the types of jobs and employees sought, or to provide time for students to exchange real information in an effort to locate opportunities and contacts among classmates.

To debrief, the instructor may ask questions about the outcome (e.g., did you find who/what you were looking for?), process (e.g., what skills helped you find who you were looking for?), lessons learned (e.g., how important was being assertive or making eye contact?), and general affect (how did it feel when you . . . ?). From these feedback sessions, we've learned that students realize that networking isn't as easy as it looks (i.e., more than just passing out business cards); and that it requires great concentration and sincere effort (e.g., remembering names and opportunities to help self and others). They have fun and gain valuable experience with an exercise that provides a fairly realistic yet comfortable opportunity to practice their skills at networking.

Exercise 4: Networking Quiz

This quiz (included in Appendix 3) has been used with graduate students and working professionals to help examine (a) how much they are networking and (b) where they are currently focusing their networking efforts. Based on their career goals, students can examine whether their networking efforts are targeted appropriately. For instance, students might realize that they need to focus on developing relationships outside their organization by meeting individuals in their professions or communities. The number of checkmarks tends to vary widely in any given class, and students are often surprised when they realize the extent of the differences. Consistent with research findings on networking (Forret & Dougherty, 2001), our experience with this exercise has been that individuals in sales positions and those at higher levels in their organizations tend to have more checkmarks than others. Both types of positions require developing client relationships and reinforce this behavior through their reward systems.

To debrief this exercise, ask students how many checkmarks they have (there is a total of 21 checkmarks possible). Ask the students who have the most checkmarks how they became involved in networking, how their networking has benefited them, and how they make the time for networking. Students are frequently amazed at how much some individuals are networking. It can also be enlightening to hear from students who are newcomers to the area, and how they are going about starting their networking efforts (e.g., joining local business groups). For those students who have few checkmarks, ask them what prevents them from engaging in networking. Some students will report being introverted and admit staying away from activities in which they should probably participate. Many students will admit that they want to do more networking, but they find it hard to find the time to do so in light of work and family responsibilities. We do take this opportunity to emphasize how networking effectively can help individuals save time by working more efficiently and by providing individuals with new ideas, information, and resources. In other instances, this exercise serves as an eye-opener in that MBA students realize they have not been developing the necessary relationships in their profession or organization that will help their careers progress (and they may realize that some of their peers in the organization are networking and are receiving more opportunities for growth and advancement).

Next, the discussion can revolve around the importance of having "nonredundant contacts" in their social networks. Members of an individual's organization, profession, and community are less likely to know one another;

thus, individuals who network in these three domains are more likely to have access to a greater variety of expertise, information about job opportunities, resources, new ideas, and information. Explore career goals that students may have. For instance, if an individual is interested in pursuing a consulting career, it could be very beneficial to develop contacts in one's community and profession.

A discussion can then ensue on which groups, organizations, or clubs to join. Barton (2001) provides a number of ideas to determine if an organization is right for an individual. First, to gain full benefit of membership, one needs to actively participate in the group's activities. If you do not have a strong interest in the group, that will be difficult to accomplish. Second, as you evaluate the members of your network, think of whom should be in your network but isn't. Does the group you are considering joining include members you should know? Third, does the group have the potential to help you developmentally by giving you the opportunity to learn new information and skills? And fourth, are the dues affordable and the meeting times convenient? Attending meetings as a guest can be a useful way to help you make your decision.

Outcomes of The Exercises

The four exercises have been used, separately and collectively, in our classrooms with great success. Despite what may seem to be simple exercises, we've found that nearly all participants derive value from the experience, whether it's a first exposure or reminder of things already known. Participants with significant work experience often testify to the power of networking, offering up stories that demonstrate what their skills, or lack thereof, have produced. More inexperienced students are surprised to learn how critical and commonplace networking really is in general and how much information is transmitted through a seemingly benign handshake in particular. In groups with diverse backgrounds, such a finding becomes fodder for a discussion of cultural differences and sensitivity. Most are able to recall impressions formed from previous handshakes and find the exercise reinforces what they know about first impressions. The 30-second commercial and role playing exercises do an excellent job of clarifying just how critical networking is to a person at any career stage. Comments range from "I used to think it was unfair that people got special favors through who they knew . . . and now I realize how networking is good for not just them but their organizations as well," to "The

