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## COLUMNIST

# Three Strategies All Women Need to Master to Network Like a CEO

The top 20 percent of performers at companies excel at developing networks.



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As critical as networking is, it's still a challenge for many people. For example, most of us are involved with social media platforms like LinkedIn, but are your LinkedIn contacts the right contacts you need to have to attain that next career goal?

The top 20% of performers at companies excel at developing networks, not just to find a new job but to connect them to resources inside and outside their firm, help them master best practices, solve problems, connect to people of more influences to get more done, and acquire better raises, among other accolades.

I recently met two networking experts who have creative tools to make networking easy and effective. The first was Tom Gaunt, CEO and co-founder of NQuotient, who was on several executive boards. The second is Marilyn Nagel, Co-Founder and Chief Mission Officer at NQuotient, formerly the Chief Diversity Officer at Cisco, which she left to run a woman's organization called Watermark. The question they both asked about growing networking skills was this: How do you sustain learning and make behavioral change stick?

That answer is unique for everyone, and especially for women. It's important to recognize that there are unique elements for women when it comes to networking that can give them an advantage - like, generally speaking, an innate ability to build and nurture a relationship, prioritize relationships, and offer support.

As a woman looking to grow her networking skills, try these three strategies that Nagel and Gaunt recommend:

**Check your attitude.** Gaunt and Nagel say that your attitude toward networking is either an inhibitor or an impetus for success. Put simply: If you don't network well, it's an inhibitor for you when it comes to reaching long-term career goals. But if you do network well, it can lead to success.

**Redefine how you network.** If the idea of going to a room full of strangers is too daunting, flip the script. Networking can be a range of activities: Meeting people one-on-one for planned and meaningful conversations, having a regular conference call with a trusted mentor, sponsor or peer, attending industry events, or even connecting online via email, social media or professional chat groups. You can even start conversations at work, on the train, or in a meeting. See that all the work you do with people at every level of leadership is an opportunity to build a network.

**Make sure your circle is diverse.** Networking can be self-limiting if you're networking with only women or only men. Embracing differences in genders or race, instead of using them as a way to rationalize differences, opens us up to a broader, more diverse thought process that is often more consistent with the marketplace on both a national and international level.

Ultimately, the goal for an ideal networking strategy first and foremost is to remove barriers to connect.

In that spirit, let's return to our LinkedIn example. LinkedIn is an effective tool, but it can also be a noisy environment. For example, if you have a 1,000 connections, but out of that group there aren't many you couldn't call immediately if there was a problem, then it's time to evaluate and take on an active

role to develop as a network manager. As a network manager, ask yourself these questions before you reach out: What are my goals for networking? Who can help me meet these goals?

How does networking fit into my life? Set reminders of what to say to people and when to reach out.

The message for women leaders is to find your confidence in your networking, and be sure you are actually committed to connecting with others and building your reputation.

If you'd like additional support growing and nurturing an effective network, check out NQuotient. You can take a free self-assessment online and learn more about where to focus your networking efforts to be more effective. You can find it [here](#).

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