



# How Successful Women Network for Professional Growth

Making connections and investing in your network is a lifelong exercise that can be intimidating for many people of any age, but an important aspect of professional growth. You never really know which relationship might help you land that next project, promotion or opportunity.

There are many ways to foster relationships. Some feel comfortable with a more traditional approach of meeting in-person for a beverage or meal while others embrace virtual meetings, conference calls, hangouts, and online platforms.

As our work environments change with remote workers, contractors, and multiple offices and locations, so has the way we work to build and foster relationships. With the help of social media and other online tools, many more people at a variety of positions and levels are more accessible, which was not the case years ago.

## **Take a few minutes to think about how you enhance your professional network:**

- *How do you foster new connections?*
- *Who have you invited to an introduction meeting outside your existing connections?*
- *When is the last time you have updated your online professional profiles?*

## **Assess Your Network**

It's important to build a trusted sphere of influence, especially during times in your life when you are looking to stretch in new directions. Ask trusted sources to review your plan and to suggest additions to your action list. Be sure you are asking people who are truly interested in supporting your desire for growth.

I have had a few unfortunate opportunities where I have trusted some people who indirectly or directly worked to sabotage my efforts. In my book, *The Working Woman's GPS*, I created a chart that helped me identify people who positively supported my current and future efforts, which has been extremely helpful throughout my life.

As a working woman, I know it takes a team of people to support my professional decisions, and I am aware of who and who does not want me to take on more or move more toward my desired goals.



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Person's Name of Initials or Role	Supports My Current Work & Contributions (+, - or /)	Supports Me as I Stretch to Accelerate My Impact (+, - or /)

(+) Yes, this person supports me.  
 (/) Maybe, this person supports me some of the time or I am unsure and have to be more mindful to determine if it is a + or —.  
 (—) No, this person does not encourage or support me.

## Over the years I've had to make two types of adjustments:

- My trusted sphere of influence. I have a circle of people, my advisory board, that has been with me for years and I truly cherish their ongoing love, support, and reciprocation. As I've evolved, so have many of the people around me.
- My exchange of energy. I'm now, more than ever, aware of the energy I exchange with people during conversations, online, and in groups. I've learned to realize that my brand is all around me. I strive to consciously attract the energy I desire through my work, exchanges, and actions.

I had to make some lifestyle changes to increase my positive energy. There was a time when my negative and self-destructive energies trumped my positive energy. There was a direct correlation to how I felt about myself, the people around me and the projects I took on.



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If you're struggling with unproductive energy, I suggest you read my book *The Working Woman's GPS*. After writing that book, I've become more aware of my commitments and the people I attracted to my network, my choices, and exchanges of energy.

## Here's a Great Example of How Cindy Landed a Board Seat

When Cindy, a developer and team lead, aspired to join a board of directors of a local nonprofit to gain additional leadership skills and expand her network, she turned to her existing network. She could do this because six months before deciding on this direction, she spent 10-15 minutes each day on her LinkedIn profile ensuring it was up-to-date. In addition, to these activities, she leveraged this and other online profiles to establish and maintain relationships that she might not interact with on a regular basis.

When she was ready to take on additional responsibility, it was her network that jumped in to make the initial connections. These warm introductions from people that already knew Cindy led to several meetings with the nonprofit leaders and eventually some of their existing board members. Cindy, of course, needed to take the lead after these initial connections, but it was her existing relationships that set up these first few meetings with the "right" people. From there, Cindy worked to learn more about the responsibilities and expectations, as well as share her accomplishments, desires, and potential impact if she was given the opportunity to join a board.

It's important to note that Cindy did take the time to do her research about the existing board members, reviewed the annual reports and investigated similar nonprofits to warrant her relevance and knowledge.

Although some might not agree that dedicated time each day is necessary to foster your network, many find it to be a key part of their weekly schedules. Some professionals make phone calls; others meet for coffee or lunch and some share articles, send emails or engage online.

### Don't forget:

- Your existing connections can be great at connecting you to key influencers or decision makers.
- It's up to you to do your homework, so be prepared for the conversation.
- Many people are likely not aware of what you are up to or what you have accomplished lately.