Human beings live in extremely complex and interdependent societies where people form groups for mutual aid, emotional and financial support. As social beings, with cooperation strategies forming the basis of our institutions, networks, societies and economies, it is rare that we find individuals who choose to live as hermits, in isolation from the rest of the world. We are no different in this regard from other mammals, whether it is seals coming together in herds or colonies, lions assembling in groups called prides, or, gorillas congregating in bands or troops. As human beings, however, we have the ability to dwell in the present, remember the past, and, plan for the future. Our use of language, storytelling and human bonding mechanisms, sets us apart from many species.

Intrinsic to our survival is the notion that, by helping others in networks, we are also helping ourselves and securing our future. The workplace benefits from cooperative strategies and leaders who serve as boundary-spanners, building shared bonds among people in the organization. Management is ultimately a team sport where leaders create a safe and supportive environment for employees by building harmonious team relationships and dynamic networks.

Many women have watched in admiration as a colleague they know navigates networks successfully to obtain promotion opportunities, moral support, expertise and knowledge, access to power, status, identity, and resources. So, as a leader, you should be examining your relationship map, identifying all of the different affiliations you have in various circles, and, the various communities of people to which you belong. When you do this, you soon see that you have one type of person or role either over-represented or under-represented. You may, in fact, need to diversify your networks in order to connect with people who are not like you, who have different expertise or networks than you do, so that you can achieve your career or business objectives. There is also a kind of reciprocity that arises in networks where people give and take as they connect and help others, when asked to do so. Women often feel rewarded when they achieve their work operating together in teams and across networks, fostering collaboration and trust through meaningful relationships.

As the BBC journalist Chana Schoenberger notes, “Experts have long believed that men and women network differently, which can have an impact on their career progression...women’s tighter networks are built for personal support but they often lack the wide reach of men’s networks...That insularity can stop women from extending their reach outside the people they already know and also reduces the number of people who can attest to the quality of a woman’s work performance. That presents problems for women who want to expand their profile beyond their current job or company.” Sallie Krawcheck, the CEO of Ellevate, observes that since business opportunities are more likely to come from a loose
connection than a tight connection, it is important for women to set aside time to meet new people and to **raise their heads up** from their daily work to take advantage of formal and informal networks where they can learn from others. The Executive Director of the Forté Foundation comments: “Oftentimes, women are very focused on succeeding in their current job and getting their job done well, but they may not think about who’s going to open doors for me to that next opportunity.”

When women avoid networking because they find it either **uncomfortable or artificial**, they need to remember that building solid relationships, or even weak ties, in an authentic way means investing conscious efforts in both relationships and key networks. This also involves engaging mentors, coaches and sponsors. It is important to distinguish between the roles played by these individuals. **Mentors** are role models who can show you how something is done in a particular environment or sector, so that you learn from their experience and connections. **Coaches** can be invaluable in helping you to work on your strengths and weaknesses, as you seek advancement and professional and personal growth. **Sponsors** are senior executives who can speak about your talents and experience, who **advocate on your behalf** so that you secure promotions and other opportunities. They are powerfully positioned **champions** who throw their power and reputation behind you. **Networks** keep you connected to new knowledge, information, and, mutual support.

Marilyn Nagel, the Co-Founder of NQuotient, helps female leaders **leverage the power of influential networks**. She cautions that many women think their work speaks for itself and that they will rise up through the ranks based on merit, even though they acknowledge that colleagues with better networks and connections advance more rapidly. She suggests that women think of their network as “a **Personal Board of Directors**, or some call it a Kitchen Cabinet.” She recommends identifying between 12 and 18 people who can help you advance and that, as part of this ‘board,’ you have at least **2-3 powerful advocates** or sponsors in this group. If you don’t have these sponsors, she proposes going out and finding them.

Not surprisingly, many highly successful women point to **sponsors** as being critical to their success. **Angela Merkel**, German stateswoman and the Chancellor of Germany, notes that her rise would not have been possible without the support of her predecessor Helmut Kohl. **Oprah Winfrey** noted in an interview with Barbara Walters: “Had there not been you, there never would have been me.” (Orji) An INSEAD **study** conducted by Lily Fang, in 2012, confirmed that women officers and managers who forged a connection with a female executive outperformed those women without such a connection. A Catalyst report confirmed that **73% of women who develop the next generation of talent focus on developing women**. **Judith Rodin**, the President of the Rockefeller Foundation, observes that women “must ‘reach out’ and embrace the power of networks, both professional and personal, in their chosen field and outside of it. Men have done this for centuries.”
2. Assignment

A number of questions follow. You are asked to respond to each of these questions, as you map your networks and relationships. Jane Newton, Partner and Wealth Advisor at Regent Atlantic Capital, says: “a woman’s ability to succeed in business hinges on three main things – relationships, relationships, relationships.” Assess the need to grow your relationships and networks.

