

# THE VALUE OF CONNECTING AND NETWORKING

By Jill Cascarano

We often hear how important it is to make connections and network. Typically, we build many different relationships throughout our daily lives. We're always interacting with people both online and offline. Sometimes our very busy lives unconsciously trigger us to operate on autopilot instead of making the most of our professional and personal contacts.

## Get Out There

It might not be until you embark on a new career path that you truly understand the importance of effectively connecting and networking. This includes reaching out to your contacts, having informational calls with the appropriate people, and getting introduced to those who can offer advice and open some doors for you. It becomes crucial to consistently put your BEST self out there. This takes organization, confidence, and sustained effort. Your determination can generate many professional opportunities. Each one becomes a building block leading to more success, as well as some vibrant and inspiring new friendships.

## Create Meaningful Opportunity

When thinking about your connections and networks, you may want to consider the following:

- Are you making quality connections based on your personal and professional values, interests, and goals?
- Are you building and modifying your network to create opportunity, success, and inspiration for yourself?
- When looking for a new job or changing careers, do you have the contacts to help you make some inroads?
- Do you reciprocate by making introductions for people and allowing others to reach out to you?

## Schedule Time to Evaluate

Actively take an inventory of your network. You never know when your circumstances will unexpectedly change or when you'll make choices to alter your path. You may be seeking new hobbies, looking for a new job, switching careers, starting a business, or searching for groups of people who share your interests. Just like you would do for a meeting, regularly schedule inventory time. Make it manageable, and stick to it.

## Reinforce Your Network

Check out the tips below for strengthening your network:

- Tap into your strongest connections. They will logically and trustingly lead to new, relevant contacts that will build a stronger network. Use your existing contacts to add people and reconnect with those who exemplify where you are today or where you want to be tomorrow. Start by engaging the people in your trusted inner circle to help you fill in the gaps within your network.
- Include people in your network who reflect the types of jobs, industries, and areas of interest to you. If you're changing careers, join professional organizations, associations, and groups that embody your preferred career path. Attending conferences, speaking with the right people, and researching companies in your desired field can help prepare you for future work.
- LinkedIn is an online social network designed for business professionals. This website can be very useful, especially when changing jobs or careers. Begin by making connections and then build deeper layers of associations. This can lead to email introductions, informational phone calls, interviews, and jobs. There are many great online resources. Find the ones that work best for you.

• Make the process of connecting a priority and a habit so it becomes part of your lifestyle. Connecting is just as vital as exercising. It makes you feel alive and more confident. Find out how your contacts are doing in their lives. Ask what steps they are taking for success. Offer your help when possible. Keep connecting, and networking will become easier to manage.

• Try to avoid the impulse to meet and connect with as many random new people as possible. Remember, the key is quality rather than quantity. You may want to reevaluate those contacts that don't align with your values, goals, and interests. Never burn bridges, but don't treat them as priorities.

## Keep Up with Strong Contacts

List the people who are crucial to your network—people you know who can and have been very important to you. Invariably, there will be some you have lost touch with over the years. Reconnect with them and schedule a phone call. You don't need a reason to get in touch, but it helps to have a clear intention. You'll feel good reconnecting, and it could provide you with an insight or two.

## Prioritize Remaining Connections

Keep a running list of people you want to reconnect with based on your priorities. People whose view of the world you value. Think of those you'd like to get better acquainted with or whose company you admire and want to know more about. Prioritize these contacts, and schedule time into your routine so you can make your way down the list.

## It Works Both Ways

Successful networking is a two-way

street. Your ultimate goal is to cultivate mutually beneficial relationships. That means giving as well as receiving. Send an email to see how someone is doing, forward an article to a contact that may be of interest to her, send key contacts a quick update on you, and always thank those who provided help. Conversely, if you're asked to speak to someone, definitely say YES. Listening to that person's goals and interests, answering their questions, offering advice, and providing one or two relevant connections for them can make a huge difference – for both of you.

*Written by Jill Cascarano. Jill has always had a passion for both writing and well-being. She has an extensive professional background developing and implementing employer health and wellness programs and writing employee health communications. She possesses an M.A. in Human Resources Management and a B.A. in Communications. She's currently a student in the Health Coach Training Program at the Institute for Integrative Nutrition. Jill can be reached at: JillCascarano16@comcast.net.*

