Social Skills and Networking

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> *"The single greatest "people skill" is a highly developed & authentic interest in the *other* person."*
> *– Bob Burg*

Networking is a large topic in professional business interests. Professionals use the people they know to get jobs, get sales, access potential job candidates, and receive introductions to knew people. Networking is widely thought of as only relating to professionals, but a network is simply the streaming of relationships.

Networking is the building of those relationships and the maintenance of them (Östlund 2016). With that definition, everyone networks. Relationships are foundational for leaders. They can't do nearly as much without working with a team. If the leader could leverage their network to help with projects, they could increase the output and effectiveness of their efforts.

College students also utilize networks. These are more informal, like a friend group. Except networks don't stop with one group, they are interwoven, and you are the center. You might introduce a friend to another friend, and they start hanging out. You might bring a friend to a club meeting, and they become an active member.

Swift Kick HQ, a leadership development company, developed "Dance Floor Theory," a fantastic way to explain the college leader's role within networks (Krieglstein & Ruiz). Imagine you are attending a dance party. Looking around, you can see people in the middle of the floor dancing and interacting with each other. On the outside of the dancefloor, you see the wallflowers. The middle of the dance floor are engaged people having fun, and as you walk out to the farthest point, people become less engaged. Not only are they less engaged, but they aren't having as much fun as the people in the dancing in the middle.
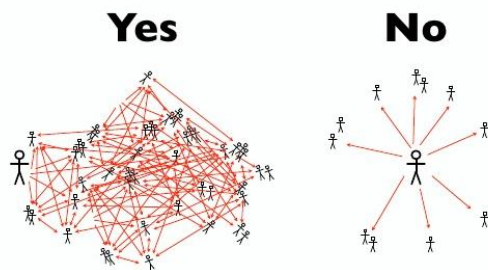
Swift Kick says college campuses are like dancefloors. The leaders are the ones engaging with activities and talking to everyone. The leaders then use their influence to bring others to the middle of the dance floor, just like helping people get involved on their college campus. Involvement doesn't just mean joining clubs and going to events. It also means participating in the community. Dance Floor Theory provides "a new model for creating community and increasing student engagement."

Coincidentally, the person bringing other people into the party simultaneously create the most extensive networks. The most significant part of creating a community is the ability to merge existing ones.

There are many ways to foster communities, meet new friends, and create social prosperity. The rest of this book consists of networking skills, tactics, and fundamental social skills.

HOT TIP

If you don't know how to say hi aka break the ice, the best thing to say is to simply "Hi" (gasp)

Really! If you don't know what to say, just say the most popular conversation starter since the dawn of time.

Social Fitness

Talent and skill are different. People with talents are born with the genetic makeup that maximize a specific outcome. For example, tall people have a statistically better chance of playing in the NBA. A skill is learned. People learn how to draw, they learn how to cook, and they learn how to be social.

Just like any skill, they are learned with practice. Social skills consist of theory and social fitness. Social skill theory such as the psychology of attraction and the psychology of social anxiety is useful information to brush up on. But, no amount of theory will improve your skill of being social.

Like lifting weights, you have to put in the reps of socialness. With weightlifting, the more reps, the stronger you become. The more you practice socialness, the more skillful you become.

If you were to take anything from this book about social skills, know that the foundation is the implementation. Put in the reps and become socially fit.

Comfort Zone Challenges

Think about a time you were interacting with someone you were very comfortable with. It could be a friend, a significant other, or a family member. When you speak to them, talking came easy. The conversations are interesting, saying hi to them is second nature, and if you don't have anything to say with each other, both of you are fine with silence. With them, you have excellent social skills.

Most people fail in a social environment not because of the lack of ability, but because of the lack of confidence. Conversations come easy with people who are comfortable with each other.

But, in a new environment, self-doubt clouds their thoughts. They can't think of anything to say, or they don't know how to say hi.

Comfort zone challenges force people to expand their confidence by challenging their everyday interactions. Ask a barista for 10% off a coffee just because it is scary to do. High five 5 strangers on your way to class is also is scary. These are tasks that are out of the ordinary and just a little bit out of your comfort zone. Doing these regularly will get you comfortable with new social situations and increase your confidence

Comfort Zone Challenges
Say "H," and wave at people you walk by. Don't stay to talk, just keep on walking
Go up to a stranger and admit an insecurity
Compliment a stranger and ask for one back
Lay down in the middle of a crowded area
Call random stores and tell them a joke
High five 5 strangers

Conversational starters

The best ice breaker is always just saying "Hi."

- o In a party setting – "Hey, I don't think I've met you yet. My name is…"
- o Comment on something they are wearing – "I like that hat. I might have to get myself one. Where did you get it?
- o Some playful ice breakers are…
    - o To someone sitting down – "Hey! That's my chair!"
    - o "Hey, you look slightly interesting. What's your name?"
    - o "I don't have anything to say, but I had to come over here anyway."
    - o "Can you hold this for a sec?" Give them a ball and get them to throw it to you.

Breaking the ice doesn't have to be complicated. There is no golden line that makes everyone love you. Most of these examples are out of the ordinary, yet they all work. Of course, there is a place and a time for goofy lines. Don't get someone to throw a ball with you while you are waiting for class to start. They are out of the ordinary to illustrate that a conversation doesn't have to start in one specific way. Anything can get it going, and you don't have to stick with the status quo.

There are endless possibilities when it comes to breaking the ice. Just pick one and go with it. If you can't think of one, the best default is to just say "Hi."

Rekindling lost connections

Throughout a lifetime, the amount of people you can meet has no limit. It is highly unlikely that you stay in contact with everyone you have ever met. Most people have small groups of relationships they keep a constant connection with.

Relationships live and die. Think of people you knew in high school. Some you might still talk with, but most of them probably haven't heard from you in a long time. Revisit the definition of networks for a second. They are streams of relationships. Some relationships are solid, such as best friends and some are weak, such as the cashier you always say "Hi" to at Starbucks. Every single relationship has a place in networking. Every person has something or can do something for another. The more people you stay in contact with aka maintain your network, the more opportunities will open up.

Imagine Greg is applying to internships for mechanical engineering in the industry of agriculture. That is a small industry, and Greg has no idea where to start looking for openings. Two years ago, he met someone who just got hired into the same industry. Unfortunately, Greg lost contact with that person a while ago. This person had little connection with Greg other than the first conversation they had and two or so emails.

Greg would be able to find out more about internships if he stayed in contact with that person. Most people wouldn't think of contacting someone they met two years ago who they had minimal interaction. But, that's not out of the ordinary. A connection is a connection no matter how small. One conversation two years ago is enough for someone to be in your network. If you maintain those relationships, over time, they will start to bloom.

A simple way to fire up an old connection would be to shoot them a quick text or an email. Acknowledge you haven't talked for a while and ask them how they are doing (Harbinger & Fulton 2019). If you want to go a step further, try setting up a coffee date to catch up or introduce them to someone that could help their career. You could just make that message a keyboard shortcut. Every time you want to reach out, type a message such as "Hey____" and it will instantly load. You won't have an excuse not stay connected.

Action Step
Spend a couple of minutes everyday to send 3 people that message. Start at the top of your contacts and move your way down.

Every person you have and will ever know has potential. They are all part of your network. Don't let that relationship dwindle away. Reach out and rekindle that flame. Meet new people and add them to your communities. Introduce people to one another and join those communities. You are in the middle of the dancefloor, so get people to dance. You are the leader, so create those communities.

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