a) Are you a networker?
b) Who are you connected to through your networks?
c) Are your networks sufficiently diverse to allow you to open doors to new opportunities?
d) Do your networks share information freely and lend you support to overcome challenges?
e) How has your career benefited from these connections and relationships?
f) Can you identify someone in your organization who is an effective networker?
g) What makes them effective?
h) Are women’s networks different than men’s networks?
i) How can your various networks support your objectives and priorities?
j) Are there key individuals or sponsors who are necessary for your success? Are they in your network? If not, how can you build rapport with these powerful people?
k) Can you identify 5 specific actions you will take in the next 6 months to strengthen your network? Have you asked to meet someone over coffee to share their life lessons?
l) How might an influential sponsor, mentor, coach or network help you?
m) Who are the men in leadership roles, as well as the women, who serve as mentors and sponsors for you and who open doors for you?
n) Who can you support or promote, serving as a mentor or as a sponsor for someone else?
o) Do you always follow-up with people whom you meet and with whom you forged a connection to thank them and continue the conversation? Follow-up is vitally important.

3. Video Descriptions and Instructions

The first video you will view is one co-hosted by the Clayman Institute at Stanford University and by INSEAD’s Business School. It is entitled, “Building Effective Networks.” Dr. Herminia Ibarra, Professor of Organizational Behaviour, INSEAD, discusses the importance of expanding your networks beyond what she calls your “convenience networks” of “people just like you.” Instead, she advocates engaging in networks that take you outside of your comfort zone where the “weak ties” you make when you connect to diverse leaders help you to achieve and sustain extraordinary outcomes as you explore new horizons. She explores operational, personal and strategic networks that can be employed to build relationships, generate new ideas and opportunities, and, enable you to have greater impact in your professional life. The video is 15 minutes in length. You will find the link here: https://womensleadership.stanford.edu/networks

The second video that you will view was filmed by C-Span for a conference of women entrepreneurs and leaders that occurred in Washington, D.C., December 4, 2013. In this 21 minute video, four panelists are interviewed about the practical applications of networking, as
part of ensuring leadership success. The video is entitled, "Women and Networking." One of the lessons offered is how to ask questions of other leaders in various settings to determine what they consider important. In turn, once you know the answers to these initial questions, you can provide explicit information about what you might wish to obtain from them, whether it is a letter of support or an introduction to a powerful leader in their network. Showing up and connecting with people, even when you feel uncomfortable doing so, and, making explicit requests so that you make it easy for others to help you, are two of the lessons imparted by the panelists. Bringing an attitude of curiosity, exchanging business cards and following up with people, or volunteering to help others, are all part of the work of building networks and becoming visible or ‘top of mind’ to others. The link to the second video can be found here: [https://www.c-span.org/video/?316619-5/women-networking](https://www.c-span.org/video/?316619-5/women-networking)

4. Follow-Up Activities and Application

After viewing these videos, reflect upon the following questions:

a) Do you often decline to attend external events, after business hours, seeing that as simply another time-consuming commitment?

b) Before you attend an event, do you think about your desired objective and craft a short "elevator pitch" about what you do and what you are seeking as part of your introduction when you meet someone for the first time? The more specific you are, the more likely you are to secure the support that you require.

c) Do you ask others “What brings you to the event?” in order to assess possible common interests or connections?

d) Do you express an explicit request, such as: “I am interested in serving on boards, would you have any advice for me?”

e) Do you ask people whom you meet to connect you with someone who can advance your objectives? Even when you do not know that person well or are meeting them for the first time?

f) Are you a member of social networks that allow you to continue the conversation and to magnify your message after you have met someone? Are you reaching out via LinkedIn? Facebook? Twitter?

h) Do you write the names of people you meet and a few key words about them on the back of the business card they hand you so that you can associate these notes with their name and face in subsequent interactions?

h) Have you tapped into female networks as a renewable source of power? (See Fonda, Tomlin video in resources section)

i) Have you identified organizations or networks you wish to join or events you wish to attend?

j) Have you asked powerful men or women to serve as your sponsor?

Mastering these abilities will become second nature over time, as was the case for the panelists featured in the second video, some of whom initially felt uncomfortable when their business priorities required them to engage in networking activities. Are you ready to step outside of your comfort zone?
5. **Expert Knowledge**

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6. **Key Words**

Key words include: collaboration strategies; boundary spanners; diverse networks; relationship maps; mentors; coaches; sponsors; champions; advocates; relationship management; weak ties; elevator pitch; explicit requests; comfort zone; reaching out.

7. **Additional Resources and Readings**


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