CHAPTER 2

NETWORKS: WHO REVOLVES AROUND YOUR AMBITIONS?

"I've been looking at this all wrong!"

These words were uttered by an exhausted social entrepreneur, as she slumped over her keyboard in the middle of our coaching session. The "all wrong" was ignoring her existing network, and downplaying how it could support her with the growth of her new venture. Entrepreneurship is challenging, and this entrepreneur was not the first founder I've met who after many late nights, and unanswered emails, has longed for the proverbial networking-knight-in-shining-armor. **Why do so many of us imagine that a complete stranger will drop everything to help us as a result of a single email outreach or social encounter?** This nearly universal belief continues to perplex me! But back to the networking quandary of the social entrepreneur. I suggested to her that perhaps a better alternative to the demoralizing, random "cold-calling" and email outreach to people outside of her existing network, was to instead start by selectively approaching those she already knew, and who knew her, and believed in her work...

Most of us have an unrealized wealth of social capital. Over the course of our careers, we come into contact with hundreds of people. Some relationships will be fleeting, others form a lasting, meaningful bond (in spite of an inconsequential beginning or distances and infrequency of communication). Fact remains, we'll mostly ignore or forgot the vast majority of these interactions, and these acts of networking omission, impact our perception of networking, from who we tap for help to who we include in our network.

With the simple but powerful insight - turn to your network, not random strangers - the entrepreneur's spirts shifted from "I'm flailing" into get-it-done action mode. The investment of time spent sorting through her existing network paid off. No surprise (to me at least)! As the positive responses and offers to help rolled in, the entrepreneur quickly realized she had been holding up her company's progress for far too long by not reaching out for help from people who already believed in her - and knew what she was capable of.

High achieving women recognize their journey towards success involves others the whole way. Let's explore your attitude towards the networks in your life. Your answers to the ten questions in the Introductions give a hint about who and how you think about networking, and the strength of support you imagine you have around your ambitions. Now we'll dive deeper to see what support is being overlooked, or is hidden away within your network.

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One request: don't make the mistake the entrepreneur made!

Suspend judgement on the quality and quantity of your network while you complete this exercise. Put aside assumptions about who should be in your network and remain wholly focused on who is in it. Don't beat yourself up with "should have" or "ought to" regrets over choices you've made in the past - choices which may or may not have contributed to the perceived strength of your network today. Just answer the questions honestly and objectively, based on who you see and what you observe in the bundle of individual human connections you've accumulated that is now collectively gathered under the heading of "your network".

While it may be tempting to skip this network auditing exercise, please don't. The answers to the challenges you are facing may be buried in the networks you already have - and your networking will improve dramatically if you gather all the information you can before immediately leaping into networking action. Plus your answers are the underpinning of all that proceeds from here. Networks influence our Focus, fuel our Grit and facilitate our success. Make your pursuits going forward a little more focused, efficient, and dare I say, enjoyable, by spending a little time on this exercise.

Have you got the right network for your career goals? Time to start sorting through the many layers of relationships you currently have, to find out.

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Exercise: Network Audit

Your Go-To's

These are your very close relationships, people with whom you share a true bond, personally and/or professionally. Who do you spend the most time with? Who do you routinely turn to for advice? Who do you trust enough to confide your career concerns or dreams with? Who are you leaning on when your ambitions need a gut check or second opinion or shoulder to cry on or a stiff drink?

Your Go-To (Networking) Activities

Think about "network" as a verb. What are your tried & return to "networking habits"? These are the primary activities you engage in today to build and maintain relationships for your career. List the activities you undertake within, or as part of organizations, conferences, memberships, associations, platforms, committees, boards, community groups, leagues etc. How do you routinely engage with others and what are the primary sources you default to for developing, maintaining and sustaining connections? There's a space below for activities you participate in only on occasion (aka not quite as go-to routine) so no need to include those here. Distinguish between IRL and online interactions. Yes, both types of interactions can be relationship enhancing, and as we're fact collecting here, it would be useful to note the manner of engagement and frequency.

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Your Close Yet Not Quite BFFs

As networks include a variety of valuable and meaningful relationships, turn your attention to people you're fairly close to but not as intimate as your inner circle of go-to relationships. Real friends, but not ones you would necessarily overshare alongside or divulge your deepest most humiliating secrets to. Professional relationships could fall in this category as could casual or context specific connections (think about people you routinely engage with in some aspect of your life, including all the c's - clients, co-workers, classmates, committee members, co-volunteers). Consider who you are bumping into on a recurring basis and/or actively socializing with in a group setting. In other words, who and where do you turn to for a meaningful but lighter level of support (besides Google or ChatGPT)?

