

## MAKING CONNECTIONS FOR SUCCESS: A NETWORKING EXERCISE

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*Networking is important, and it is a skill. The authors have developed an exercise that provides students with a realistic networking experience within the safe environment of the classroom. The exercise provides a lead-in to the discussion of networking techniques, active listening, the cultivation of secondary networks, appropriate ways to prepare for a networking opportunity, and tactics for cultivating relationships after a networking event. This exercise has an experiential learning and reflective assessment component so that it is aimed at giving students concrete experience, feedback, and an opportunity to reflect on ways to improve their current skill level.*

**Keywords:** *networking exercise; experiential learning; networking theory*

### Networking

Research has shown that networking is a valuable skill in enhancing careers and in improving entrepreneurial success. Networking is the "building and nurturing of personal and professional relationships to create a system or chain of information, contacts, and support" (de Janasz, Dowd, & Schneider, 2002, p. 192). It helps individuals build social capital, which is the goodwill that is created through social relations that can be mobilized to facilitate the attainment of needed resources, influence, and sponsorship (Adler & Kwon, 2002). Accordingly, because networking is so critical to the success of managers and entrepreneurs alike, it is important that educators give students the opportunity to improve their networking skills (Whiting & de Janasz, 2004). One

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JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT EDUCATION, Vol. 31 No. 1, February 2007 104-127  
DOI: 10.1177/1052562906286860  
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of the best ways to foster skill development in the education process is to use experiential exercises that promote active learning (Marcic, Seltzer, & Vaill, 2001). In this article, we present an exercise that has experiential learning and reflective assessment components that are aimed at giving students "concrete experience, feedback and an opportunity to reflect on ways to improve their current skill level" (de Janasz et al., 2002, p. xiv). We have used this exercise seven times in the past 2 years within a general entrepreneurship course taught at graduate and undergraduate levels. Approximately 300 students, in class sizes ranging from 35 to 45, have participated in the exercise. Students come from various disciplines across campus as the course does not require any prerequisites. The exercise for this number of students is designed to fit into a 90-100 minute class period.

### THE VALUE IN LEARNING TO NETWORK

Networking has been shown to foster career success (Eddleston, Baldridge, & Veiga, 2004; Forrett & Dougherty, 2001; Hwang, Kessler, & Francesco, 2004; Luthans, Hodgetts, & Rosenkrantz, 1988) and to improve learning and knowledge acquisition (Leeman & Whymark, 2001; Sonnenberg, 1990). Accordingly, as noted by Seibert, Kraimer, and Liden (2001), "popular advice for getting ahead rarely fails to mention the importance of networking for the achievement of career goals" (p. 219).

Although the importance of networking and social capital has been advocated since the early work of researchers such as Kanter (1977), Granovetter (1973), and Lin, Ensel, and Vaughn (1981), possessing effective networking skills is even more important given changes in the work environment. Few people today work for the same organization throughout their career, whether because of downsizing or because of the boundaryless nature of modern careers (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Eby, Butts, & Lockwood, 2003). With the advent of the boundaryless career has come increased advocacy for developing networking skills to accumulate social capital. Individuals are encouraged to develop networks with suppliers, customers, and professional contacts who can provide expertise, reputation development, learning, and access to resources (H. Parker & Arthur, 2000). Networking in the era of the boundaryless career is, therefore, seen as an important competency that will lead to the development of "career communities" that can provide career support and personal development (H. Parker & Arthur, 2000, p. 105). Understanding the importance of creating career communities is also key for students nearing graduation given that 70% to 80% of the best jobs come from networking, as opposed to the submission of resumes, applying for job postings, or utilizing executive search firms (Koss-Feder, 1999). Furthermore, studies show that the most successful managers spend 70% more time engaged in networking activities (Luthans et al., 1988) and

that networking with powerful individuals is positively related to promotions (Eddleston et al., 2004).

Networking and building social capital has also become increasingly important to the success of entrepreneurs (Huggins, 2000; Sirmon & Hitt, 2003); that is, an entrepreneur's network is strategically one of the most important resources of a business (Johannisson, 1990). Networking helps an entrepreneur build more effective relationships with customers, support organizations, and financial institutions (Sirmon & Hitt, 2003). As such, developing contacts through networking is important for starting a business and for the continued development of a business (Ostgaard & Birley, 1996).

Entrepreneurs' networks provide information and access to resources that are beyond what they could possess alone. Networking allows entrepreneurs to compare notes on prices, contracts, customers, suppliers, taxes, and marketing (R. A. Parker, 1997). Such discussions can help entrepreneurs judge their effectiveness and can also lead to referrals and connections with possible collaborators or investors (R. A. Parker, 1997). Building relationships through networking can help entrepreneurs gain credibility and legitimacy in the marketplace, and the information exchanged through networking can lead to the identification of potential opportunities (Cooper, 2002). Indeed, networks allow entrepreneurial businesses to compete in markets without first owning all of the resources necessary to do so (Hitt, Ireland, Camp, & Sexton, 2001), and the development of an effective network has been linked to business survival and growth (Baum, Locke, & Smith, 2001; Donckels & Lambrecht, 1997). Therefore, it is important for entrepreneurs to continuously develop their networks so as to achieve their economic goals and to grow successfully.

