

Establish Relationships

Establishing positive relationships with people in your organization fosters a friendly, open work environment where employees feel that they can contribute ideas, creativity, and feedback. You can take steps to improve your people skills and be a model to others. Understanding how relationships work in your organization is a good place to start.

As you focus on relationships, take the time to consider how people perceive you and how you can improve the way you relate to people. Sometimes small changes can make a big difference. If you need help, consider finding a coach who can provide feedback and suggestions.

In this chapter, we will cover the following areas:

- ▶ Be open and friendly to put people at ease
- ▶ Show genuine interest in the needs and concerns of others
- ▶ Relate to others in an accepting and respectful manner regardless of their organizational level, personality, or background
- ▶ Leave others feeling better after you have interacted with them
- ▶ Adjust interpersonal style and communication to a variety of people and situations
- ▶ Respond appropriately to subtle or nonverbal cues from others
- ▶ Treat people with respect
- ▶ Treat people fairly
- ▶ Develop effective working relationships with your direct reports
- ▶ Develop effective working relationships with your peers
- ▶ Develop an effective working relationship with your manager
- ▶ Develop effective working relationships with higher management
- ▶ Compromise to build give-and-take relationships with others
- ▶ Build relationships with direct reports in other locations
- ▶ Cultivate networks of people across a variety of functions and locations within the organization
- ▶ Leverage networks to get things done

Be open and friendly to put people at ease

▼
List behaviors that make people seem approachable.

An open and friendly manner can help you build relationships by making you more approachable. It can also put people at ease, dissipate a negative atmosphere, and help people work cooperatively. Consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ Ask trusted coworkers or friends about their first impressions of you. Do you seem friendly and easily approachable, or do you seem intimidating and gruff? Do your gestures and speech patterns make people comfortable or uncomfortable? List specific behaviors that people use to describe you.
- ▶ When you meet someone, use a culturally appropriate manner to communicate welcome, respect, and interest. For example, in a Western culture, help the person feel at ease by initiating a conversation.
- ▶ Show interest in people as individuals. For example, pay attention to what they say about their interests, likes, and dislikes. A colleague might mention her garden; take the cue to talk about gardening.
- ▶ Use humor to ease awkward silences or tension, and to break the ice when you're meeting new people. Appropriate humor helps people see your personable side.
- ▶ Consider your body language. If your presence seems to make others uncomfortable, ask a coach for feedback about your body language and find out how you could be more approachable. For example, hold yourself in a relaxed manner, smile, and nod to encourage others as they talk.
- ▶ Be visible to your team. Frequently walk around your area, check in with people, and talk to them about their work. Make sure to stay in touch with team members in other locations—a quick e-mail can help them feel included and appreciated. This will make people feel more at ease with you, and they will feel more confident that you understand their issues.
- ▶ If you choose to adjust your personal style, do so gradually and consistently. People may be suspicious about an abrupt change from a distant or heavy-handed style to a friendly and approachable style. Changing too quickly can make your relationships uncomfortable.

- ▶ Tell people about your communication style ahead of time so they will not be taken by surprise or offended. People appreciate managers who communicate openly and directly while still respecting their feelings and differences.

Show genuine interest in the needs and concerns of others



Taking an interest in other people and their needs is a necessary step in building positive relationships. This does not mean that you have to engage in long conversations about their personal lives. Instead, show that you care about what they think and what they are doing. Consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ Recognize that it is important for leaders to show interest in people and their needs. You accomplish your work through other people. If you don't know what they're interested in or what they need, you won't understand what motivates them or be able to garner their support.
- ▶ Commit to understanding others, even if you don't agree with them. Adopting this mind-set may make it easier for you to listen and show interest in people's views.
- ▶ Ask open-ended questions about people's work—what they enjoy the most, what gives them the most satisfaction, what their biggest challenges are. Ask what they want from you and how you can help them be more successful.
- ▶ Use active listening skills such as asking open-ended questions, paraphrasing, reflecting, and summarizing. Active listening helps you focus on the person who is talking.
- ▶ Recognize that spending time on relationships is an investment. The amount of time you devote to others will pay large dividends in terms of your ability to accomplish your goals.
- ▶ If you have difficulty generating interest in certain people and situations, examine the reasons for it. You may have a personality conflict; you may be bewildered because people seem to be bothered by things that don't affect you. Once you address the root cause, you can begin to show more genuine interest.

