

Be a Connector

If you really believe that six degrees is all that separates us from anyone else in the world, you realize how important network connections are. People tell me I'm the ultimate connector; I take that as a compliment. For twenty years I've made my living running an executive search firm. That means having no inventory other than relationships and selling a product that talks, which, as you can imagine, is a challenging task. The one truth that I have learned over the years is to achieve your goals in life, you can't get there alone. You need to develop an extensive personal and professional network of trust-based relationships. Why is this so important, in a technology-based field like information security? First, now more than ever security officers are expected to work closely with multiple lines of business to help them achieve organizational goals. As someone who is frequently required to affect change through influence alone, it's essential to understand the power of a solid network. The bottom line is: The greater your network, the greater your scope of influence.

So how do you go about increasing your scope of influence? One way is for you to become a connector. Connectors understand the power of generosity, the basic rule of having to give before you get. One of the newest requirements companies look for when hiring a security officer is the ability to socialize a program. If you think this can be accomplished by just telling your clients and customers what it is that you need, you're sadly mistaken. Successful and savvy security officers will tell you that they understand and can articulate how their initiatives will benefit their clients and customers. You have to deliver a message about them and not about you. It's important to understand that once you are viewed as someone who helps others achieve their goals, it is much more likely that others will go out of their way to help you. Most people don't realize the fundamental truth that real networking is accomplished by discovering ways to make other people successful.

The second reason why networking is important is the companies we work for no longer give us the promise of lifelong employment. There are very few people who grow up in and retire from the same company. Even if you don't own your own company, in terms of your career, you are an entrepreneur. You need to really give some thought to what your personal brand represents. The information security industry, like many niche markets, is very close knit. Your reputation is incredibly important and will follow you throughout your career.

One of the ways to create your own brand awareness is to get actively involved in industry organizations or associations. Over 200 of the most senior female executives in the security industry utilize **The Executive Women's Forum** as their venue to connect. By participating in this community, these women make connections with leading experts across all corporate industries, as well as in government and educational institutions. They can draw on the strength and knowledge of these experts and use these contacts to increase their value within their own organization. It is incredibly important for you to connect with people you admire for their knowledge, accomplishments and ethics. Actively participating in a group

like **The Executive Women's Forum (www.infosecuritywomen.com)** will increase your circle of reference and influence.

Investigate what organization will give you the best return on investment for the time you will devote to cultivating new relationships. Remember that you need to make sincere connections with the people you meet, so don't just attend--volunteer to help or participate as a panelist or speaker.

In summary, the basis of true networking is the ability to build relationships, not just professional contacts. Many people view networking as collecting business cards, making introductions, or attending industry events. When doing this, recognize that in order for it to be effective, you must go well beyond superficial introductions and establish deeper, more meaningful connections. When expanding your network, make sure you include key people that you feel have very extensive networks themselves. Even if you aren't comfortable initially with the concept of networking, if you are successful at establishing relationships with individuals who are extremely connected, you can benefit from their extensive network. I'll remind you that it has to be a two-way street; you'll also have to add value to their network. Make sure you understand what it is you have to offer before making an introduction or request for help. Much is written lately about adaptive networks. You need to become an adaptive human network, cultivating and leveraging connections to be your agents of influence. Once you have connected with someone, you have to make a conscious effort to follow up and keep in touch with them. It requires time and commitment on your part, but you'll find great pleasure from the professional contacts who grow to be valued friends.

In order to be successful in networking, you can't just do it when you are in a crisis. You need to adopt a philosophy of helping others achieve success throughout the course of not only your career, but your life. You never know when you'll need your connections the most. When you are in crisis mode, it most likely won't be your intelligence or good looks that will help you out; it will be a friend, colleague, client or customer who you've helped out in the past.

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