Network structure also affects the business opportunities and performance of a business (Burt, 1992; Uzzi, 1997). Entrepreneurs with networks comprising a large number of contacts (density) with a variety of relations and capabilities (diversity) are best able to respond to environmental opportunities and to acquire the resources they need to manage their businesses (Dubini & Aldrich, 1991; Kristiansen, 2004). Although network density and diversity are two common factors that improve the effectiveness of a network, there are three other components that entrepreneurs should aim for when developing their networks. The first focuses on exclusivity. Establishing exclusive relationships with exchange partners can help a business create a competitive advantage (Cook & Emerson, 1978) through the procurement of unique resources, technology, and information. Second, being able to broker connections between otherwise disconnected contacts can increase the influence and power of an entrepreneur (Burt, 1992). By creating a bridge between disconnected contacts, the entrepreneur has influence over whose interests are served by the bridge, thereby enhancing the entrepreneur's social capital and the entrepreneurial opportunities within his or her network (Burt, 1992; Rodan & Galunic, 2004). Indeed, possessing a bridge position in a network

has been found to be associated with stronger performance (Rodan & Galunic, 2004). Last, access to resources and knowledge can be improved by reaching out to contacts that belong to partners' networks (Hitt et al., 2001). Being able to tap into the networks of direct contacts has been argued to be the most important resource that networking provides (Kogut, 2000). In this way, resources, knowledge, and credibility arise not only from direct network ties but also from the indirect ties that are referred through direct contacts. Therefore, an entrepreneur should aim to develop a network that is dense and diverse, while also creating exclusive partnerships, relationships that he or she can bridge, and connections with individuals who have contacts that can be of assistance. An effective entrepreneurial network should thus be balanced in content and relationship structure.

Although we have shown that networking helps managers and entrepreneurs build social capital and credibility and gain access to resources and information, the original purpose of the exercise was to give entrepreneurship students the opportunity to practice their networking skills and to discover how effective networking can help them succeed. Even though experiential learning appears to be quite popular in the area of organizational behavior, as noted by the many texts devoted to the topic (e.g., de Janasz et al., 2002; Marcic et al., 2001), few exercises exist that are aimed at entrepreneurship students. Although students in organizational behavior or management classes can use the exercise as described below, we also append an adaptation for instructors who choose to use the activity as a professional networking event for a job search.

#### **PRINCIPLES TO DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE STUDENT NETWORKING**

By taking part in a simulated networking event, students have the opportunity to practice networking and to reflect on their communication and interpersonal skills. This networking exercise serves three main objectives. First, the exercise provides networking experience. Second, it demonstrates the principles of effective networking—the importance of memorable introductions, the merged network approach, and network diversity, which are usually presented in lectures, discussions, and readings—and makes these concepts memorable. Third, the exercise encourages discussion about effective and ineffective networking techniques, which allows students to reflect on their communication and interpersonal skills. We now discuss the principles of effective networking.

For entrepreneurs to succeed, they must be able to marshal together resources to bring their business ideas to fruition (Ostgaard & Birley, 1996). These resources can consist of money, team members, customers, employees, advisers, suppliers, or professional services. The main method entrepreneurs use to locate these resources is through personal contacts with

people who have control over those resources (Ostgaard & Birley, 1996). Because start-ups are risky ventures and entrepreneurs are usually cash poor, entrepreneurs must attract the resources they need by making their business ideas sound compelling. Therefore, the first step to persuading others is to create a 30-second business plan presentation, also known as an *elevator pitch* (Mathews, 2000). An elevator pitch should be concise because people's minds tend to wander after about 45 seconds and first impressions are generally established within the initial 2 to 4 minutes of meeting (Marcic et al., 2001). Good elevator pitches generally (a) say who you are, (b) describe the salient features of your business plan, and (c) get your listener excited about what you do so that she or he wants to hear more details. These presentations need to be succinct, interesting, and memorable, which means they need to be rehearsed (Ennico, 2003). Therefore, for entrepreneurs, successful networking involves the ability to describe succinctly their business concepts to make their businesses interesting to others and to concentrate their efforts on meeting people who can help their companies succeed.

Accordingly, one of the tasks for the exercise was to get students to develop an elevator speech that was concise and exciting. The importance of a concise elevator speech is that it not only imparts information quickly but also indicates that the entrepreneur has a clear understanding of his or her business. If the student cannot explain the business quickly, it generally means that he or she does not really understand it. Students also learn through this exercise that they need to practice their elevator speech because the pitches are not easy to ad lib, and the pitches are difficult to remember when the students feel stressed by the situation.

When the elevator pitch is prepared, the entrepreneur is ready to begin making contacts. Entrepreneurs are often required to interact with strangers so that they can inform them about their business and find the necessary resources for their business; it is recommended that entrepreneurs act socially and civilly and focus on treating people as people rather than as mere resources (RoAne, 2000). Entrepreneurs need to be proactive rather than passive in a social setting. They need to take the lead in trying to meet people rather than sitting back and hoping people will come to them (Misner, 2003). This can be difficult for many individuals who are not naturally outgoing and social. However, from this exercise students begin to understand the importance of physical proximity to effective networking. Proximity promotes serendipitous interactions in which "people gradually come to learn about each other, become comfortable with each other and develop bonds that enable future access" (Borgatti & Cross, 2003, p. 436). Therefore, besides learning what to say about one's business, students also learn the importance of where to stand at a networking event.