Be a role model; show genuine interest in the people you coach.

- ▶ Identify leaders who show genuine interest in others and watch them in action. How do they convey interest and empathy? What are their nonverbal actions? What questions do they ask? How do people respond to them? Note how their behavior affects their reputation and skill as leaders.

Relate to others in an accepting and respectful manner regardless of their organizational level, personality, or background

Have people practice expressing opinions and disagreements in ways that are constructive and respectful.

Successful leaders know how to get along with people across the organization, regardless of their personalities or backgrounds. They understand that cordial, effective relationships help people work together productively. Consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ When you meet a new colleague, concentrate on developing a rapport that will allow you to communicate effectively. Focus on what you need to do to make the relationship work, not on whether you like the person or whether he or she is different from you.
- ▶ Learn more about people in your organization. Find out how their interests, experiences, and perspectives are similar to and different from your own. Understand each person as an individual, not as the representative of a group.
- ▶ Develop an appreciation for people's differences. Learn about their careers, what brought them to the company, what they're trying to accomplish. This will help you understand their viewpoints and give you a broader perspective on their reactions to events and issues.
- ▶ Adopt the attitude that you can learn something from each individual, even those who are difficult to work with. Look for a skill, approach, or outlook that each person can teach you.
- ▶ Observe the way people in other groups interact. Take note of behaviors you could use to be more effective when you work with them. For example, people from other cultures or backgrounds may have different expectations about nonverbal behavior, sharing personal information at work, or interacting with coworkers.

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- ▶ Be wary of basing your opinion solely on another person's experience with an individual. Develop your own relationship with the person, and go into it with an open mind and a positive attitude.

Leave others feeling better after you have interacted with them

▼ Work can be stressful. Part of your job as a leader is to maintain a positive atmosphere in which people can accomplish their goals. Even in tense or unpleasant situations, you can show a concern for others that will help them feel better after you talk. Consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ Think of concrete ways you can make people feel better. For example, talk about people in a way that makes them feel valued. Discuss situations in a graceful way instead of complaining, getting bitter, or being cynical.
- ▶ Make yourself accessible, and encourage others to come to you with problems or concerns. Knowing that you are available and willing to help will make people more likely to seek you out.
- ▶ Improve your listening skills. Check your understanding of others' feelings and concerns by asking open-ended questions and paraphrasing their comments. Nod and make eye contact as you listen.
- ▶ Use humor to relieve stress. Humor can take away the initial "bite" and help people get perspective on a situation.
- ▶ Realize that humor needs to be used at the right time and in the right way. For example, use humor to help people cope more effectively with a serious situation, not to distract them. People may feel more stressed if they think you're trying to minimize the seriousness of a situation or to paper over it with a positive attitude.
- ▶ Consider how your personal style affects people. For example, if you have a strict or demanding leadership style, people may feel intimidated, overwhelmed, or nervous when they're interacting with you. Learn how you can adjust your style so that you leave people feeling better, not worse.
- ▶ When you must communicate negative information, offer your help, support, and sympathy. This will let people know that you recognize the gravity of the situation and that you want to help them.

Observe people to see if they encourage individuals who have been having a difficult time.

Adjust interpersonal style and communication to a variety of people and situations

Effective leaders are versatile and adaptable. They understand that one style of interaction does not fit every person or situation. Consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ Base your approach on the needs of the person, task, and situation. For example, an experienced employee facing a daunting task may need to know that you have confidence in his or her abilities. A new employee may need encouragement plus training.
- ▶ Use a personality test such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® to gain insight into your personal style and those of others. This will help you understand why the detail people get so frustrated when big-picture thinkers start brainstorming during a project planning meeting.
- ▶ Pay attention to the interpersonal styles of your team and other colleagues. Then consider how your style typically interacts with theirs. For instance, if you tend to be gregarious and assertive, your style may put off people who prefer quiet, calm interactions.
- ▶ Recognize the value of adapting your interpersonal style. People respond more favorably to leaders they feel comfortable with, and adjusting your style is one way to make them comfortable. Expect that you will need to adapt to others, not that they will adapt to you.
- ▶ Think about how you adapt your style in your personal life. You probably interact differently with family members and friends depending on their personalities, your history, the situation, and your relationship. Do the same at work.
- ▶ Be careful about how and when you adjust your interpersonal style. You may be viewed as manipulative if you change styles suddenly. Also, people might believe you are showing favoritism if you use drastically different styles with different people.

