

PRIOR TO DECIDING MY NEXT CAREER adventure, I experienced what many have faced. It was the five minute “we are making some organization changes” lecture from my manager. As those words came out of his mouth, I was anticipating a new role or perhaps a lessening of my responsibility within the company. However, I never imagined that after years of dedication, loyalty, and significant contributions, I was being downsized right out of my job. Unbelievable! As fast as those words came out of my manager’s mouth, I began reaching out to my contacts and acquaintances; typical of someone who find himself or herself suddenly without a job. Wait! I had been gainfully employed for twenty-five plus years but had only seventy-five documented contacts. They were people in my small sphere of influences including co-workers, managers, clients, and industry peers. “Oh, my gosh, where is my Rolodex!” I asked myself. “Where is my contact management system that hold the vast network of people whom I have met or did business with over the years? Why is my Outlook Address Book near empty?”

I have conducted business and personal interactions with countless individuals including clients, business associates, recruiters, and close friends in the past. Each of them had their own networks. But I only have seventy-five documented contacts. That was not going to be enough to help me find a job or start a business. I quickly realized that I had lost over two decades of valuable contacts who could potentially help me out. So, I set off to feverishly rebuild my network. I went through my phone books and e-mails, and started compiling a spreadsheet composing of information of my colleagues, recruiters, acquaintances, friends, and family. From that point on, I made sure that with every new contact I had, I would determine what, how and where he or she could compliment my network for the present and for the future. I entered his or her information into an online Excel spreadsheet. I learned that I could not wait to create, grow and maintain my network. I need to do it today, tomorrow and always. Through my new networking development scheme, I was able to gather enough guidance, contacts, leads, referrals, prospects, and other information to launch a new career, buying and running a business excellence consulting and coaching business. The following are some “Network Development” practices I have to share.

- Network, Network, Network – Join local and national associations, and referral and networking groups such as Refocus on Referrals or the Atlanta Business Alliance.
- Create A Contact Log – Use an online Contact Management Systems (CMS), an Outlook Address Book, or an Excel spreadsheet to create a contact log. Use the millions of contacts in Linked In to create, grow, and maintain your network.
- Capture critical and key information about each individual including the contact’s full name, company name, business address, office phone, cell, e-mails, and more. Make a note of how and when you meet that individual. Write down spe-

cific information that you learn about his or her spouse, kids, birthday, hobbies, sports teams, pets, etc.

- Business Cards – Either buy a business card scanner that will allow you to automatically upload all of the business card information into your CMS system or contact spreadsheet, or put a process in place to get all of the business card information into your contact system sooner than later.
- Maintain Contacts – As your network grow, have a plan or process in place to update changes and maintain your relationship with your contacts. Regularly help your contacts so that they can help you in time of need.

In summary, it is critical that you create, grow, and maintain your network today, tomorrow and always.



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