PERSONAL NETWORKS

Accelerating Transitions

Initiate, Engage, and Refine Networks for Success in New Roles

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Abstract

Twenty years of assessing networks and individual performance in more than 300 organizations has shown that **initiating, engaging,** and **refining** personal networks in targeted ways is critical to successful role transition. Our most recent research revealed specific strategies of people who effectively managed a role transition, offering needed insight for the millions of people who enter a new organization, accept an internal promotion or lateral transfer, or take on a project assignment with a new group. The research also provides guidance for organizations navigating pressing workforce trends toward increased talent mobility. By teaching effective network practices and embedding them into key processes, organizations can enable and accelerate successful transitions into new roles.

In this paper, we describe a set of network practices in three categories that new hires and newcomers to a group can implement to successfully transition into their new role:

INITIATE
Initiate diverse networks early and establish specific relationships critical to success.

ENGAGE
Engage others by building energy, credibility, and reciprocity to create pull into networks.

REFINE
Continually **refine** networks to avoid traps and create collaborative efficiency for long-term success.

We present examples of people who have transitioned well by creating a productive network, quickly, and detail many small, effective actions that differentiate them from people who struggle or underperform. We also suggest ways organizations and managers can support new hires and newcomers to initiate, engage, and refine their networks.

The work is based on extensive quantitative analysis of networks as well as in-depth interviews conducted with 160 women and men. For more information and related resources, visit www.connectedcommons.com/transitions.

A Tale of Two Transitions

Marcus was an experienced investment banker whose performance was stellar. The first years of his career were marked by outstanding results, interesting work, and increasing responsibility. Through his transactions, he built a powerful internal network composed of a diverse group of experts and leaders who worked in different sectors and locations. His reputation extended well outside of his firm, and he was frequently approached by competitors with lucrative offers to lure him away. Confident in his personal performance and ready for a change of scenery, Marcus accepted an attractive job offer. It seemed like a great fit; he would be in a familiar industry and similar role, just in a much larger organization. What could go wrong?

To his shock, Marcus faltered. He struggled to implement his ideas, often missing critical information or failing to grasp internal obstacles and challenges. Quarter-to-quarter, he fell short of performance goals, and, after a year, he doubted he would ever replicate the success he had at his previous employer. Marcus' manager, disappointed that her superstar new hire couldn't deliver, decided Marcus wasn't cut out for the role and had him moved to another division. She wondered how, with all the time and money spent on recruiting top talent, the company had made such a mistake in the hiring process. She joined an HR-convened task force to consider different ways they should screen recruits in the future to increase the odds of success.

Marcus' experience is not unusual, and, on the surface, he didn't do anything wrong as he transitioned into the new company. He followed much of the typical advice about starting a new role: he went out of his way to be visible to other managers, build his brand, and show his value to his team. Unfortunately, he over-relied on his personal knowledge, skills, and effort, and did not fully realize the collaborative demands of his new role. Unlike in his previous job, the network he created did not enable efficient execution. He was unaware of the know-how and influence of key colleagues, including top performers and long-time employees. Without the collective capability of a network to facilitate and amplify his success, Marcus was unable to take advantage of a great career opportunity.

In contrast, Holly made a successful transition to director of talent acquisition in a global professional services firm by quickly and intentionally building a broad network across business units, corporate functions, locations, and levels. Her boss, Max, had learned how certain connections predict performance and rapid transitions and developed a list of key people for Holly to meet. With that starting point, Holly held introductory meetings with more than 50 people within the first six weeks on the job. Some were business leaders and formal influencers, but many were internal clients and functional managers whose teams she would rely on over time. In these initial meetings, she sought to understand the business environment, how their groups operated, and each person's most pressing concerns. To take full advantage of these people's hidden knowledge of relationships critical to her success, Holly always ended the conversation by asking *who else* she should meet or work with. Parallel to building ties into the various units and functions, Holly began to establish relationships within her group at all levels and locations, the larger HR function, and peers across the organization.

Knowing she would be in a position of influencing without authority, Holly wanted to establish relationships and understand others' needs and interests before she asked for support or advocated a position. In early interactions, she asked many questions and was open about what she did not know. She presented her knowledge and applied her expertise to the context rather than over-selling her past experience. She also showed genuine curiosity about others' professional and personal interests, looking for points of commonality or ways they might collaborate for a mutual win. Her efforts made for an intense start, but she felt connected and able to contribute very quickly. "It was both exhilarating and exhausting," Holly remembers. "I had to work against my own instincts to just

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buckle down and do the work, and instead reach out to others in a way that made me a little vulnerable and not so in control."

During a six-month check-in with her manager, it was clear Holly was engaged and had established the network of someone who had been in the position much longer. Max was impressed with how quickly Holly had become plugged-in and effective, with people inside and outside her team vying for her time. He pointed out that her pace and level of involvement would need to shift to a more sustainable level and helped her think strategically about how to more efficiently collaborate with others.