Encourage people to discuss communication styles with their teams so they can recognize when someone's style is different from their own.

Respond appropriately to subtle or nonverbal cues from others

Have you ever experienced a situation in which everyone appears calm, but the atmosphere is charged? In those cases, your best strategy is to look for nonverbal cues to guide your actions. Consider the following suggestions:

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Discuss how nonverbal cues differ between genders and cultures.

- ▶ Make a list of the cues you should look for: vocal tone, intensity, and inflection; eye contact; body language; word choices; where people are sitting or standing in the room.
- ▶ Become a student of how people show their reactions nonverbally. For example, watch how people behave when they are receiving praise or being treated respectfully. In meetings, watch how people respond nonverbally when they are interrupted or when their ideas are not taken seriously.
- ▶ If you have received feedback that you aren't responding to nonverbal cues, get more information. Have a candid discussion with a trusted colleague or friend, and press him or her for details. For example, you may be so focused on communicating your point that you don't pay attention to how people are responding to you. Or you may not understand the messages people are sending through their actions.
- ▶ Realize that nonverbal behaviors vary by culture and region. For example, in some cultures direct eye contact is expected, and in others it is considered rude or confrontational.
- ▶ When you recognize negative nonverbal responses, allow others to talk while you assess the mood and the situation. Adopt a listening and learning role for a while.

Treat people with respect



Consistently showing respect for others is essential for creating and sustaining a productive environment. Consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ Check out your assumptions about how people prefer to be treated. Many individuals assume that all people define respect in the same way and are surprised to find that their impressions are incorrect. When in doubt, ask questions.
- ▶ Assess whether your intentions match your behavior. You may not intend to be rude or disrespectful, but nonverbal behaviors can give the impression that you aren't interested in listening, you don't think others' views are important, or you don't care about their feelings. Ask for feedback about the impressions you give others.

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- ▶ Identify the circumstances in which you do not treat others with respect (when you are stressed or behind schedule, for example), and make a conscious effort to change your behavior. Being aware of your tendencies will help you change them. As you approach a deadline, for example, remind yourself of the need to be respectful toward your colleagues.
- ▶ Confront issues, not people. Placing blame on others or making personal attacks fosters an atmosphere of disrespect. Focus on issues and respect other people and their ideas, even if you don't agree with them.
- ▶ Respect others' privacy. When you must confront someone or handle a delicate situation, do it in private. This will show respect for the other person's feelings and reduce the chance of potentially damaging gossip.
- ▶ Don't use inappropriate or hurtful sarcasm. Identify occasions in which you use sarcasm in ways that offend others, or where you use sarcasm to avoid talking honestly about a difficult situation. Replace sarcasm with appropriate humor.
- ▶ Study other cultures to understand different perceptions of respect. People with backgrounds different from yours may have different ideas about how to convey respect. Understand expectations for respectful behavior and act accordingly.

When people are stressed, talk about how to monitor moods, actions, and words to ensure that they remain respectful toward others.

Treat people fairly

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Perceptions of unfair treatment can arise in many situations. For example, people might perceive unfairness in amount of work, types of opportunities and assistance they receive, or opportunities to influence a decision that affects their work. To ensure that you treat people fairly, consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ Pay attention to any feedback you receive that you show favoritism or treat some individuals differently than you treat others. When you receive feedback, keep the following in mind:
 - ▷ Listen carefully so that you understand the situation. Take care to not argue or defend yourself.
 - ▷ Summarize the person's concerns and feelings.