Another principle for students to discover is the difference between the transactional approach and the merged network approach. A transactional

approach consists of two individuals coming in contact and deciding if there is any direct link between them. If so, a transaction in the exchange of contact information occurs; if not, they move on. This is a very limiting approach when trying to find a few good contacts among many possibilities. The more effective approach is the merged network approach because it takes advantage of indirect contacts by extending efforts to each person's own network of contacts. As such, even if there is no direct fit between the two parties, each party can help the other by recommending seemingly useful contacts to connect with at an event. For example, if one person wanted to start a bakery while the other was an investor in technology start-ups, the two would have no direct relationship. However, instead of just breaking off, they could point out others that they know who might be useful contacts or offer to keep a lookout for better contacts for the other in the future. This tactic doubles their ability to find direct contacts and can help each person's network grow. Therefore, the students learn through the exercise that a cooperative approach to networking can help them more effectively search for contacts in a networking situation. Indeed, Dubini and Aldrich (1991) argued that successful entrepreneurs are mindful of increasing their networks' density and diversity.

In addition, this exercise encourages students to appreciate the principle of network diversity and weak ties. Network diversity, in terms of occupational roles and resources, has been found to be positively related to new venture growth and entrepreneurial success (Ostgaard & Birley, 1996). In participating in this exercise, students begin to see the value of creating a network made up of individuals with different resources, contacts, expertise, and sources of information. In this way, the exercise puts into practice the networking concept associated with structural holes theory (Burt, 1992). This theory focuses on the value of diverse members within a network and suggests that individuals with such networks can accumulate power because of the ability to coordinate activities and act as a bridge between contacts; networks rich in structural holes and diversity provide greater access to unique information, greater bargaining power, and greater visibility (Seibert et al., 2001). Concerning weak ties, this exercise demonstrates to students the importance of reaching out to individuals outside of one's social group; that is, when individuals develop ties with "strangers" or people normally outside of their social group, they are more likely to gain access to unique information, resources, and influence (Granovetter, 1973). As such, this exercise demonstrates to students the importance of attending networking events and continually establishing new connections with people.

## **The Exercise**

The Making Connections for Success exercise requires students to participate in a simulated networking event to make connections with people who

can provide them with useful resources. During the exercise, each student is required to take on two roles: (a) entrepreneur looking for resources in one half of the exercise and (b) resourceful individual looking to connect with entrepreneurs in the other half. The exercise is usually scheduled near the end of the semester. By this time in the course, students have been exposed to what entrepreneurs do and to what people who interact with entrepreneurs do; they are familiar with typical roles, such as bankers, investors, partners, and advisory board members. If the exercise is held earlier in the semester, class time needs to be spent on explaining the other roles a student might play in the exercise. At the end of the exercise, students write a reflection paper on their networking experience.

### **ADVANCE PREPARATION**

Instructors prepare their students for the event with copies of the general instructions for the simulation (see Appendix A) and complementary readings about elevator pitches and networking events. We have a preparation class for the exercise a week before the event occurs. Students can be given, for example, two articles on preparing elevator speeches (e.g., Ennico, 2003; Mathews, 2000) and two articles on networking (e.g., Misner, 2003; RoAne, 2000). In class, we discuss what will take place at the event, review the articles, and discuss what makes a business idea interesting to others.

At the end of the preparation class, the students decide on the type of business that they want to start. There is no limitation on the types of companies they should consider starting. They write a two-sentence description of their business and its location and submit this to the instructor about 1 week before the actual event.

When the descriptions are received, the instructor divides the businesses into two groups—one for each half of the exercise. The instructor then prepares a list of resources that the entrepreneurs would require for their businesses. Some of these resources are specific to entrepreneurs, such as angel investors; however, most are generic, which the students will know, such as an aerobics club will need an aerobics instructor. It is recommended that the instructors create these resources so that the match to a particular business is not necessarily straightforward. This will encourage the students to investigate to see whether there is a connection to their business. Instructors should make sure that there are several possible connections for each student to find. For an example of the list of businesses and resources for one half of the exercise, see Appendix B.

Classes are divided into two groups so that in two rounds of the event, each student will play two roles, one as the entrepreneur of his or her business idea, and one as a resource for another entrepreneur. Instructors then assign each student to play the resource roles on a semirandom basis. If

instructors believe that a student fits a particular role well, that student can be assigned to that role. If there are no obvious candidates, students can be randomly assigned to roles. Instructors then distribute name cards with the students' names on one side and the designation of "entrepreneur" or their assigned resource role on the other side.

The exercise requires a room large enough for the class laid out in a way that facilitates movement and interaction. A classroom with moveable furniture (not fixed desks) is acceptable. Students circulate around refreshment tables and need to be able to mingle. Students can still be isolates if they want to; however, the room should be designed to facilitate interaction.

