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Proof Networking Is Actually Worth Your Time

COMMENTARY by [Janice Ellig](#)

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Even if you don't enjoy it

The MPW Insider network is an online community where the most thoughtful and influential people in business contribute answers to timely questions about careers and leadership. Today's answer to the question: What's the most important lesson you've learned in your career? is by Janice Ellig, co-CEO of Chadick Ellig.

When I left the corporate world to be a co-owner of an executive search firm in 2000, little did I know I had been preparing for this role all my life. Throughout my career, I was fortunate to learn from many highly accomplished executives and thought leaders who became part of my outstanding network. And creating a successful global executive search firm requires having an extensive network of influential executives who see you a “trusted advisor.” So to remain relevant, this network needs to be constantly evolving.

After graduating college, I immediately joined various professional groups and sat on several not-for-profit boards. I also explored career paths in various industries, ranging from big pharma to banking, and even took a company public. During my tenure at each position, I spoke at conferences, wrote articles, and co-authored two books. Without a clear roadmap, I was building my “rolodex” of highly successful executives. It just came naturally.

Some people view networking as “work” but I see it as being intellectually curious and constantly learning from others. Each client, manager, and coworker is an opportunity to learn from their experiences, successes, and failures. As a result of these interactions I eventually found myself on the board of the Thomas Edison Innovation Organization. Sitting with some very savvy and highly accomplished entrepreneurs and leaders, I am able to observe the true meaning of entrepreneurship. This board has changed the way I think about innovation, which I now apply at my own company.

The bottom line is that the network of people you associate with and the spheres of influence you enter are critical to your personal and professional development. Companies in Silicon Valley know this; those who attend the Allen & Company meetings in Sun Valley know this; the Davos events foster this. Most successful executives come to the revelation in their career that beyond who you know, the critical factor is who knows you — and how they view you. Unless you are known to that proverbial circle, you are not invited to “the table.” I did this originally without a plan or much forethought. But today, I am more deliberate and focused on how to better serve my clients, candidates, and the business. Expand your community and you will get tenfold back.