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- ▷ Consider asking the person what he or she thinks would be fair in the situation.
- ▷ After you understand the point of view, discuss what you could do differently.
- ▷ If you do not understand or know what to do, or if you feel angry or hurt, let the person know you heard what he or she said. Say that you want to think about the situation, and then consult with someone, such as your manager, coach, or HR representative.
- ▶ Recognize everyone involved in a project—not just the stars. People want to know that you notice and appreciate their efforts.
- ▶ Examine how you assign work:
 - ▷ Look at the assignments you give to each team member. Analyze each person's abilities, the visibility and complexity of the assignments, and the person's interest in the assignments.
 - ▷ Determine whether the assignments are equitable, given the skills of each individual.
 - ▷ Ask your team members for their opinions on the current distribution of responsibilities. Address any concerns they have.
 - ▷ If people believe they should have more challenging assignments, tell them what skills, competencies, and experiences are required.
- ▶ Avoid taking sides in disagreements between or among employees. Instead, facilitate a discussion.
- ▶ Explain your decisions, especially when they affect people's roles and their work. When people understand the rationale behind a decision and feel as if they have been a part of the process, they are more likely to perceive you as being fair.

Ask for a description of fair treatment in a number of work scenarios.

Develop effective working relationships with your direct reports

Managers are often the most significant factor in whether direct reports enjoy their jobs. Every other aspect of the job may be perfect, but if the relationship with the manager is poor, direct reports will become unhappy. To develop effective relationships with your direct reports, consider the following suggestions:

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- ▶ Be accessible. Spend time each day in your employees' work area and talk about their work. Remind people in other locations to feel free to call or e-mail you. This will show your interest and give you opportunities to hear firsthand about daily issues and frustrations.
- ▶ If you typically don't spend a lot of time with your employees, gradually increase the frequency of your visits or other communications. A drastic change may cause them to think that you are unhappy with their work and you're checking up on them.
- ▶ Establish an open-door policy. If this is not a good option (if you travel frequently, for example, or have employees in other locations), set aside regular blocks of time to discuss concerns. Announce your schedule, put it on your electronic calendar, and tell each direct report personally.
- ▶ Stick with your policy once you start it. Insincere attempts to appear approachable may worsen communication instead of improve it. For example, if you establish times when you will be available and then consistently schedule other events at these times, people may conclude that you are all talk and no action.
- ▶ Share some of your personal interests. People will feel more comfortable sharing their interests with you if they see that you are willing to reveal information about yourself.
- ▶ If you invite people to discuss problems, be prepared to respond appropriately. Be a problem solver rather than a problem reactor.
- ▶ If individuals wish to discuss personal problems, be willing to listen. Take care, however, not to take on roles for which you are not professionally trained, such as that of financial or family counselor.

Ask people whether they focus on their direct reports' feelings and concerns, not on their own.

Develop effective working relationships with your peers

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In your career, you probably have had both positive and negative experiences with peers. You know how their support can help you achieve your goals and how their opposition can stymie progress. The question is not whether to build relationships with your peers, but how. Consider the following suggestions:

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- ▶ Prepare a list of the peers with whom you work regularly. Rate the quality of your working relationship with each person on your list:

- 1 = Work poorly together
- 2 = Have an adequate working relationship
- 3 = Work reasonably well together (room for improvement)
- 4 = Work very well together

Peers	Quality of Working Relationship			
	1	2	3	4
	1	2	3	4
	1	2	3	4
	1	2	3	4
	1	2	3	4

- ▶ Identify obstacles and problems in the relationships. Determine what you can do to resolve these issues. In many cases, the solution may be obvious once you describe the problem.
- ▶ If you want to improve a relationship, set measurable goals and establish milestones for taking action. Be precise about what you're going to do and why you're going to do it.
- ▶ As you work with your peers, try to recognize when you're on the verge of damaging a relationship over a small issue. Take a step back and think about the larger context. Is it worth alienating a peer just to make a point?
- ▶ As you improve your relationships with your peers, monitor whether they are more willing to volunteer information, provide feedback on your ideas, and discuss issues with you. You'll know you're making progress when you start getting input from peers who have never offered it in the past.

Have people compare a positive peer relationship with one that is thorny. What makes the difference?