To simulate a typical networking event, the room can be set up with two tables, one at each end of the room. The instructor can provide refreshments—snacks and beverages—and plates, cups, napkins, and utensils. A few tables with chairs can be placed around the room but not enough for everyone to sit down.

A table at the entrance to the room holds name cards for the first round. When students arrive, they pick up their cards and find out their roles before entering the room.

### THE SETUP

The students are told that they will go to a conference room where there will be food and beverages. They will be required to take turns playing one of two roles: the entrepreneur of the business they have submitted, or a resource role for other entrepreneurs. Students are also informed that in both roles, they will need to actively intermingle and socialize with each other to find the contacts related to their companies or roles. During the networking exercise, students are asked to note the contacts' names and why they feel the contact is worthwhile. They are also informed that there will be at least five contacts for each person, although students usually find more. This target number spurs them to continue mingling even though they may have made several contacts. The contact information is necessary for them to complete their reflection assignment, which requires them to compile a list of their contacts and the connections in both roles. The students are also told to keep note of what tactics work and do not work in finding contacts and networking, so that they can report on this in their reflection paper.

Anticipating that some students may be tempted to simply blurt out their role and who they are looking for in a crowd of students, we created a simple rule that students cannot act in a rude manner in the simulated event. Students need to manage their impressions just as they would at a real social event: They need to be polite, talk in small groups, and not yell out. This rule prevents students from going up to a crowd and announcing, "Does anyone have anything to do with XXX?" Such behavior would drop

them from the invitation list (real world) and their grade would be lowered (academic world).

## **TIMING**

*First cycle.* We use a rule of thumb of about 1 minute for each student in the exercise. So for 40 students, we allow 45 minutes. For more or fewer students, we adjust the time allotted accordingly. This timing was found to be most appropriate because it does not allow enough time for everyone to talk to everyone else in a sociable way while also eating and drinking. Plus, the timing allows students to "warm up" to the event. In our experiences, we have found that students take to their roles easily; however, little interaction occurs in the first 15 minutes. They have no trouble being bankers or ad salesmen; the playacting often brings out personalities that we do not see in the first 10 weeks of classes. However, they are shy and not proactive; they do not intermingle at first.

Instructors should make themselves available to the students in case any of them have been assigned to act in roles that they do not understand, but for nothing else. Instructors should allow the group dynamics to develop organically.

*Second cycle.* Equal to the first. The students who were entrepreneurs in the first cycle retrieve role cards at the entrance table—those who had played resource roles become entrepreneurs. The second cycle timing includes the role-card retrieval time because students quickly return to an active networking mode—they typically do not need another warm-up period.

*Follow-up.* At the end of the networking event, students are reminded about the reflection paper assignment. It is recommended that they create two tables listing their contact names and the reasons they are reasonable contacts. They should be given about a week to complete the assignment. By including a reflective writing assignment and class discussion, the learning objectives of the exercise are strengthened and solidified (Dennehy, Sims, & Collins, 1998). An example of a student's paper is in Appendix C.

The next class period is used to debrief the event and discuss lessons from the exercise. The class discussion also includes follow-up steps they would take after a real networking event. As they have only made an initial contact, they need to follow up by calling, writing, or e-mailing suggesting some further action, such as making an appointment or continuing the discussion. This would be true of either contact, the entrepreneur, or the resource; however, the onus falls predominantly on the entrepreneur because of the more fragile status of a start-up. Also discussed is the need to keep the contact alive over a longer time period. This can be done by continuing to interact with

the person and by trying to be helpful by passing along an article or a germane piece of information.

### EVALUATION OF MEETING OBJECTIVES

We set out three objectives for the exercise: experience in networking, making the principles of networking memorable, and self-reflection on effective techniques. We now evaluate each in turn.

Networking is a skill, and because it is a skill it needs to be practiced to become effective. It is one thing to know the theories and concepts associated with networking; it is quite another to be able to effectively network with individuals who possess desired resources or key information. This exercise offered students an opportunity to develop their networking skills. It is in line with Astin's (1985) view of education, which focuses on improving and strengthening students' skills and talents by getting them actively involved in the subject matter.

In the discussion during the class following the exercise, students often express surprise that networking is not an activity that comes naturally but is actually a skill that they need to learn and practice. They also realize that most people were interested in what they had to say and were actively seeking to connect. This insight helped them recognize why so many nascent entrepreneurs and suppliers of resources for entrepreneurs seek out and frequently attend events that provide networking opportunities. The value of such events becomes more obvious. The students also tend to express greater confidence in knowing what to do and how to act at a real event. A common outcome is for students to discuss how they feel more comfortable about attending future networking events because they have a better sense of how to behave and they realize that people at networking events want to make connections.

The second objective is making the principles more memorable. In the class discussion during the next class period, the students share what they learned about networking with one another. An effective way to get students talking about their networking experiences is to ask them what tactics worked best to find their contacts at the networking event. The students are readily able to discuss the principles of effective networking, and to point out tactics that they would like to remember for future networking opportunities. They also gain a deeper understanding of networking.

