



5 Strategies for Intentional Relationship Building — The Social Way to Succeed

Career Development



It's easy to think that in order to succeed, you need to put your nose to the grindstone and not "waste time" making friends, socializing, or meeting people. But the opposite is true. You need to engage — not avoid your colleagues — if you want to succeed. However, this does not mean you should be

manipulative.

Instead, focus on being authentic, staying respectful, and giving back. Relationships are only manipulative or misleading when one party disproportionately gains and does not give back to the other. It is up to you to develop these important, mutually-beneficial relationships and leverage them in your professional growth. Focusing on forging lasting relationships is the best long-term strategy.

1. Become valuable to others

Helping others will help you feel productive and possibly even indispensable. It will also help you contribute to your team, both internally and externally. Focusing on how you can help others will also highlight areas where you need to invest in learning and teach you how to calibrate your responses, depending on the size and quality of the problem.

Over time, more and more people will come to you for advice, and you will become the go-to person for certain problems. In the process, you will develop empathy and social awareness to help you read others, relate to them, and become even more valuable to those around you.

2. Build relationships

Connect personally to your colleagues. Talk about their families, their hobbies, and their stories. Allow them to share their passions with you. Focus on building authentic relationships. Professional relationships are important in your career progression. In the process, you will become more collaborative and become an integral part of the team. Always recognize the need to strategically invest in relationships that may benefit you now or later. After all, you must work with people every day. It is a lot better when you have great relationships with them.

3. Know your colleagues' expertise

Get to know what your colleagues know and reach out to them for advice. Don't just know people — know what they know. You need to know who knows what so that you can strategically leverage information and experiences to get your work done efficiently and effectively.

Build a network of experts to approach when you need expert advice, such as when you're confronted with an issue where you lack the subject-matter skill, knowledge, or experience. If you build a wide network of experts, you will have people who can give you constructive and useful feedback when you have a difficult problem.

4. Find an informal mentor

Develop informal mentorship relationships based on personal connections and the mutual exchanging of advice. Involve more experienced colleagues in the sharing of guidance and information.

These professional friendships may help you identify which skill areas to develop, how to address issues that may concern you, how to navigate challenging situations, and whom you may need to know to advance. Moreover, a reliable mentor can help calibrate your strategy and responses to difficult situations. They can also put things in perspective and normalize your struggles.

Finally, mentors also help you by identifying opportunities to learn and improve, pushing the limits of your abilities, assisting you in becoming a more confident professional, and helping you bounce back from any setbacks.

5. Create a support circle

It helps to help people who will speak well of you. A compliment or introduction from the right person can boost your reputation. Relationships can make people think positively of you merely by association. Relationships with supportive, outgoing people can also help you make a good impression, stay poised and strong, and weather the most brutal storm. And it starts with finding the right crew.

Ultimately, your best opportunities and impactful connections will come as a result of your relationship building efforts. Moreover, in order to build deep and wide relationships, be open-minded so you can consider many sides of different issues. Don't write off a potential relationship simply because you think you won't get along or the other person comes from a different background. We can learn the most from those who are different from ourselves, whether in terms of background, personality, career status, or other factors.

Most importantly, intentionally developing lasting and meaningful relationships is a crucial first step toward taking control and responsibility of your career. No matter how much you build relationships, others won't make your career happen. You need to put in the work! This means taking charge and changing what you can in your professional and personal life. Building relationships is an underrated aspect of your job that you can consistently improve, influence, and, over time, reap great benefits.

[Olga V. Mack](#)



Fellow

CodeX

Olga V. Mack is a fellow at CodeX, The Stanford Center for Legal Informatics, and a Generative AI Editor at law.MIT. Mack shares her views in her columns on ACC Docket, Newsweek, Bloomberg, VentureBeat, Above the Law, and many other publications.

Mack is also an award-winning (such as the prestigious ACC 2018 Top 10 30-Somethings and ABA 2022 Women of Legal Tech) general counsel, operations professional, startup advisor, public speaker, adjunct professor, and entrepreneur. She co-founded SunLaw, an organization dedicated to preparing women in-house attorneys to become general counsels and legal leaders, and WISE to help female law firm partners become rainmakers.

She has authored numerous books, including *Get on Board: Earning Your Ticket to a Corporate Board Seat*, *Fundamentals of Smart Contract Security and Blockchain Value: Transforming Business Models, Society, and Communities*. She is working on her next books: *Visual IQ for Lawyers* (ABA 2024), *The Rise of Product Lawyers: An Analytical Framework to Systematically Advise Your Clients Throughout the Product Lifecycle* (Globe Law and Business 2024), and *Legal Operations in the Age of AI and Data* (Globe Law and Business 2024).