

## CLIMB THE CORPORATE LADDER ONE RELATIONSHIP AT A TIME

BY JULIA PALMER

CCA's recent survey regarding members' workplace experiences generated many strong responses, predominantly that people with a chronic illness can – and deserve to – climb the corporate ladder. Many respondents also told of having to change career paths due to their illness.

Whatever the situation, business relationship specialist and BConsulted founder Julia Palmer believes everyone can improve their job satisfaction by adopting valuable three strategies.

NEVER before has it been more pertinent to develop a strategic network aligned to your career and professional goals.

If you are a graduate, recently retrenched, going through organisational changes such as a merger, or you want to proactively manage your career, then creating and managing a viable professional network should be high on your list of priorities right now.

There is substantial proof that your network will contribute to and assist in mapping a positive footprint throughout your career, so it's best to get involved early and often.

Research conducted by BConsulted revealed that 75 per cent of people say that their existing network does not support the results that they need. If this may be you, it's vital to take charge now.

People network for a variety of reasons and there are networks for just about anything these days. The following three key factors will influence your success, help raise your visibility and ensure you create a powerful professional network.

### PARTICIPATE

In the modern age we have online and face-to-face networking opportunities that we can access on a daily basis, and the emphasis is on utilising them! Gone are the days where we are just appraised for the role we currently do.

Companies now measure the ability to network as a key driver for success, and in fact, research at institutions such as Harvard and

MIT has consistently shown that employees' personal networks are in many cases the single biggest factor impacting their productivity and ability to contribute to the company.

Online forums are a great way to bounce ideas on professional issues with others globally, but note that these are usually more generic in nature. It's important to get involved by asking questions and adding comments to other peoples' questions too. Be proactive and allocate some time every day or week to invest in raising your online profile.

Face-to-face on the other hand is a lot more personalised, but don't spend the entire event with people you already know! It's not called net-sit, net-eat or net-drink, it's called net-work, so ensure you meet new people and initiate a structured, memorable conversation with each. Whatever you do, don't start with the question, "what do you do?". It alienates people and makes them feel judged. The start of the business relationship is about establishing rapport and trust, and you will have time to qualify once you know if you like each other first. Face-to-face networking is daunting to most, but just remember that everyone was a stranger to us at some stage. Know that you have something valuable to contribute and look for the good in people.



### THINK STRATEGICALLY

Research by BConsulted has found that job titles, ranging from director to assistant, have strong relationships with their immediate team, but this recognition drops significantly for relationships with other departments, and plummets for professional networks.

It certainly helps to map the key categories within your networks so you are clear on what your activity levels will be to support the acquisition and/or maintenance of the relevant business relationships. While some networks are geared only to certain job titles, there are plenty of industry and business-based networks that draw a range of people due to the topic or theme of each event. Sign up to the newsletters of such networks to be kept abreast of invitations and current affairs, and ensure you show initiative by attending the events that are aligned to your organisation.

Anyone with their eye on climbing the corporate ladder should develop a personalised, strategy-based networking plan

to complement them. As with any skill, networking takes time and practice to get better at, so stop beating yourself up. If you are at the beginning of your career, get excited at the fact that you can leverage your networks throughout it if you start now. Remember that it's too late to build a relationship when you need it most, so invest in long term mutually beneficial connections.


### BE VISIBLE

Networking internally and externally is about raising your profile and staying top-of-mind within your networks. Think about creative ideas that you can implement to generate opportunities for you and your network. Remember that while making new contacts is always beneficial, ensure you are staying top-of-mind within your existing business relationships too.

The ability to leverage two-way business relationships is essential to most front-line, support and management staff, and yet unfortunately, people tend to hide behind their desks when times are tough.

Working closely with clients recently, we have experimented with many ways to help raise visibility. The following are a few examples with the hope of providing you with some ideas to try for yourself:

- Write proposals and emails from a highly visible café in the CBD
- Leave enough time to walk between city meetings, pay the extra for business-class travel
- Bring your lunch and eat it in common areas at work. Now is the time to show your face as you never know who you will bump into!

Implement the three key factors and know that reciprocity breeds reciprocity. The most successful business professionals have established supportive networks both internally and externally to help them achieve their goals, raise their visibility and give back to their professions. 

*Julia Palmer is the managing director of BConsulted and author of BUZZ – Inspiration to attract, leverage retain profitable business relationships.*

*BConsulted provides training, mentoring and resources in business networking and relationship management. Details: [www.bconsulted.com.au](http://www.bconsulted.com.au) or 1300 785 815.*

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