An insight gained by many students is that almost everyone is a relevant contact if their time horizons are expanded. Students often mention that listening became very important in determining what someone potentially had to offer. The importance of active listening and the need to improve one's listening skills is commonly discussed. By spending more time listening to each other, the students explain that people are better able to help each other and to make connections. Many of these connections are not predetermined by the instructors; that is, students typically find many more relevant contacts

than originally planned by the instructors. This demonstrates their creativity and resourcefulness—two very important characteristics for fledgling entrepreneurs. In line with their course material, students also often recognize the importance of cultivating diverse and dense networks.

Because of the greater number of contacts, the discussion may segue into how one would need to follow up with the contacts and how to maintain the contacts over time. Students often mention that they could maintain the contacts as long as they continued to share with each other. For example, a common thought is that rather than having just a one-time transaction with a contact, if they continue to share referrals, recommendations, and information, they could maintain the contact. They also often discuss the power that can accrue to individuals who have connections with individuals who control valuable resources or information; that is, the importance of bridging network connections and tapping into the networks of their direct contacts. In addition, students typically enjoy discussing networking tactics to pursue after a contact has been made.

The third objective, the use of self-reflection to enhance understanding, is demonstrated through the papers of those who participated in the exercise versus those who did not. Usually a small number of students do not attend the events because of job interviews or illness. For their assignment, they are asked to read the articles and write a paper on the tactics that they believe are most effective in networking—the same topic as assigned to the students who participate in the event.

The differences in papers (see Appendix C and D) are striking in the quantity and quality of comments the students make. Appendix D presents an example of a paper from a student who did not attend the event. He received the same final course grade as the student in Appendix C, so the two students are of similar overall ability. However, as one can clearly see, Appendix C, from the student who participated in the event, includes many more effective networking techniques and the comments were more developed and insightful than in Appendix D, the paper from the student who did not participate. In addition, none of the students who did not participate in the exercise identified any tactics that were not in the articles. In contrast, it was quite common for students who participated to identify several effective networking techniques from their own self-discovery. Therefore, although the comparisons between the students are indicative rather than scientific, the students who participated in the exercise seemed to have come away with a much deeper and richer understanding of networking than those who only read the articles.

## **Lessons Learned**

Students are often told that successful people use their networks to get ahead and that the students should do the same. However, it has been our

observation that few students network, probably because the concept is too abstract for them—they do not know how to do it. At the beginning of the course, we often tell students that the guest speakers who come to campus are good contacts and that they should take advantage of the opportunities presented. Few students, however, approach the speakers afterward or ask for their business cards. We have found that after participating in the networking exercise, students readily talk to the guest speakers and ask for their business cards. The students have changed their behavior, so they seem to understand the concept of networking and become more willing to practice their networking skills. A student quote typifies how practice helped:

My elevator pitch started out rocky mainly because I wasn't including all the facts that people wanted to know about. After talking with many people and repeatedly being asked the same questions after my pitch, I incorporated the responses to the questions into my speech. Therefore, as time went on, people had to ask fewer questions after the pitch.

An important element of the exercise is to have the students play two roles—an entrepreneur looking for resources and someone with resources. Participating in both roles allows the students to experience what it is like to search for resources and what it is like to have people soliciting them for something. The students soon become sensitized to what leads to success when they are asking rather than being asked—to treat the person as a person and not as a resource. The students also learn that cooperative behavior—looking to help as well as be helped—is more effective than putting oneself first. From another student paper, we got the following observation:

I found this networking event to be very interesting. I now feel more comfortable going up to others and just presenting my elevator speech and brainstorming about either my business or theirs and seeing how we can help each other through our networks.

As for the instructors, this exercise fulfills its pedagogical role in that it gives students the opportunity to practice their networking skills in a simulated networking event. Students will experience the trials and tribulations of the networking process, the difference between transactional and merged network strategies, and how to cultivate and use a secondary network. This exercise also exposes students to networking concepts associated with structural holes theory and weak ties theory and the importance of creating networks that are dense and diverse. However, the main advantage of the exercise is that the students enjoy the experience, which helps make the lessons of the exercise more memorable. The following quote is from a third student's paper:

All in all the exercise was a lot more fun than I thought it would be. The class seemed to be into the role-playing. At first I thought it was cheesy, but when

I got into it and started role-playing myself I had a good time. It is amazing that things like this take place everyday. This is definitely something I want to check out firsthand.

In conclusion, this exercise offers students the opportunity to practice their networking skills in a simulated networking event. This exercise helps students to understand the significance of an effective elevator speech, the need for active listening, and the importance of cultivating relationships after a networking event. As such, it is an exercise that complements many different topics on networking and allows students to reflect on ways to improve their networking skills.

## **Job Search Variation**

Although the focus of the exercise has been to train entrepreneurs to network, the exercise can be modified slightly to provide a networking simulation in other contexts. In Appendix E, we describe one such variation—a professional networking event that can be used in a job search context. With a little thought, instructors can modify the exercise for any networking purpose.

## **Appendix A**

### **Networking Exercise Instructions**

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#### **PREPARATION**

You will be attending a networking event that is designed to be very similar to how a real social event with networking possibilities would be. Before attending the event, you should read the assigned articles on creating an elevator pitch. Based on these articles you are required to prepare a 30-sec elevator pitch to use at the networking event. You should also read the two articles on how to network. They are aimed at helping you be more efficient and effective at the event. Remember—you must socialize and act as you would at a real reception.

