

COACHING GUIDE MODULE 6

LESSON 2: BEHAVIORS THAT HOLD YOU BACK

DEVELOP A POWERFUL NETWORK OF STRONG RELATIONSHIPS - BEHAVIOR #2

Women are great at developing close relationships, but often don't know how to best benefit from them fully professionally. Women have a tendency to believe that networking somehow exploits their relationships for personal gain which they consider distasteful causing them to under-benefit from any networking activities. This short-sighted thinking is further exacerbated by women's predisposition to underestimate and undersell their professional self-worth. As a result, many women have this self-imposed barrier and hesitation to network beyond the social relationships they have built and therefore do not grow successful networks compared to men. Research shows that men typically place less emphasis on personal relationships and make networking decisions based on strategic and career motives. Women need to do more of this.

Where women sometimes fail is thinking about how to strategically develop their networks beyond their immediate spheres of influence or organizations. So many women I have coached over the years tell me they are too busy with work to focus on building their network.

This is a huge mistake.

Building our network is part of our job and a key tool for all professionals looking to develop themselves and their careers. No one stays in the same company or organization forever and our network can be invaluable when we are ready to make a move. In general, an external perspective is very valuable to our current circumstances as we grapple with how to do something better or innovate. Also, our network can act as thought partners because they're objective and do not have a personal stake in our game. Having a diverse and broad network is great to call on for support, information, and ideas. Likewise, you can be a valuable resource for others, so this strategy becomes win-win for all. If you are not making networking a priority, or actively leveraging your network, you could be missing out on great connections and opportunities that can help you both.

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Recently I started a new role in which I had holes in my professional knowledge base where there were things I thought I needed to know in order to do the job well. I called upon my network to look for the right person who could help me fill in what I was missing. On some level I knew it was a stretch assignment as there were parts of the job I had not done for many years and I needed to update my skills. When we take on a stretch assignment, there is so much we don't know how to do, which is the reason it's called a stretch assignment. Stretch assignments are awesome because they provide huge growth opportunities for us. This was the case for me.

Thank goodness for my network! I reached out to ask a few individuals if they would be willing to have a "thought partner" conversation with me so I could pick their brain. Every single one of them said yes. These conversations gave me information I never would have known if I hadn't reached out to ask. Their collective advice was priceless as it helped me navigate my new position without missing a beat and without anyone else realizing I was missing some skills or knowledge important for my role.

I cannot recommend more strongly spending inordinate amounts of time strategically building your network and taking the time to reach out to them regularly in order to keep the relationships vibrant.

It is said that the quality of a person's life is most often a direct reflection of the people they surround themselves with. You become like your inner circle and vice versa. Successful people leverage their relationships and build inner circles that empower and uplift them. Take a moment and think about what does your current inner circle look like?

We are NOT meant to travel this professional journey alone. Having help and building alliances is a smart way to travel through our career life cycle. It is important to build a broad and varied network both inside and outside your organization. The ability to network can open new doors that you never knew existed. Continue to build and utilize these precious relationships throughout your entire career.

Initially, it may seem daunting to know where to start to build a powerful network. To begin your thinking, the right individuals to select to surround yourself with are people who you admire, respect, want to learn from, and are ahead of you on the path in some way – people you want to be like when you grow up. Internally, start to build relationships with your boss's boss and their peers and anyone who has a seat at the table who has line of sight on your work.

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Ideas include:

Start or join a Mastermind group. According to Tony Robbins, an entrepreneur, #1 NY Times bestselling author, philanthropist, and a life & business strategist, “A mastermind group is a group of peers who meet to give each other advice and support. It’s similar to mentoring, but has several important differences. First, it will have five-eight members, instead of being a one-on-one meeting. In a mastermind group, you will both give and receive advice, while in a mentorship, you’ll typically be on the receiving end.”

Mastermind groups can involve brainstorming, idea generation, problem solving, business building conversations and are a safe place where you can speak the truth without fear of repercussions at work. I have been part of many Mastermind groups over the years and have found them to be super helpful in growing my business, setting strategy, thinking about what I want next professionally and then putting an action plan in place to get there. A big shout out to Nancy Martini, Nancy Michaels, Michael Neece, Steve Lishansky, Terrie Lupberger, John Boisvert, Anne Rarich, Suzi Pomerantz, Garry Schleiffer and many others who, without their thought partnership and support over the years, I might have not experienced the heights of professional success I have been fortunate to have had.

Attend industry conferences – Conferences are a great place to get inspired with new ideas. There are many different kinds of conferences and include:

- An **academic conference** where scientists or academicians share their research findings.
- A **business conference** for people working in the same company or industry who come together to discuss new trends and opportunities pertaining to the business or industry.
- A **trade conference** where both business people and sometimes members of the public who gather for the purpose of networking with vendors and making new connections through trade booths, workshops and white paper presentations.

Over the last 10 years, I have frequented the following conferences, Conversations Among Master Coaches, The International Coach Federation, NEHRA (New England Human Resource Association, Simmons Women’s Leadership Conference, Massachusetts Conference for Women, The Executive Coaching Summit, Institute of Coaching, Global Institute for Leadership Development and Women in Leadership. All of these have been valuable to build my skills, my business and my network.

Volunteer at an industry conference, summit or event. Volunteering is a great way to get connected to the key people running the event, like celebrities, or key people in your industry - plus you often get to attend for free.

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One of the best places I volunteered over the years was at the Massachusetts Conference for Women. My role was to be the backstage assistant to all the keynote speakers before they went on stage to deliver their content. I think I had the best volunteer job at the entire conference. Some of the people I got to rub elbows with or get to know more deeply over the years came from volunteering and working this event - Suze Orman, the personal financial expert, Ruth Simmons, prior President of Brown University, Gloria Steinem, writer, political activist and feminist organizer, Meg Whitman prior president and CEO of Hewlett-Packard, Sally Krawcheck, former head of Bank of America's Global Wealth and Investment Management division and currently CEO and co-founder of Ellevest and Hillary Clinton, politician, diplomat, lawyer, writer, and public speaker who served as the 67th United States secretary of state from 2009 to 2013 to name a few.

EXERCISE 1: DEVELOP A POWERFUL NETWORK OF STRONG RELATIONSHIPS

Complete this template in your journal. Begin with 3 things you could start with to grow your network.

Networking Ideas	Why is this a good idea? What value could it provide you?	What's the first step to take?	What are the next steps needed to make this a reality?

Once you have completed each one of these networking ideas, step back and evaluate the short AND long-term value of each one. It takes time to build relationships and thus having a long view is valuable. Everyone knows building a strong network is important but not taking the time to actually do it will hold you back professionally. Get started today.

STOP: It is important to do this exercise before going on to the next Lesson and Coaching Guide.

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JOURNAL AND REFLECTIONS

This exercise will help you think strategically about where you are and where you want to go next and most importantly, how you will get there. Your network is one of the most valuable resources you have in your career toolbox. Use it.

Journal your answers to the questions below. Journaling is more about writing stream of consciousness versus getting it right or making it sound pretty. Journaling is a process that unearths curiosity and wonder within us. After completing the exercise...

What top 3 observations do you have?

What patterns, if any, do you notice?

What specific things resonated most or seem right on target for you? And why?

What resonated least or seems less relevant for you? And why?

What are your biggest ahas or take-aways?

What did you learn about yourself that delighted you most?

What are 1-2 next steps you will take with this information you now have?

FOLLOW UP

Want more help understanding what this all means and how it relates to where you are or where you're going, reach out to me at Wendy Capland, wcapland@visionquestconsulting.com to schedule a one hour 1:1 Coaching Session. Investment-\$500.