[commercial] helped me stand out among many candidates . . . later the recruiter told me that I was the only one who persuasively 'sold' myself," to "what [our professor] is telling us is true. I do recruiting for a living, and individuals who can tell us what they have to offer and what they want make our job a whole lot easier." About the networking quiz, students' comments include "thought provoking . . . it caused me to face an area in which I have failed to exert any of my energies," and "opened [my] eyes to the power of networking. Developing ties with individuals from all areas can be very beneficial in various ways." Some students in late career stages found the quiz "beneficial but depressing," because of their feeling of "beyond being helped in this realm."[8] Others realized that career change was not only possible but can be facilitated through networking—both for information and employment opportunities.

Truth be told, some students, particularly those with little or no work experience, pay cursory attention to the exercises and discussion that accompanies them. They think their skills or achievements will sell themselves, and that the perfect employer will knock on their door. It is these students who e-mail us after the class has ended with "now I understand . . ." realizations. Others share candid responses about how their discomfort in and fear of networking-related activities waned subsequent to participating in these activities. Using any or all of these activities, instructors can create a safe environment in which students will experience various aspects of networking (e.g., "it's not as scary as I thought it would be") and hone their skills through practice and feedback from peers and their instructor. Moreover, instructors who teach hybrid or online courses, or who have students that struggle with the idea of face-to-face networking, can choose to complement and augment this activity with one that takes place exclusively online. One such activity, online mentoring (see Whiting & de Janasz, 2004), requires students to initiate and build a mentor/protégé relationship with a business professional over the course of a semester using the Internet. In a recent study involving 228 undergraduate and graduate students who had participated in this activity, about 60% initiated relationships with mentors they didn't know previously, i.e., they used electronic means to meet and solicit help from a stranger (de Janasz & Godshalk, 2006). The help received (mentoring) led to increased skill efficacy with the networking aspect of mentoring, suggesting that non-face-to-face means to expand one's network has increasingly become a viable alternative and complement to traditional methods (de Janasz, 2006; de Janasz & Godshalk, 2006).

Discussion

Those who do not learn how to network will fall behind in today's competitive and global environment (Riddle, 1998). Luckily, these skills can be learned and applied in a variety of contexts. For those who are shy, networking can be achieved through means other than face-to-face, such as an e-mail or letter (Whiting & de Janasz, 2004). After confidence and competence increase, these approaches can be combined with more direct, face-to-face methods, such as meetings and conferences. Networking takes conscious effort. It is very much like exercising; if you do not continue to work at it, you will lose what you already gained. Relationships not only need to be built, but also need to be maintained to be effective.

Networking relationships are built on trust (Baker, 2000) which takes time to develop. Social capital is created when employees have the opportunity to participate in "real work" with one another that results in their cultivating trusting relationships (Cohen & Prusak, 2001). By cooperating with other individuals on projects (whether in one's organization, profession, or community), individuals can discover similarities in values and beliefs held by others that help them communicate more effectively. It is through more substantial interactions that trusting relationships form. For instance, attending meetings of a service organization can help an individual meet people, but it is through working with others on service projects that deeper relationships develop as individuals learn more about each other's values, attitudes, competencies, and aspirations. Collaborative relationships are characterized by knowledge of each person's expertise, a willingness to engage in problem solving, and trust (Cross, Parker, Prusak, & Borgatti, 2001). Informing students that the most effective networking relationships have this collaborative quality, so that individuals sincerely desire to help one another succeed, should help them gain a greater appreciation for the effort involved and the potential career opportunities that may arise. The experiential exercises and experiences we've discussed help students increase their understanding of the power of networking; more importantly, they provide a rich learning opportunity to help them discover networking's potential and their ability to harness such potential for personal and professional success.

Appendix 1
Sample Slide on Benefits of Networking

Networking can help:

- **Individuals seeking job or career changes**
- **Increase access to available resources and information within an organization**
- **Increase effectiveness in researching, creating new concepts or ideas or starting new projects**
- **Managers identify potential employees**
- **With locating providers of supplies and services**
- **Expand your business**

Appendix 2
Sample Roles for Exercise 3: Networking Simulation[9]

Direct, immediate reciprocity:

- You are a young but talented contractor. You are looking for a major project to launch your new business.
- You are a developer who has a major mall project in the works. You need a variety of people to help you out, including design work, construction, financing, etc.