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Your Occasional Networking Activities

Not quite haphazard, but definitely not the networking you routinely look out for, or seek out. It's the networking activity you're happy (or feel slightly obliged) to do when invited or prompted. Examples of occasional networking activities could be anything from an alumni event, lecture series at your local library or community center, the periodic firm-wide retreat, team away-day or happy hour in a co-working space. Networks are the end result of an endless number of interactions, so don't fail to list activities because you think they're too trivial, infrequent or inconsequential to mention.

Your Wider Net(work)

These are the people in your network whose significance is limited by the number of interactions you have with them. The person could be a new contact (where there's been minimal, or very limited interaction) or an "older" connection where there's been a significant lapse of time between your interactions. For this circle, cast your net wide by thinking about somewhat familiar faces you are likely to run into at annual industry gatherings, quarterly working group meetings, monthly meetups etc. Who are the people or communities you follow or watch and/or engage with on an intermittent basis? And don't overlook the connections you keep tabs on with your likes, follows and comments on social networking platforms, such as LinkedIn.

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Past Networks

Excavate your past! Cast your mind back (or glance over your resume) to reflect on networks you've really stepped away from (work, school, membership, volunteer etc.). What groups and gatherings have played a role in your career evolution? Write them down. This is a chance to expand your notion of what "networks" you have to tap into. Reflect on how those networks have shaped your career journey to where you are today as (hint!) lessons from these networks could prove to be quite helpful in the present as well as in the future.

Spend some time assessing your network and how you're networking. BTW recalling the intricacies of connections between and within social relationships[1] is one of our superpowers as women - so flex this skill and put it to use as you start to create your high achieving network! Pull in your answers from the ten questions in Chapter 1. Anticipate referring back to this network audit as well as making additions and/or adjustments to it as your understanding of how high achieving networks operate, grows. As you tackle the Chapters on Focus and Grit, it is likely you'll discover additional networks at your disposal or relationships you need to make.

1. Matthew E. Brashears, Emily Hoagland, Eric Quintane,"Sex and network recall accuracy", Social Networks, Volume 44 (2016) Pages 74-84, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socnet.2015.06.002

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Networking Pro-Tip: Experience Gratitude To Enhance Your Networking

There's an added benefit to thinking about the relationships that have supported you (beyond efficiently solving a networking for success challenge you have today). When we acknowledge the support we receive and express appreciation for the people who have befriended, guided, mentored, or enriched our lives in some way, it highlights the relationships we want to work on maintaining and improving. Here's hoping a boost of gratitude from having a complete picture of your network, sparks some networking renewal or inspires meaningful reconnections for you.

Once you've given some thought to your network, and networking choices, consider:

1. How has your Go-To list changed over the past five (5) years? What's prompted this change?
2. What did you discover when you created your Past Networks list? Did you uncover any forgotten networking gold?
3. Who is giving you solid career feedback (i.e. the person who finds time when you seek them out)? And who is talking your skills up in conversations you're not privy to? Where did you categorize these people on your lists?
4. Where are you spending the majority of your networking time? What relationships and information flows do these activities position you within and for?
5. Do you have the networks you need around your success (or, is your perception of your network somehow standing between you, and your probabilities of success)?

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Networking Pro-Tip: Increase Your Networking Confidence By Using Your Network To Help Others.

Reflecting on your network is a necessary and powerful place to start your networking, as the pause can shift your networking mindset from panic and lack to confidence to abundance. I observed an immediate mindset shift when I facilitated a networking "ask and offer" exercise with women entrepreneurs participating in the Tory Burch Foundation's fellows program. One entrepreneur approached me to say she couldn't contribute anything to the group exercise as she "didn't have a network." Based in California, DY had recently launched a pet nutrition company; a venture vastly different from her previous career in logistics and operations in the Philippines. Her belief that she "didn't have a network" was ridiculous. Of course she had one! By helping her look behind her immediate networking "geography" (sunny southern California where she resided), and the niche industry silo she was now in, DY realized she could tap her "old" network to help other women entrepreneurs in the fellows program with their business growth needs. What DY was overlooking is a powerful networking tactic referred to as "brokering" (which is addressed in detail in Chapter 5). Reactivating her network with a business opportunity completely disconnected from her own networking needs, was also an easy way for DY to provide an update on what she was building (and perhaps, in doing so, she would serendipitously discover ways to generate opportunities for herself too). What "old" networks are you overlooking because of a shift in geographic location, career change, or business pivot?

