

What is an Ideal Network?

A business consultant set a goal to secure a particular type of client—a real estate developer. She made three connections with members of her network: one to secure a name to go with her goal, and two connections to create a direct link to the goal. Within a week, the consultant had a name for the developer of choice. With assistance from one of the connections she made during the week, a meeting was set with the developer and shortly afterward, the developer hired the consultant. Goal achieved. That was two and a half years ago, and the developer remains a good client and has brought more business to the consultant. An ideal network includes only the best contacts to create the best connections.

A top-selling real estate team decided to target investors as their “ideal clients.” A team partner made a call to a contact in her network to help map out a plan to create visibility within this market. That contact, a marketing consultant, made three calls within her network: one to a Web site designer to rework the existing Web site for “investor appeal,” and two calls to contacts for the purposes of generating visible sponsorship opportunities. Along with the perfect visibility inside the target market came invitations for prestigious events for the real estate partners as well as the marketing consultant. Mission accomplished! An ideal network is organized for easy access and quick results.

When a beach resort decided to cease operations, the owner called a professional networker to help the employees transition into other employment when the resort closed. The networker turned to her network to make some initial inquiries, which resulted in

over 70 connections -- at least 3 good job leads for each employee. Two months after the project initiated, success was in grasp. In the process, the networker found employment opportunities for two other people who weren't even on her employee-client list. An ideal network can pull off the impossible ... and then some.

What is an "ideal network," really? For the business consultant, marketing consultant, and professional networker in the stories (who, by the way, are all the same person), an ideal network is one that can help her manage each goal with simplicity and speed. Her network, unlike an ordinary address book or database, is first organized according to her very specific needs, and second, continually developed based on her honest appraisal of how she utilizes each contact. It's her ability to look beyond a person's occupation to see the true attraction she has with her network members that allows a business woman to bring ideas to life and projects to fruition time and again with incredible finesse.

Here are a few tips to help you in planning and utilizing your own ideal network:

1) Staff members have roles and job descriptions. Your network is your personal staff, so consider how you utilize them and assign those roles to your network members.

Categorize accordingly.

2) Cull out "deadwood." People with whom you've had no contact inside of three years might be acquaintances, but there isn't enough growth in relationship for them to be considered ideal for your network "staff." Do keep in your network decision makers or experts in fields of interest to you.

3) Every network should include mentors, connectors, and media contacts. Mentors provide inspiration and guidance; connectors know everyone and love making introductions, while media contacts are invaluable sources for information, publicity, and marketing venues. Include these in your network.

4) Once a goal is clear, identify the appropriate contacts from your network and make the connection. Don't let the fact that you may be clueless as to how to reach a goal thwart your efforts. If you plan your first level of "ideal network" contacts well, they will provide the "how." You will ask each contact for a next step or another contact to help you reach your goal. Chart your way through levels of contacts in order to see exactly where you are going and who is paving the way. The chart is a visual map and helps to keep you on track. More important, it documents your progress so that when your goal is reached, you know who to thank for what. Follow up with any lead that you commit to as the contact that provided the lead may follow up with you.

Your own ideal network can be organized in an hour or two one afternoon with long-lasting rewards of incredible success achieved with synchronicity and flow. As a creative entrepreneur or business professional, what you wish to accomplish is important and personal—and it is available to you with a customized network of staff members just waiting to be of service. Now, that's ideal!

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