

Connect to the future

Are you job hunting desperately or networking intelligently?

IN THIS article, we look at the benefits of networking as a productive tool in pursuing career development opportunities.

Get results

Last week, I attended a business event. You know the sort of thing – you arrive a little late, take time to eat, chat to a few people, and then leave well before the end. It is what we call “networking”, right?

That evening, as I entered the room, I noticed a man – we’ll call him John – with a colourful bunch of folders under his arm. Being bright yellow, they caught my eye immediately, though it was his behaviour that really drew my interest.

While most people were standing around eating and talking, John quickly circulated. He would go up to a new group, chat for a moment or two, hand over folders, then move on.

My curiosity got the better of me. I approached one group to enquire of the content of those yellow folders. Each one contained his resumé.

I went over to him to chat, and discovered that his company had recently restructured, and he had lost his job. Thankfully for John, his firm was considerate enough to provide access to outplacement services, and he was utilising their

resources to the maximum.

John had a really positive outlook, and had already built a solid resumé by reflecting on his past career. He was putting himself out, demonstrating great courage by breaking the ice with many new contacts at the business event. These were all fantastic things to do.

However, his answer to my question, “Why are you doing this?” was insightful. He replied: “I am networking because I have just lost my job!”

Taking control of one’s life through action is an intensely positive decision, and a great choice for John. Yet, though his desperate search that evening might help him feel a little better, what were the chances it could help him achieve his objective – that of securing a new job?

“Less than you might imagine” is probably the most honest answer.

John deserves full credit for trying. However, he thought he was networking when in reality, he was only job hunting. So what’s the difference?

In my experience, job hunting is something that many of us do in despair. It forces us to spend our time today, to redress issues that occurred yesterday. In contrast, networking is an investment decision we choose to make today, to realise some desired returns tomorrow.

So, what else could John do to be more effective?

New possibilities

When seeking a new career position, all channels have merit, but

some channels are more equal than others. While a popular route for filling vacancies is through advertisements, research indicates that many job positions are secured through personal connections.

Emphasising this, in a 2006 Chartered Management Institute poll, well over 60 per cent of those polled rated networking as an important option when looking for career development opportunities.

When performed well, networking is an immensely productive channel, opening up many new possibilities. John was very wise to consider networking as one of his options. Who you know does count, but where in your network do the best opportunities arise?

Most of us imagine that the people we know well deliver the best opportunities. We believe that our closest friends and associates are the most likely to know about us – who we are, what we do and what we want. Moreover, we feel that those closest in our network are the ones who want us to succeed.

However, in Granovetter’s 1974 study “Getting a Job”, he counter-intuitively found that of all personal connections in your network, the strongest ones were often the least fruitful. In contrast, your occasional and rare contacts were more likely to realise the most value!

Close friends share the same world as we do, occupying a similar space, with similar opportunities to those that we already can envisage. In contrast, new possibilities abound

in the wider domain of occasional and rare connections.

Granovetter concluded that the “weak ties” in your network are often the most productive, as they occupy a brave new world that differs radically from your own.

However, this distant work of new possibilities often remains dormant, as people maintain a limited focus, restricting their network investments to activities involving only their close circle of friends.

Networking therefore can work powerfully in helping to locate new career opportunities. To be effective and make networking work for you, you need to think about how big your network is, who exactly is in it, and how you go about doing it.

Considering the quality of your network, as well as ways to network more effectively, are both aspects covered in Part II of this article tomorrow.

Article by Patrick O’Brien, managing director of The Amanuenses Network, which delivers soft-skills training solutions that focus on personal effectiveness and team productivity. For more information, visit www.Amanuenses.Net

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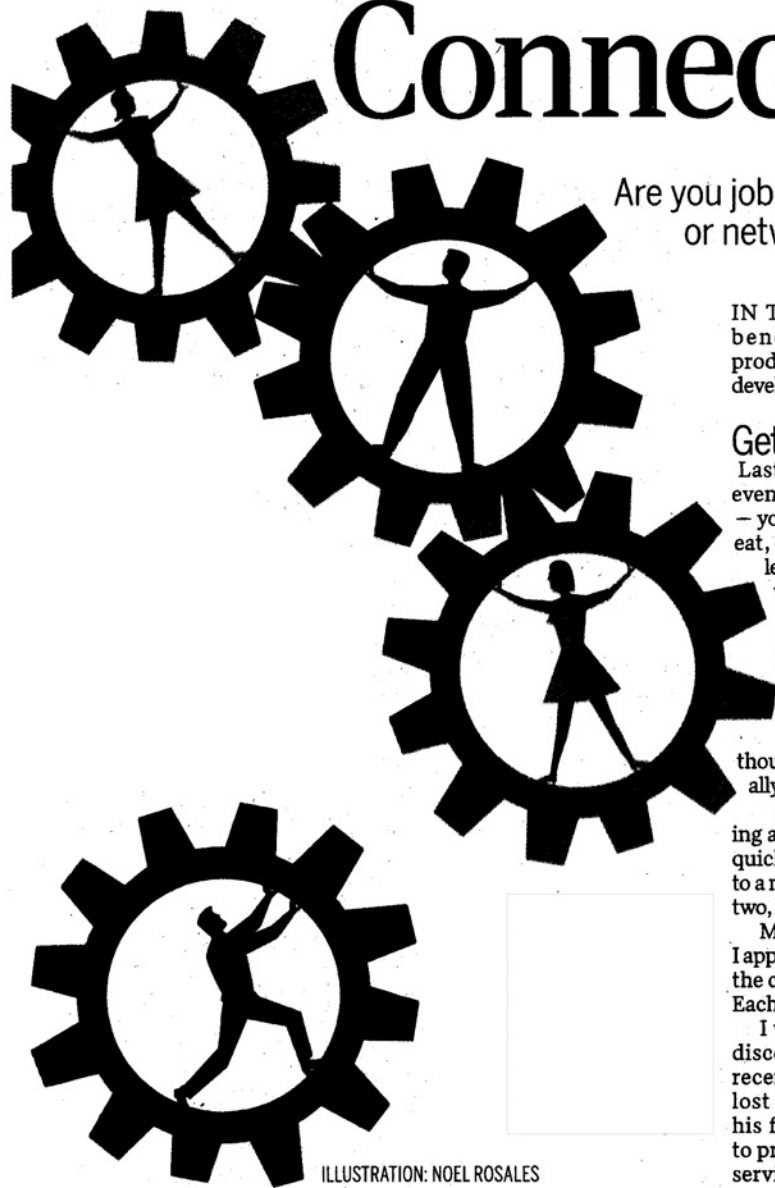


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