

Networking Smarter: What's Your NQ?

by Jim Bolt

Today's highly networked business world provides rich rewards for networking maestros -- those people among us who are skilled at developing varied and effective networks. But there hasn't existed an effective measure for how good or bad you are at networking, in order to know how to improve. Until now.

First, some background. In a groundbreaking study more than 20 years ago, the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) claimed that 70% of a leader's development was derived via on-the-job experience, 20% through relationships, and 10% by structured education programs. So much has changed in the last 20 years that would call for a reexamination of these findings in today's business environment, especially regarding the payoff potential of personal relationships.

Two primary shifts are noteworthy:

1. The pace of change is so much faster today than it was two decades ago that the 70%, 20% and 10% distribution may not be accurate, and worse yet, might be misleading since these findings are often used as guidelines for developing leaders. Given the dramatic bench strength challenges confronting most organizations (as discussed in my earlier columns), we need accelerated development for leaders. Few people can afford to wait the length of time that on-the-job experience requires -- estimated at 20 years or more.
2. With the Internet, we are far more connected than we were 20 years ago, opening new channels for personal and professional development via peer networks.

In order to accelerate your personal and professional effectiveness, the "relationships" component of the CCL equation must become a much bigger part of your development. That means you need to leverage your networks more than ever before. In fact, a recent *MIT/Sloan Management Review* article titled "The Social Side of Performance" supports my contention by adding a finer point to the issue: "What really distinguishes high performers from the rest of the pack is their ability to maintain and leverage personal networks. The most effective create and tap large, diversified networks that are rich in experience and span all organizational boundaries."

An important measure of your ability to develop strong networks -- your Networking Quotient (NQ) -- is central to this argument and crucial in developing effective personal networks. Which begs an important question: Can we create a way to measure your NQ just like IQ measures your intelligence quotient? I think we can; what's more, I'd argue you *must* in order to chart a roadmap for developing more effective networks for competing in today's business environment.

Let's break down the general topic of networking into two key components. First, think about your networking universe, which consists of three primary types of networks: a

Life Network, a Social Network, and a Work Network. Each one of these plays a role in determining your NQ. Your Life Network is made up of your family, extended family, your school friends and contacts, all your lifelong friends, etc. Your Social Network is made up of your active friends (people you see at least once a month), people from your place of worship, fellow club members, neighbors, contacts in online communities, etc. Your Work Network includes contacts from previous jobs, colleagues from other firms, contacts in your current organization, mentors/coaches, etc.

Second, before you begin to calculate your NQ, think about three important factors: 1) the number of people in your various networks; 2) the depth of your relationships with those people; and 3) how often you interact with them. Quantity matters (i.e., the more people in your networks the better), but quality is just as important (is the person in your network an *acquaintance* -- they know who you are and will probably return a call; a *personal contact* -- they'll do you a favor if asked; or a *close friend* -- someone you can always count on when the chips are down).

So how can you quickly assess your NQ? Honestly answer the following questions on a scale of 0-4:

1. How many total people are in your Life, Social and Work networks? 0=none, 1=less than 50, 2=51-100, 3=101-200, 4=more than 200
2. What's the overall quality of your network contacts?
0=Terrible, 1=Poor, 2=Good, 3=Very Good, 4=Excellent
3. To what extent do you actively work on building your network relationships?
0=no extent, 1=little extent, 2=some extent, 3=great extent, 4=very great extent
4. What is the strength of your relationships with your network members?
0=very weak, 1=weak, 2=in between weak and strong, 3=strong, 4=very strong
5. How actively do you recruit new members to your network?
0=do nothing, 1=hardly at all, 2=sometimes, 3=often, 4=all the time
6. To what extent is the relationship with your network members reciprocal (that is, you've helped them as much as they've helped you)?
0=not at all, 1=hardly at all, 2=sometimes, 3=often, 4=all the time
7. To what extent do you leverage the Internet to build and maintain your networks?
0=not at all, 1=hardly at all, 2=sometimes, 3=often, 4=all the time

Multiply your total score by 10. You'll end up with a score between 0 and 280. If your score is from 0-70 your NQ is terrible, from 71-140 your NQ needs improvement, from 141-210 your NQ is good, and from 211 to 280 your NQ is excellent.

So how did you do? Are you a networking neophyte or a world-class contender? Does this self-assessment point to some areas you might want to work on to improve your NQ? No matter how you scored, you can always get better.

Tim Sanders, Chief Solutions Officer at Yahoo once said, "All of your knowledge won't amount to much if you don't have a network of people to share it with and enough

compassion for the people in that network to understand that your success is a direct result of their success."

I couldn't have said it better myself. Happy networking!



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MIT Sloan Mgt Article

What separates high-performing knowledge workers from their more-average peers? Superior ability is part of the answer, as is superior expertise. But according to the authors, what really distinguishes high performers from the rest of the pack is their ability to maintain and leverage personal networks. The most effective knowledge workers create and tap large, diversified networks that are rich in experience and span all organizational boundaries.

Contrary to the popular image of the networker, the authors say, the building and use of such networks is rarely motivated by explicit political or career-driven motives. In addition, they posit that high performers are much more than "social butterflies," who tend to have numerous relationships that don't scratch below the surface. Effective knowledge workers focus on building deeper relationships that will be mutually beneficial over time. The authors discuss the three tactics used by high performers to build and maintain their networks. Ideally, they say, organizations should use tools and readily available human-resources practices to hire people who are likely to develop large, widespread networks. Once on board, people should be encouraged through incentives to maintain their networks. Such

important work — and it is work, even if isn't usually visible — shouldn't be left strictly to chance.

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