#### **EXERCISE**

When you arrive at the meeting place, check in at the desk to receive your materials. The class time will be divided into two sections of 45 min each. You will play one of two roles for each time slot:

1. Entrepreneur looking for resources: Based on the entrepreneurial business that you previously submitted, you will be playing an entrepreneur looking for contacts and resources to help your business. There will be several people in the room whom you should meet related to your business (e.g., customer, investor, banker, consultant, employee, community-based adviser, entrepreneur with

a similar business). Your task is to network through the reception to find those people.

2. A resource: You will be given a role to play as one of the above listed resources. Your job is to network to find potential entrepreneurs to work with. You will not know how many people there are for you in a given time slot, and the match may not be straightforward—so you may have to be creative in creating a link. Your job is to use the same rules as above and find business leads. Again, the two articles on networking should help you.

## REFLECTION PAPER

After the event, you will need to write a one-page paper on your networking experiences. Write a couple of paragraphs explaining what tactics worked for you in (a) telling people about yourself, (b) finding out about them, and (c) seeing if there were any business connections. Your paper should also include the following exhibits:

1. A table that lists your resources, as many as you found, and explains how each was related to your business. Highlight the significant part of each relationship. You can also list some less obvious, but possible resources and explain why they may be possible leads.
2. A table that lists the entrepreneurs for whom you were a resource and explains why you would be able to assist each with their businesses. Again, highlight the significant part of each relationship.
3. A list of the best and worst characteristics and activities of participants and a brief explanation of how they helped or hindered your ability to network.

## Appendix B

### Example of Businesses Submitted by Students and Resources Created by Professors

<i>Businesses</i>	<i>Resources</i>
Commercial real estate in Boston	Electronics engineering consultant
Bakery in Back Bay	Day care licenser
Philly cheese steak shop in New Jersey	Zoning lawyer
Diner in Boston	Minority lending banker
Restaurant	Small Business Administration (SBA)
Ad agency in Boston	administrator in Massachusetts
Waiting room entertainment	College student
Home video game manufacturer	Menu consultant
Car audio installation service	Interior designer
Ski shop in Boston	Graphic designer
Home day care in Newton	Car dealer
School for children who are at risk	Small business banker
General contracting in Boston	Restaurant equipment salesman
Real estate	Marketing executive from Gillette

Real estate in Connecticut  
 Ad agency in Plymouth  
 Martial arts studio in Brockton  
 Unisex hair salon in Dorchester  
 Home health care

Instructor at a hair styling school  
 Psychologist  
 Husband waiting for executive  
 wife in building  
 Aerobics club owner  
 Professor of early child education

### **Appendix C**

#### **Example of a Student's Reflection Paper**

- I. As an entrepreneur looking for resources, my business is active in the consumer electronics field. More specifically, my business sells video game consoles (such as PlayStation 2) and gaming accessories (wireless controllers, memory cards, etc.). The company is headquartered in Boston, MA, and has a few smaller branches which are located in Greater Boston and in Providence, RI.

#### *Contacts I*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Resource / Near Resource</i>	<i>Relation to Business</i>
Makam	Resource	Makam's business helps provide funding to small businesses. My business would likely be eligible for funding because, although I have already established a few locations, my business is still very small compared to its competitors in the industry and could greatly benefit from some additional cash to promote its growth.
Sean	Resource	Sean's business is in the car audio and electronics business; he has installed a PlayStation 2 and audio components into a customer's car before. There is a big potential here for success. There are a number of ways in which we could refer customers to one another or establish a deal in which we see an increase in the quantity of our customers. For example, while Sean works on a customer's speaker system in their car, he could mention that I sell gaming systems that have been optimized for usage in automobiles and that if the customer uses him as a referral then that customer will receive a discount.
Isabel	Resource	As an electrical engineering consultant, Isabel could provide quality assurance and inspections of the electronics that I am selling to ensure

		their reliability and to keep me updated on the technical specifications of the products I'm selling.
Jong-Ho	Resource	Jong-Ho is a Northeastern University student who has a flexible attitude toward his future career path. He could become an employee at my company's headquarters or Boston branch, and he could also promote my stores to his fellow classmates.
Jake	Resource	As a father of six children, who was "waiting for his wife" at the convention, Jake is the prime type of customer I look for. By making a good impression on him, he could spread the word to other parents that my stores are the place to go for video-gaming needs.
Nathaniel	Resource	Nathaniel is aiming to start his 24-hr dining restaurant as soon as possible. After telling him about my business, he has expressed a strong interest in creating a unique setting for his restaurant by means of video games. In the proposed setting, I could provide the gaming consoles and wireless controllers that would be necessary for his customers to enjoy video games while waiting for their meals.
Philip	Near Resource	Philip is a psychologist for youth who are going through problems and need guidance or treatment. In some cases, video games could be the cause of these problems, and in other cases video games could be the solution. In the future, we'd have to think of something more substantial in terms of the relationship of our businesses; however, I'm confident that there is definitely a connection between youth and video games.
Jonathan	Near Resource	Jonathan is a karate instructor in Brockton, MA. His business attracts many young males, which is one of the main categories of people who buy video games. If I were able to promote a fighting game at his karate studio, such as Tekken 4 or Virtua Fighter 4, I would be able to increase sales and his students could learn new moves from the video-game characters. However, we'd have to think of a way to advertise this to parents as being a good thing and not as something that promotes violence.
Krystal	Near Resource	Krystal runs an aerobic and fitness studio. If her business has a section of treadmills where

people walk for hours, then a video-game system hooked up to a television could promote more interest in using the treadmills. It's yet to be seen though, and doubtful, that an ordinary person would be able to achieve the coordination of simultaneously playing a video game while walking on the treadmill.