Direct, future reciprocity:
- You are a hair stylist who is looking to take a vacation to a place you've never been, and would like to obtain comprehensive information on prices, places, and options.
- You are a travel agent who has "been around the block a few times." Your office badly needs a new paint job to spice up the visit for your worldly clients.

(continued)

Appendix 2 (continued)

Indirect, collective reciprocity:

- You are a potential candidate for Congress and are looking for financial support and inside contacts.
- You are a secretary for the governor's brother. You are about to be audited by the IRS and are in need of professional assistance to get your books in order.
- You are an accountant who is looking to adopt a new accounting-based computer program that would link with your current office software.
- You are a computer specialist who focuses on small businesses that would like to set up business-oriented computer programs.

Appendix 3
Networking Quiz (Exercise 4)[10]

Do you engage in the following behaviors? Please place a ✓ in the box if you routinely engage in the listed activity. How often do you…

Networking in Your Organization

- ☐ Ask to serve on new work projects or committee assignments?
- ☐ Volunteer for cross-functional task forces?
- ☐ Attend your organization's social functions?
- ☐ Participate in company-sponsored athletic activities?
- ☐ Ask your direct reports how you can facilitate their development?
- ☐ Meet your peers in the organization for lunch or coffee?
- ☐ Send thank-you notes or gifts to those who have helped you?

Networking in Your Profession

- ☐ Attend meetings or conferences of professional organizations?
- ☐ Serve on committees for your professional organization?
- ☐ Collaborate on projects with peers in your profession?
- ☐ Socialize with peers in your profession?
- ☐ Accept speaking engagements on your area of expertise?
- ☐ Write articles on your area of expertise for newspapers, trade publications, or newsletters?
- ☐ Send cards, newspaper clippings, or e-mail to keep in touch with members of your profession?

(continued)

Appendix 3 (continued)

Networking in Your Community

- ☐ Participate in local service groups (e.g., Rotary, Kiwanis)?
- ☐ Become involved in promoting a personal cause (e.g., increasing literacy, preventing breast cancer, helping the elderly)?
- ☐ Become involved in the arts, theater, symphony, or other quality-of-life events in the community?
- ☐ Participate in city governance through serving on boards, councils, or committees?
- ☐ Meet members of your religious organization?
- ☐ Welcome newcomers into your community?
- ☐ Meet others in your community who share your interest in a hobby or athletic activity?

How much are you networking? Total number of ✓ = _____.

Where are you focusing your networking efforts? Number of ✓ for organization = _____, profession = _____, community = _____.

Where should you be focusing your networking efforts?

Notes

1. We thank one of the reviewers for pointing this out.

2. Ideally, the commercial is 30 ± 5 seconds. By letting students know that I'll be calling out the time at the intervals noted, students become aware of what they've covered by when as well as whether their commercial is too long or too short. This information, along with their partner's feedback, helps direct their revision efforts. Alternatively, an alarm could be set to ring at exactly 30 seconds.

3. In our classes, effective feedback is a skill that is typically covered before networking, and we take a few moments to remind students how to do so effectively, e.g., start with the positives, be specific, address the behavior and not the person. We recommend that students are instructed or reminded how to give feedback prior to implementing this exercise; most organizational behavior and skills textbooks contain this information.

4. Debrief questions taken from de Janasz, Dowd, and Schneider (2006), p. 303.

5. From de Janasz and Davis (2000); also appears in de Janasz, Dowd, & Schneider (2006), p. 304.

6. We use this term as analogous to the practice of speed dating, where individuals have just a few minutes to meet a person and engage in a targeted conversation before moving on to multiple successive first meetings with others in an effort to quickly find who/what they're looking for.

7. The various role assignments collectively cover three possible outcomes: (1) "I help/need you, you help/need me" (direct, immediate reciprocity), (2) "I help you now, you help me later" (direct, future reciprocity), and (3) "I can't help you directly, but I know someone who knows someone who can possibly help you" (indirect, collective reciprocity).

8. This student was referring to a realization of the many opportunities missed because of the inattention to networking over his extended career. Based on where he saw himself—in the twilight of his career—his comments reflected a feeling that the window of using networking was nearly closed.

9. At least 30 roles have been developed and are available from the first author.

10. The networking quiz is adapted from Forret and Sullivan (2002).

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