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Networking Pro-Tip: Change Your Definition Of Networking

My networking mantra is simple: networking is every human interaction. Every. Single. One. Think about the multitude of touch-points you have a daily basis to connect with other people. Texting, posting, fleeting hello's, calls, meetings...and the last thing you need to imagine when you hear the word "networking" is that "needing to network" necessarily equates to devoting more time by taking on more commitments and subjecting your time-stretched schedule to additional demands. We all have full complicated lives, and guess what! so do the people we're wanting to network with. Think more expansively and imaginatively about what meaningful networking is (to avoid dropping the relationship building ball).

Exercise: You're Doing More Networking Than You Think You Are

A few years ago, I conducted a multi-week survey to understand how people thought about networking, how much time they spent doing it (and with whom), and whether, by paying attention to what they were ACTUALLY doing, participants might begin to shift their networking behaviors. Say, switching from endlessly stressing about how much time they imagine they weren't networking to recognizing the web of connections they were routinely developing then finding easy, and relatively simple ways to meaningfully connect.

If you're already stressing over thoughts of "not doing enough" networking or, on the flip side, wondering how you'll fit more networking into your already cramped schedule, this exercise will help you see the myriad of ways you're already engaging your network. Since this networking is (as noted) already taking place, doing it with a little more presence and awareness should ease your mind and improve your connections - without consuming an additional investment of your time.

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Pull out your calendar along with your email, text messages, DMs, etc. and review the past week or so's worth of appointments, meetings, and conversations. Note the activities and communications you're engaging in, and with whom. Notice any patterns here?

Think expansively about how you're building your network through a range of daily interactions. Use the list of prompts below as a suggested guide.

- Emailed or texted with mentor(s)
- Call or Zoom with a mentor
- IRL meeting with a mentor
- Brainstormed ideas with a colleague / peer
- Worked with a coach
- Attended a class or training or seminar at work
- Attended a seminar or workshop with industry colleagues
- Attended an online event
- Participated in a Q&A
- Met with a working group
- Gathered with a mastermind group
- Posted on social media
- Posted on an internal social network @ work
- Sent an email asking for help
- Requested or conducted an informational interview
- Asked someone to facilitate an introduction
- Sought out guidance / feedback
- Volunteered
- Mentored
- Chaired a meeting
- Attended a meeting for a not-for-profit/community organization
- Joined a committee
- Took on a new project
- Expressed interest in getting involved with an initiative
- Renewed a membership
- Resigned from a committee, organization, club, or group
- Organized a gathering/meeting
- Talked to a recruiter
- Followed up on a presentation
- IRL gathering with friends or acquaintances

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At the end of this networking review, consider:

1. Who are you connecting with most frequently? Where did you include this person (or group of people) in the network audit exercise?
2. When you have access to individuals you imagine can help advance your goals, what types of conversations are you having?
3. How are your networking choices furthering your relationships? And, how about your goals?
4. Which of your routine networking interactions is having the greatest impact?
5. How can you use this information to ease your imagined "not doing enough" networking stress OR to adjust your networking efforts?

This exercise is about the relationship-building you're doing today, so as we move forward through the upcoming chapters on Focus and Grit, use what you've discovered to spark ideas on where to switch-up your networking, and/or to generate ideas on how to continuously engage with your growing network in meaningful, and time-saving ways.



Networking Pro-Tip: Perfectionism Can Be A Networking Killer!

You've got a high achieving personality, so yes, it is likely you have high expectations for yourself when it comes to networking - and likely for the outcomes of your efforts. But don't let these expectations spiral into unrealistically high expectations which then thwart your networking momentum. If you're a perfectionist, it is easy to imagine that if you can't get it right the first time, why bother trying to do any of it. Take a pause if you find yourself swirling in the not-doing-it-perfectly-enough mindset. Then list the facts. I suspect after you rattle off all the networking actions you've initiated, however incomplete, imperfect or flawed, the facts will reveal an altogether different networking story to the one you perceive.

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The Social Billionaire

A Networking Roadmap for Women Seeking to Flourish and Achieve More by J. Kelly Hoey

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