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How Senior Executives Can Most Effectively Navigate and Network for their Next Position

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You are a talented senior executive, so likely throughout your career, opportunities found you. This especially is common earlier in your career when you are lower in the corporate pyramid. At that career stage, there is a plethora of opportunities to help develop your skills and experiences. Key mentors want you on their teams and promote you, and when they leave and join a new company, they bring you along.

Yet as you climb in your career, there are fewer people above you and fewer avenues for advancement. Senior roles are less tactical, have greater strategic impact, and are more competitive. You may now be the mentor, promoting key team members and advancing their careers. Your next step up may be your boss' role, and he or she may not be going anywhere. What do you do? Stay and wait, or look for opportunities elsewhere? Being open to both is the best approach.

How can you get more opportunities coming your way? As a senior executive, your professional network is your most valuable resource in finding your next great role.

Despite being exceptionally capable, many just do not have the time, vision or discipline to effectively navigate the labyrinth of opportunities that could be within reach. Your lifestyle is probably not conducive to any kind of career search (you likely work long hours where scrutiny of your performance is continuous). You may also feel entrenched within a particular organization or industry, built up over many years of service loyalty.

Effective networking is fundamentally critical when looking externally. If done correctly, you can expand your reach and effectively leverage the connections of people within your own network. You want opportunities presented to them to reach you. You want to be top of mind, so they refer potential opportunities to you and further expand your professional network. Here at NGS Global when I lead critical executive search assignments for my clients, more than 50% of my placements come from a referral. My network often knows of other people in their network who are ideal for a specific critical role with my client.



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I am currently amazed by the number of senior executives, many of whom are exceptionally talented and experienced, who are not proactively optimizing and checking in with their many contacts in their professional network.

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With such limited time and focus available to executives, what is the best way to do this? What is the most effective form of business networking so that your connections think of you when they hear of an opportunity?



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A simple formula illustrates how you can actively and systematically make the most of your professional network that leads to your next great role. This systematic and structured approach harnesses the power of your professional network for future opportunities and will be of huge benefit to you and your career.

2 x 2 x 2

Firstly, identify your core list of connections that you have had professional and personal dealings with **in the last ten years** who are **your equal or higher**. This includes all peers, bosses, customers, colleagues, non-colleagues, etc. Even if someone's background is dissimilar (even radically dissimilar), if they are your equal or higher, they may have insights about opportunities and can make introductions to new contacts that expand your reach.

Once you have determined this list, commit to doing **three** things **each work day**:

1. Make **two** outreaches to your list: this can be in the form of a thoughtful call or email. This is not a broad email blast or general InMail message. Don't just say hello, but note significant events relevant to each contact's world (eg. promotion, acquisition, new product launch, etc.). The more personalized and meaningful you can make this the more likely you are to get a response
2. Make **two** follow-ups: if you get no response, then plan to follow-up and re-reach out to them
3. Your eventual goal is to lock down **two** meetings/calls each work day: this will require more work than you think. They require research and being prepared. You don't want to just talk about yourself. This is about gaining their trust and confidence in a collegial manner, ideally by offering your advice with a strategic issue, their own career goals, and more.

As you start, remember that there will be a 'lag' factor at play here, as it will take a week or two before you are able to start following up with initial outreaches (step two), and a week or two beyond that before you actually start having meetings and calls with your network (step three).

The numbers will be in your favor if you are able to invest in a consistent daily pattern of time and effort. In a month, you will have made 40 initial outreaches. In two months, you will have made 80.



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The follow-up is critical. Again, offer to be a resource and sounding board around strategic challenges or ideas, even if it relates to opportunities that are not right for you. You want to be a source for senior contacts at other companies, as well as recruiters. This way you have a pulse on the market and may come across a position that has not gone live yet.



By way of example, I recently coached a client through this process. He was President of a US\$1.5 billion division. The only relevant role above him was the CEO role, but his CEO was not leaving.

After several months of this systematic process (and regularly coaching him and checking up on his progress), my client found an incredible opportunity, and today is the CEO of a \$500 million private company that is backed by a leading private equity firm.

The 2 x 2 x 2 model is structured to provide self-accountability and process when optimizing the network you already have. There is no sugar-coating it: it is not easy and will take work and an investment of time. When done in the right way, however, it is an effective methodology for mining opportunities and establishing front-of-mind presence with your most valuable contacts.