- II. As a resource looking for entrepreneurs, my role was working for the New York Economic Development Agency. As a state agent, I was looking for start-up and small businesses in New York that had growth potential and were in need of assistance, financial or otherwise.

### *Contacts II*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Resource / Near Resource</i>	<i>Relation to Business</i>
Derek	Resource	I am a resource for Derek's business because his patio and pool company meets all the necessary criteria. It is located in New York, is a small business, and is looking to develop and grow into a larger presence in New York.
Isabel	Resource	Isabel was originally looking to start a cosmetics business in Los Angeles; however, after networking with a few people she decided that New York would be a better location for her business. Isabel needs to draft a business plan and also to obtain some initial funding for her business, and I could most likely provide aid in both these areas.
Neyah	Resource	Neyah is an event manager who does his business in New York. Some examples of events are weddings and corporate gatherings. He has made it clear that his business could benefit greatly from my assistance, and I think that by helping his business it will promote more economic activity in New York. By increasing his capacity for events managed, more businesses will be interacting and spending money in New York's economy.
Krystal	Resource	Krystal wants to open up a restaurant and is seriously considering New York as its location. She currently owns no building for the restaurant and, therefore, will be scouring the market for a good deal on a building. This is

		certainly an area in which I could be a strong resource, as long as she is definite that New York is going to be the restaurant's location.
Jong-Ho	Resource	Almost identical to Krystal's business, Jong-Ho is also starting up a restaurant, is confident that New York will be his choice of location, and has also requested financial assistance for his business.
Billie	Near Resource	Helping woman-owned small businesses is a very similar role to mine, and this is what Billie does for a living. There is potential that in the future we could conduct a statistical study of the businesses we are helping, with factors such as projected increases in revenue and growth forecasts, and we could help one another to analyze the data.
Makam	Near Resource	Makam's business of transporting and warehousing business goods is currently located in Boston and looks to expand throughout New England in years to come. By the time his company expands to New York (which will likely occur after expanding throughout the Northeast), it will no longer be a small business; however, Makam will most likely have established contacts with other small businesses in New York that I could be a resource for.
Sean	Near Resource	Sean is in the information technology (IT) management sector of the computer industry. If he knew of a friend or acquaintance getting a business started in the New York area, then he could refer them to me and I could most likely help them out.
Philip	Near Resource	Philip's business provides technical training to outside company employees. For example, if my employees needed to learn a new operating system on the computers used at work, then Philip's team could provide a good training program. Currently, my business is self-sufficient in this area; however, it's possible we could run into future problems and need Philip's expertise.
John	Near Resource	As a salesman of Nextel phones and a campus recruiter, John communicates with a large number of college students. He might be able to give us tips concerning the best way to sell our products on college campuses.
Sasha	Near Resource	Sasha works with the Internet, and his company provides online space for customers to create

Web sites and set up e-mail accounts. His company is located in Boston; however, many of his customers may live in the New York area. Because the Internet is not limited by physical location, if we were to make a deal his business could be a good source of e-mail addresses of New York residents.

Lindsey	Near Resource	Lindsey also helps small businesses through her work. We could refer businesses to one another that look better for the other person. For example, I could refer Makam to her because his business is currently getting started up in Boston, and if Lindsey knew of any New York small businesses then, in return, she could refer one to me.
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- III. There were a few people who were rude and only made conversation with people whom they thought they could benefit from; however, I don't remember their names. On the other hand, some people such as Makam and Philip were extremely polite and optimistic about a possible future relationship, even if it seemed like our businesses could not really benefit from one another.
- IV. The first and foremost tactic that worked was to simply approach someone and greet them. Taking the initiative to start a conversation increases the odds of finding a good resource, whereas just sitting around will almost always lead nowhere. After approaching someone, I first gave a friendly greeting and asked how the other person is doing. After establishing this personal connection, it was easy to transition into talking about my business and also to ask about their business. The short elevator pitch that introduced my type of business, to whom I sell my products and services, what their value is, and where my business is located, worked very well in providing a concise summary that the potential resource could understand. I also found that after giving my elevator pitch, it encouraged the person I'm communicating with to respond either positively or negatively, and then to give his or her elevator pitch in return. Following this, we would then be able to talk about any potential relationships between our businesses. In the case that there wasn't really an obvious relationship, we would either chat about non-business-related topics or would point one another toward someone who we thought could help out.