Develop an effective working relationship with your manager

Your relationship with your manager greatly affects your job satisfaction. It is in your best interest to make the relationship as positive as possible. Consider the following suggestions:

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Ask people to write a description of the type of relationship they would like to have with their manager.

- ▶ Help negotiate your manager's expectations of you. Set up a meeting to discuss your role, compare perspectives, and develop a shared understanding of goals and expectations.
- ▶ Learn about your manager's professional and personal goals, and determine how you can help him or her achieve them.
- ▶ Identify your manager's strengths and weaknesses, and use your skills to complement or compensate for them.
- ▶ Let your manager know what you are learning from him or her, and what he or she has done that you like or respect. Managers appreciate positive feedback too.
- ▶ If you have an unpleasant or even hostile relationship with your manager, recognize that you're probably going to have to be the one to improve it. Set your expectations accordingly. You don't have to become friends, but you need to find a way to work with each other. Start by taking the high road: treat your boss with courtesy, don't talk behind his or her back, follow through on your commitments.

Develop effective working relationships with higher management

Look for projects in which people will work with higher management on broad organizational problems.

Senior-level managers can help you obtain the support you need for your area, give you insights into the strategy of the organization, and provide opportunities to advance your career. Consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ Take advantage of opportunities to associate with higher-level managers. Establish rapport by discussing something you know they are interested in or providing information about an initiative they're sponsoring.
- ▶ Focus on providing information that will be of interest to higher-level managers. If you just try to publicize your accomplishments or opinions, you will be memorable, but for the wrong reasons.
- ▶ Identify two or three senior managers whose areas intersect with yours. Discuss common goals and ways you can work together to achieve them. If it seems appropriate, volunteer to act as a resource to their teams.

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- ▶ Serve on a committee or work on a special project with higher-level managers. This will give you a chance to interact in both structured and unstructured situations in which they will have opportunities to witness your skills, ideas, and enthusiasm firsthand. Find opportunities to maintain the relationships after the committee or project work is done.

Compromise to build give-and-take relationships with others

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Check that people support others whenever possible. Their influence will increase when they build give-and-take relationships.

Building reciprocal relationships requires both compromise and responsiveness on your part. By conceding relatively unimportant points and offering to share resources, you can create and maintain relationships that will serve you well. Consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ Keep in touch with people, so you can volunteer help when it is needed. Showing awareness and concern for others builds solid relationships.
- ▶ When you think compromise may be required, classify your issues into three categories:
 - ▷ Issues that can be dropped or put aside without penalty to you. Use these issues first as conciliatory gestures in negotiations.
 - ▷ Issues that are nice to have, but not essential. These are the next offerings you can make.
 - ▷ Must-have issues. Hold out the longest for these.
- ▶ Resist the urge to forward your request to a higher level in the organization when someone cannot help you. This tactic will alienate the person whose support you will need in the future. Instead:
 - ▷ Believe he or she does want to help, but really does not have the time or resources.
 - ▷ Make your request again, emphasizing your common goals or the importance of the need.
 - ▷ Give the person direct feedback about the impact of his or her refusal.
- ▶ Don't be too busy to listen to another person's requests; this can brand you as a manager who uses others, a reputation that can hurt you. Other managers may not want to work with or promote individuals who do not know how to give as well as take.

- ▶ Before agreeing to help, make sure you understand exactly what the other person is requesting by asking questions and investigating the issues. If possible, write down and agree upon the resources you will contribute.
- ▶ If you truly are too busy to help, the following tips can help you say no without jeopardizing the relationship or future support:
 - ▷ If the task is not integral to you, suggest someone else who could help.
 - ▷ If it is integral, make sure there is no possible way you can take it on. Look for ways to rearrange your current priorities to allow you to accommodate the request. Or try to identify a peer or a team member who could temporarily or permanently assume one of your other responsibilities.

