

Make Networking Your Professional Boomerang



BY GINA RILEY

Exercising my networking muscles has become a natural reflex.

Instinctively, my mind moves like a pinball that lights up with ideas about who to meet or bring together.

I don't have second thoughts about how introducing two amazing people benefits me, because I have a generous mindset, What I give will boomerang back to me.

More than ever, connection

and networking are correlated to the ease of making career transitions.

Networking and relationship building are keys to unlock doors to collaboration opportunities or a new position created and customized to your unique value proposition.

Your success depends on an interconnected network. You are responsible for its design.

Are you confounded by the idea of professional networking? If so, let's start with what networking isn't.

Networking is not asking for a job. It is not an invitation to "pick someone's brain" without a plan or purpose. It is not calling a meeting and aimlessly describing your career history.

Intentionality wins over winging it.

Ways to design your professional networking strategy are numerous, leading to beautiful, productive outcomes.

One way is to recruit your own personal "Board of Directors" (BOD) to support you in your career journey.

Another way is to create and build a professional network outside of your company walls. Then, there is the innocent connection request that leads to a beautiful personal relationships with collaborative, professional outcomes.

I reached out to women I admire to ask them about their networking experiences.

I wanted to know how connecting with others fueled their personal and professional success and ways they built their network. Allow their stories to inspire you and call you to action!



IMAGE BY KASEY

1 Build your own professional “Board of Directors”.

Simply put, you are a “Business In A Business” and you need to nurture your career and attend to your brand so you are ready to seize the next opportunity when it presents itself.

One way to truly own your career is by constructing a professional Board of Directors (BOD).

According to Lakecia Gunter, Vice President and General Manager, IOT Global and Strategic Engagement at Microsoft, the purpose of a BOD is to act as an accelerator for personal and professional growth.

Gunter says, “Every successful company has a board of directors that consists of a diversity of people who offer different perspectives, knowledge, skills, and insights, all in service of one goal - to help the company drive phenomenal growth. Each of us must cultivate our own personal board of directors to help us elevate to the next level of success we desire.”

And her advice as to who should be on your BOD?

- You need a team of people around you who believe in you and can see a vision for you beyond what you can see for yourself. Identify individuals you can

partner with to co-create a better version of you (and them!).

- Enroll individuals who can help you navigate fear, doubt, and all those negative voices in your head.
- Identify people who inspire you and have qualities you want to develop.
- Recruit a truth teller - a person who isn't afraid to tell you the truth or call BS when they see it. They hold up a mirror to you or maybe even give you some tough love. The person who is not afraid to tell you when you're out to lunch!
- Enlist a devil's advocate to shine a light on your blind spots.

If you choose the right people, they will tell you things you may not want to hear.

They do it with love and support and you trust them enough to hear and own their feedback.

After talking to any one of your BOD members, you should feel like you can conquer the world!

How do you go about asking a person to be on your BOD?

Gunter's advice is when you find someone you may believe to be a good fit for your BOD, start by getting to know them and cultivating a relationship first.

Then, the ask becomes an easy one.

One key aspect of building a successful relationship is to ensure it is mutually beneficial.

Find ways to invest in your BOD in the same way they are investing in you, such as sending them articles on topics you know they are interested in, making an introduction to someone in your network, or reviewing a presentation they are preparing.

The key is listening and understanding their needs and finding ways to support their growth and development.

2 Find a professional network outside of your company.

Having close professional relationships in our workplaces is one key to happiness on the job.

However, there are times when sharing our problems, concerns or career aspirations with our immediate counterparts may leave us feeling vulnerable and unsupported.

In the worst case, we tamp down our desires to seek growth opportunities.

There is an alternative way to go about surrounding yourself with the support you need.

Kasey Jones, a Thought Leadership Coach and B2B Growth Strategist, beautifully epitomizes how an interconnected network outside her organization can blossom into a full-blown support system.

She leads by example, finding ways to bring her networked community together and cheering them on to explore the possibilities through connection.

Whether it is hosting webinars, virtual book clubs, or a "Galentine's Day" party for local women on February 14th, Jones supplies her network with a generous stream of business-related content and personal growth information.



IMAGE BY KRISTIN SHERRY

When I asked Jones about the importance of her professional network outside of her organization, this is what she had to say,

“Your personal and long-time friends can’t understand and support your career transitions in the same way as your work friends. You don’t speak the same language.

Especially during a pandemic, the lines between the personal and professional are blurring at an accelerated pace.

We need ways to express our vulnerabilities by talking with professional peers who can relate to our work experiences.

If you are an entrepreneur, the isolation we feel is amplified.

I build personal relationships with people who come together, understand and magnify each other’s strengths, and serve as a sounding board for ideas. For me, it is all about collaboration and less about transactions.”

When asked why women especially need to attend to their network, Jones replied, “Because we are terrible cheerleaders for ourselves and amazing cheerleaders for each other.

We help shut down negative self-talk in others and serve as a hype-squad to

encourage positive action.

I recommend people be effusive and skip ahead in relationship building by being real and vulnerable.”

She went on to say, “I think we need to be expansive in our thinking. Things are changing with the upcoming generations. There are more seats at the table for women and with more options we can afford to lift each other up and help take on these leadership roles for the betterment of our communities.”

Open yourself up to the unexpected – one pivotal moment can change everything.

Kristin Sherry is a best-selling author and creator of the YouMap® Career Assessment Profile.

Her personal friendship and professional relationship with Lila Smith, Creator of Say Things Better, is a shining example of how a simple connection request turned into a heart-to-heart friendship and professional collaboration.

Their story played out something like this ...

On December 17, 2017, Sherry received this LinkedIn connection request, “Kristin! I keep seeing you around and I love what you have to say.



IMAGE BY LAKECIA GUNTER

I'd really like more of your voice in my community. Would you like to connect and make it LinkedIn official?"

Sherry had no inkling what was about to develop after accepting the invitation from Smith.

Since then, they have "leveled up each other's lives and careers" by first becoming a client of the other, referring business to each other, and in March 2020, they co-authored a children's book together called, *You've Got Values!*. Additionally, Sherry credits Smith with helping her shape the messaging that allowed her to further expand her frameworks and business into the global marketplace.

Summary

Recruiting a professional BOD, building a network outside your organization's walls, and taking a risk to spark a conversation are three ways for women to own their own career with meaningful networking practices.

How will you build up and nurture your network? How does your network contribute to your long-term career aspirations? Why wait when personal and professional fulfillment are on the other side?

Remember, what you put out will boomerang back to you.

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YOURSELF
UP TO THE
UNEXPECTED**
**1 PIVOTAL MOMENT
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