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### **Connecting People**

Change is inevitable more so in the business world. Continuous learning fosters knowledge gain and enhances survival skills. While learning has been defined as “the cognitive process of acquiring skill or knowledge,” networking is seen as a medium that facilitates learning through group interactions. Employers and employees alike consider “networking” as an immensely valuable resource to gain and upgrade knowledge.

#### **What is networking?**

In simple terms, networking can be defined as, “Using contacts made in business for purposes beyond the reason for the initial contact.” Networking not only encourages social skills but also makes individuals more erudite and sharper. In short, networking fosters learning through interactions and introduction to a wide range of subjects.

In business jargon, it is fittingly put across as, “right opportunities of all kinds and at all levels”

Time and again factors like Intelligence Quotient (IQ) and Emotional Quotient (EQ) have been cited as springboards to gain competitive advantage. Today, Networking Quotient (NQ) is not far behind. NQ is the ‘degree to which one has developed highly effective personal networks.’ Being a part of an effective network is the answer to professional aloofness. People are enthused by valuable knowledge sharing.

#### **Types of networking**

Peer to peer networking is a highly effective networking tool. This works at all levels in an organization.

A run of the mill illustration is that of the apprentices. Apprentices observe their peers keenly. They learn faster and better from their more experienced peers. The core of peer-to-peer networking is sharing experiences and knowledge with similar people. This is by far easier owing to the high trust factor. Such collective understanding in a set of trusted peers enhances learning. The circumstances and problems are more or less similar and the collective experiences and wisdom provide a platform to think, learn and act. Listening to experiences of people involved in it is more valuable than hearing from the manager.

Networking forums address critical issues like best practices, latest technological breakthroughs and innovation. Participating in these forums automatically keeps both employers and employees abreast of the critical business components that improve performance. The logic is clear: While solving problems, learn from organizations with similar problems, their inventive strategies and processes and customize them to suit your business needs.

#### **Online business networking**

Online chats and discussions have revolutionized communication through the Internet. Online networking is the most convenient way to reach friends, associates, customers,



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employees, job candidates and employers. If one is looking for a job, the process is simple: post the résumé. However, the security factor could be a disadvantage. Misuse of valuable information can cause great damage to both employers and employees. Secure websites with stringent policies can help curb unfortunate incidents.

A set of social networking organizations, such as LinkedIn, Plaxo, and Friendster, aim at connecting people. These websites steer clear of information misuse. "The most popular activity on LinkedIn is to reconnect with old colleagues," says co-founder Konstantin Guericke. Eventually, the company plans to move into recruitment and business development.

### **Reality networking**

The benefits of networking are many ranging from career prospects to business expansion and business opportunities. The managements have also realised the pros of networking. An organisation that disregards learning by peer association does so at its own risk.

Dick Bruder, an employee at Procter & Gamble for thirty-five years, founded his company Cincinnati Consulting Consortium Ltd. in 1999. When he started looking out for prospective clients he singled out his fellow ex-employees at P&G. One among them was Robert S. Morrison, who was the chairman, president, and CEO of Quaker Oats Co. Morrison employed Bruder's consultancy firm in an information-technology project. The project was successful and brought the much needed momentum and funds to Cincinnati Consulting Consortium.

Subsequently, Bruder was instrumental in establishing P&G Alumni Network.

### **Networking works for all**

Keeping in touch is not limited to employees alone. Employers too reap many benefits. Rehiring, for instance, has been the biggest advantage of 'networking'. For one, the employer looks at cost savings while rehiring a former employee. A case-in-point is Microsoft. The in-house recruiters at Microsoft cover a unique facility to exclusively process ex-employees' applications.

Secondly, it has been noted that rehired employees display great enthusiasm and perform better. At Ernst & Young, twenty five percent of the recruits at the higher level have been the returning employees. The internal studies at E&Y reveal that such rehires continue longer and perform better in the second round.

Another noteworthy advantage of networking with ex- employees is enhancing referral business. For instance, when a top manager at Deloitte & Touche quits and becomes a CFO elsewhere, chances that he considers using audit services from Deloitte are high. Accounts on how Deloitte has garnered considerable revenue from alumni referrals are evident.

Lastly, employers understand that their former employees act as their goodwill representatives in the market. As ambassadors for their previous employers, their services include recommending products, business and most importantly support for the brand.



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### **The go ahead**

The alumni associations of P&G and Microsoft are independent, yet they grow with their companies. When MSA was launched, Microsoft approved using the company name. Both the company and its networking partners benefit from such an arrangement. Microsoft has observed the value in keeping in touch. Today, the members of the alumni enjoy discounted employee rates for the Microsoft products.

The findings are clear: networking or keeping in touch is a precondition that improves business life, social life and empowers people.