Build relationships with direct reports in other locations

Depending on your organizational structure, your direct or indirect reports may be located in other cities, states, or countries. Some of the biggest hurdles to building relationships with them are logistical: different time zones, different languages, lack of opportunity to meet face-to-face, reliance on e-mail and voice mail as the main communication vehicles. To overcome these obstacles, consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ Set the expectation that you will speak regularly with each individual and that the team will have opportunities to interact. For example, you might have a weekly phone call with each person and a weekly videoconference call with the team.
- ▶ Arrange to meet your direct reports throughout the year. At a minimum, you should meet each person at least once. If it's feasible, try to get together every month or once a quarter. Also take advantage of events, such as professional conferences, to gather your team.
- ▶ Think of e-mail as a way of having a friendly chat like one that you might have with someone walking down the hall: How are you? Did you have a good weekend? Do you have any questions or concerns?
- ▶ Include all team members in communications and decisions, and schedule team meetings so that remote workers can join in by telephone or videoconference. E-mail documents to each person before a meeting.

Recommend weekly phone calls with direct reports in other locations.

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- ▶ If you don't see each other often, it's important to be very clear about expectations and assignments, and to follow up regularly. This will help you catch issues quickly and give you additional opportunities to build your relationships by working through problems together.

Cultivate networks of people across a variety of functions and locations within the organization

▼ Effective leaders have networks that extend beyond their immediate area to include key people in other functions, locations, and organizations. These relationships provide leaders with the flexibility, resources, and strategic advantages they need to succeed in a fast-paced business world. Consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ Determine whether the structure at your organization is formal or informal. This will help you determine your strategy for creating connections with other groups.
 - ▷ If the structure is formal, make sure you understand the protocol. Work through the structure to create relationships with people in other levels, functions, and locations.
 - ▷ If the structure is informal, find a mentor to help you navigate the organization and figure out whom you need in your network. An experienced colleague can guide you in building relationships with people from all areas of the organization.
- ▶ List the groups you work with inside and outside of your organization, and list your contacts in each. Include their names, their functional responsibilities, the ways in which they can support you, and the support you can offer them. If you do not have a contact for each group, identify people you would like to meet.
- ▶ Serve on cross-functional committees to work with leaders in other areas. Make an effort to stay in contact with these people once your involvement with the committee has ended.
- ▶ Attend company social events to meet people from other functional areas and organizations. Company picnics, award banquets, open houses, charity events, and customer events are excellent ways to meet people informally.

Suggest that people co-chair an event, such as a summer picnic or a holiday party.



- ▶ Get to know your vendors, suppliers, and customers better. This will help you work with them more effectively and creatively. Also, because you will understand each other better, it will help you to both provide and receive better service.
- ▶ Build relationships with others in your profession by joining a professional association or attending trade shows. Networks can provide professional development, business opportunities, and resources to do your job better. In addition, building your reputation externally can often help you increase your status within your organization.
- ▶ Broaden your circle of acquaintances. Introduce yourself to people you have wanted to meet. Consider setting a goal to become acquainted with a certain number of people each week.
- ▶ Find a well-connected person who would be willing to act as your mentor. This person can provide valuable information about key people in other functional areas, such as who has the authority or influence to get things done, who can provide advice or political support, or who has experience or skills in an area relevant to yours.
- ▶ Develop relationships with key people in other functions and at other levels in your organization. Find ways to stay in touch with them—common interests, projects, committees—and communicate regularly.

Leverage networks to get things done

Effective leaders leverage their relationships with people inside and outside the organization to get things done. They know how and when to involve others, gain support, and mobilize them for action. Consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ If you need practical assistance—advice on a proposal, another person's time, priority for your project—state your needs in person; if that's not an option, use the phone or e-mail. Be prepared to negotiate and adjust your plan in order to receive the assistance that you need.
- ▶ If you need support from several people, think about the best way to present your position so others will see mutual benefit in supporting you.

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Study the organizational chart and discuss who should be in a person's peer network.

- ▶ Treat other network members with respect. Always ask for people's help; never demand it or try to manipulate people. Keep in mind that strong networks are built on mutual respect.
- ▶ Realize that asking for help after having no contact for a long time may feel manipulative to some people. A colleague who hasn't heard from you in several months may not be responsive to your request for support. Although it takes time and effort to maintain regular contact, the benefits of doing so are well worth the investment.
- ▶ Identify the people in your organization who successfully leverage their networks to achieve results and influence others. Take them to lunch and find out how they do it.