Another tactic that was effective was to move around the room a lot, while trying to speak with a couple new people from each section of the room. By literally moving from one person to another at a good pace, it was easier to keep with the flow of how to introduce my business to people whom I had never before spoken to. On the other hand, staying put once in a while is also an effective tactic. For example, there were cases when I had exchanged elevator pitches with the person I was talking to; however, no personal connection had been made. By sticking around and making small

talk, a much stronger connection was made, which in turn will lead to a better foundation to work off of in the future. Moreover, by being around a small group it sometimes increased the chances of someone approaching me or the people around me, and then we could all introduce each other.

One more good tactic is to ask questions of the person about her or his business because small facts can be good leads and can also make obvious a relationship that neither of us had noticed at first, especially if she or he didn't mention an important factor in her or his elevator pitch. For example, after asking one student the location of his business, it turned out to be the exact location I was looking for (New York). However, if I hadn't asked, it didn't appear that he was going to tell me. This proves that in addition to being a good listener it is beneficial to ask questions.

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### **Appendix D**

#### **Example of a Student's Reflection Paper Who Did Not Participate in Networking Event**

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From going over notes and in-class discussion, networking seems to be an important part of the process of getting your business recognized. In my opinion, effective networking involves being confident but not overtly confident while also being knowledgeable about your company, the market in which you are trying to tap into, and the competitors involved within your particular market. What could make your proposition to a potential investor interesting is coming up with a product or service that clearly sets your business apart from the other competitors by creating a superior service that could be very profitable. While networking, show genuine interest in your company but also give the person you're talking to a chance to follow all of the information that you're handing out to him or her. At the same time, allow the person a chance to ask questions because this is a sign of interest and also shows that you're not just trying to get his or her money. Having proper contact information is key so I believe it's important to get a good form of contact such as telephone, e-mail, and so on. When you gain this information, follow up in a timely manner and show initiative by sending information about your company.

In my case, networking would involve gaining resources such as additional capital and clientele for my real estate firm. What I would explain is that we offer commercial leasing and residential properties for ownership. What would help us have a distinct advantage is having a thorough knowledge of the surrounding areas and being a young start-up company with many trained professionals. What would help out also is having some notable clients who have already become partners in our company. Interest would be generated by being a company that is profitable and has not yet reached its peak. By having a clear set of goals and a definitive business plan, it would exemplify to the potential investor that we are a serious business with a good management team in place. Finally, I would try to get the proper contact information so I could follow up and if not then I would make sure to have a business card that's professional in appearance with the proper information.

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## **Appendix E**

### **Potential Variation to Exercise**

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This exercise can be adapted for management students by having the networking simulation resemble a professional networking event. For example, local chambers of commerce and Business Expo networking events are designed to bring together managers and professionals to encourage future business and foster mutually beneficial business relationships. To participate in this variation of the exercise, students will need to prepare an elevator speech based on a 30-sec introduction that includes who they are, their skills and capabilities, and something that is unique about themselves that will get the listener excited so that he or she will want to know more. Students will need to provide their instructor with a job title and brief job description that they are interested in pursuing—perhaps their “dream” job. Examples of occupations that students are likely to submit include hotel manager, business lawyer, accountant, restaurant manager, jewelry designer, tax attorney, financial adviser, realtor, interior designer, and bank executive. The instructor will then need to create possible business contacts to act as resources. These can include potential customers, clients, employees, partners, subcontractors, suppliers, and referrals. Examples of resources are editor of local newspaper, limousine driver, boutique manager, mortgage broker, residential construction developer, baker, convention center manager, restaurant owner, electrician, and insurance salesperson. Students will then take turns acting in their chosen professional role and as a resource.

#### **Exercise Instructions for Professional Networking Event**

##### **EXERCISE**

You will be attending a networking event that is designed to be very similar to a real social event with networking possibilities. When you arrive at the meeting place, you will need to check in at the desk to receive your materials. The class time will be divided into two sections of 45 minutes each. You will play one of two roles for each time slot:

1. A business professional looking for resources: Based on the job title and job description that you previously submitted, you will be playing a business professional looking for contacts and resources to help you become more successful and efficient in your career. There will be several people in the room whom you should meet related to your job and profession (e.g., potential customers, clients, partners, subcontractors, referrals). Your task is to network through the reception to find these people.
2. A resource: You will be given a role to play as one of the above-listed resources. Your job is to network to find potential business professionals to work with. You will not know how many people there are for you in a given time slot, and the match may not be straightforward—so you may have to be creative in creating a link. Your job is to use the same rules as above and find business leads.

## REFLECTION PAPER

After the event, you will need to write a one-page paper on your networking experiences. Write a couple of paragraphs explaining what tactics worked for you in (a) telling people about yourself, (b) finding out about them, and (c) seeing if there were any business connections. Your paper should also include the following exhibits:

1. A list of your resources, as many as you found, and explain how they would help you to become more successful and efficient in your career. You can also list some less obvious, but possible resources and explain why they may be possible leads.
  2. A list of the business professionals for whom you were a resource and explain why you would be able to assist them with their jobs and businesses dealings.
  3. A list of the best and worst characteristics and activities of participants and a brief explanation of how they helped or hindered your ability to network.
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