

# CONNECTION IS KEY

Learn to connect to boost your resilience and your career



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**W**hen I say the word ‘networking’, what comes to mind? If you’re like a lot of my coaching clients, you hate networking and it feels forced and fake to you.

For many years, I felt the same way. I knew I needed the help of other people to be successful in my career, but the idea of networking left a bad taste in my mouth. As I started to develop my resiliency model, though, I realised that ‘connecting’ felt better to me and I incorporated the strategy of connection into the model.

### What is connection?

First, let’s define connection as the result of creating and nourishing relationships and look at why it should be a priority. George Vaillant, the Harvard psychiatrist who directed the Harvard Grant Study from 1972 to 2004, found strong relationships to be the strongest predictor of life and career satisfaction. The Harvard Grant Study was 75-year longitudinal study of 268 Harvard college students from the classes of 1939–1944.

Feeling connected to one’s work was far more important than making money or achieving traditional success Carolyn Gregoire.(2013) *The 75-Year Study That Found the Secrets to a Fulfilling Life*. Huff Post. Another study found that when we relate to others and connect in

a deep way, the brain releases the neurotransmitters oxytocin and dopamine. These feel-good chemicals are part of what makes it so rewarding to give and receive social support Christine Carter (2008). *Happiness Is Being Socially Connected*, *Greater Good Magazine*. My coaching clients notice that as they make connection a priority, they feel more engaged in their careers because they are happier and have more energy.

### How to connect

To be a master connector, develop supportive relationships in three major areas of your life.

- 1. Your organisation.** One way to connect with your colleagues is ask them questions like, “What is your career background?”, “What are important trends?” and “What projects and initiatives are on the horizon?”
- 2. Your profession/industry.** A great connecting strategy here is to take an active role in a professional association to stay up-to-date on the latest trends and to develop competencies that are outside your experience in your present position. Read professional journals and industry publications and stay current with what is going on in your industry. Industry knowledge helps you prepare for the future and

anticipate changes that could affect your career.

**3. Your personal life.** Don't neglect your personal network! Develop contacts in areas such as education, fitness, family and spirituality.

One of the biggest mistakes unskilled connectors make is thinking that connection or networking is a numbers game - how many business cards they can collect or how many social media connections they can make. But giving someone your business card or connecting with them online does not build trust immediately. Think about your career - you probably trust people only after you have been assured of their character and competence and have found common ground on which to connect.

**Make a plan**

I have learned from people who called me because they were made redundant or unhappy in their careers, that trusting relationships with connections are not created overnight. You need an intentional plan to connect. Just as we track our projects and productivity, we need to make a plan for connecting with others and track against it.

I recommend a very simple system. On your computer or in a notebook, list individuals with whom you want to connect and write down how many times you'd like to connect with them during the year and how you'll connect: meeting for a meal, emailing, or talking on the phone. Connecting online and by phone is most convenient with our busy schedules, but try to meet face-to-face occasionally. I have noticed this results in closer, more beneficial relationships. Leave space to track your connecting actions.

Who	Goal	Tracking
J. Smith	lunch every six months, short email once a month	lunch May 2
M. Jones	coffee every two months, email in alternate months	emailed June 12 emailed August 23
P. Roberts	email once a month	emailed October 5 emailed November 1

Once a month, check your connection plan and see who you need to reach out to. We tend to connect with others more often during the holidays, which is when they are already bombarded with cards, emails, and calls. This won't keep you top of mind with them, and doesn't develop mutual trust. Following your connection plan keeps you networking in a proactive manner throughout the year rather than only when it is convenient or you need something.

**Connection works!**

Is it realistic to think you can work full-time, devote time to family and friends, and still have time to connect? Interestingly, when you take a deep breath and focus on connecting in a purposeful way, it energises you and makes you more productive and resilient in your career.



My coaching client Derek, who was originally from Scotland, was a scientist at an organisation in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Although he had no family in the States, he was able to develop incredible connections. He did an amazing job implementing a connection plan once he realised how important it was. He identified colleagues with whom he wanted to connect, including newer colleagues in the organisation that he wanted to mentor. With work constantly busy, keeping these connections active was a challenge. Derek realised that some of his connections were runners, as he was, and he used running as a connection tool, meeting these people for lunch and after work.

Another client was working as a consultant on public health projects but wanted to find a more stable position where she could contribute her skills and grow her career. During this time, she needed surgery, and scheduled a consultation with a surgeon. The surgeon happened to be a well-known public health figure and writer and during the consultation they spent quite a bit of time talking about public health research and her work.

After she recovered from her surgery, she hired me to help with the job search and during one of our sessions, told me about her experience during the surgical consultation. Her connection homework was to reach out to him to enquire about job possibilities there. It took her a while, but she eventually sent an email to tell him she was doing well and ask if she could come and talk to him or someone else to learn more about the organisation. He wrote back in less than thirty minutes asking if she was interested in a position. He connected my client to the person responsible for hiring, which ultimately led to a job!

Connection is an important ingredient for building your resilience and career success. The broader your network of support, the greater your influence. As I look over the past twenty-five years of my career, the greatest success has come from my connections.

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