At the one-year mark, Holly had aligned her team and a cross-functional group around a new workforce planning process, which would eventually streamline efforts and reduce gaps in staffing. She clarified her role and purpose and gained a solid grasp of how best to leverage the talent across her network. She was highly effective and remained in her role for several

years (operating out of multiple locations) before being promoted to Chief Human Resource Officer.

This **tale of two transitions** reveals two distinct paths that may be taken when beginning a new role. Marcus followed the established new-hire playbook: seeking visibility with formal leaders and taking every opportunity to showcase his expertise. His perspective of what was required in the new role did not take into account the collaborative nature of success whereas Holly—and her boss—anticipated the collaborative demands of her role from day one. She cultivated a broad, diverse network and sought out key opinion leaders early on. She nurtured relationships and responded to others' interests, needs, and feedback with curiosity and openness. She adapted her network and created efficiencies for long-term success. Through her actions, Holly *initiated*, *engaged*, and *refined* her network in ways our research shows are required for successful transitions.

The Emerging Imperative: Managing More Transitions

The vastly different experiences of Marcus and Holly show the impact a role transition can have on individuals. Getting it wrong can have devastating consequences. Organizations, too, have a compelling interest in ensuring that new hires and newcomers adapt effectively during role transitions. Unfortunately, HR and business leaders typically get it wrong as well.

Many organizations make enormous investments in talent acquisition—an average of $4,000 per employee—and may spend an additional 10-12% of recruiting costs in onboarding, orientation and initial training.[1] Even so, they typically make limited or uninformed efforts to help people transition successfully into their new role. The gap shows up in both turnover and performance.

Many new hires don't stay in an organization for more than a year or two. Studies find 20-30% of turnover occurring in the first 45-90 days.[2] In addition, many employees anticipate leaving

their jobs: in 2018, 43% of Millennials expected to leave within two years, up fairly rapidly from 38% just a year earlier. While significant, that number is dwarfed by the Gen Z rate of 61%.[3]

As employees ineffectively move and transition into new roles, the cost of poor performance is felt. Forty-six percent of promoted employees are unprepared and underperforming in new roles.[4] Lost productivity resulting from the learning curve for new hires and transfers is between 1% and 3% of total revenues; with typical attrition rates, a 10,000-person company is likely losing $3-4 million a year by not enabling and accelerating new-role transitions.[5]

The challenges of role transitions for organizations are not going away. Two trends in the world of work will dramatically increase the frequency with which individuals will transition roles and put pressure on organizations to find more effective ways to enable and accelerate new-hire and newcomer success.

TREND ONE: The Agile Organization is on the Rise

Increasingly, organizations are pushed toward speed, agility, and adaptability and are redesigning structures and processes to be more flexible, according to a 2017 report from Deloitte.[6] Ninety-four percent of companies surveyed said that 'agility and collaboration' were critical to their organization's success. Six percent said that they were 'highly agile today' and 19% described themselves as 'not agile'—but 32% said that they were designing their organization to be more adaptable and flexible. The report further described flexible networks of teams and greater fluidity of talent as an important part of designing for adaptability, with only 14% of executives believing that the traditional organizational model—with hierarchical job levels based on expertise in a specific area—makes their organization highly effective.

This shift to operating as a portfolio of purpose-built teams with highly mobile talent will undoubtedly increase the frequency of role transitions people make during their careers.

TREND TWO: The Workforce Expects Experiences

Over the last 20 years, the number of companies that people worked for in the five years after college graduation has nearly doubled. People who graduated between 1986 and 1990 averaged 1.6 jobs; that number has steadily increased with those who graduated between 2006 and 2010 averaging nearly 2.85 jobs. The number of companies that people work for 5-to-10 years after graduating has increased as well.[7]

Millennials, long viewed as a job-hopping generation, have driven this shift, but not for the reasons originally believed, according to London Business School Professor Tammy Erickson. The fast-changing work environment and demands are leading Millennials to seek career experiences that enable them to remain relevant.[8] If their current organization does not offer these experiences, they will choose to move to an employer who will. Further research confirms this shift toward experiences: "When you dig into the data, what you find is that Millennials don't have an innate desire to job hop, but they do have an innate desire for a variety of experiences. During the early part of their career they want to taste several different things rather be forced into one career path."[9]

The Millennial Generation is about to surpass Baby Boomers as the largest living adult generation in the U.S. and the first truly digital native workers, Gen Z, are entering the workplace.[10] Together, their expectations and experiences are soon to be the new normal.

A Network Solution

Most organizations and individuals are unprepared for this oncoming rush to greater talent mobility, holding beliefs and creating practices that consider only half of the equation: the *human capital* perspective. Human capital can be thought of as the knowledge, skills, and abilities possessed by an individual. Organizations that take this classic view of talent build competitive advantage by matching individuals to organizational needs. They assume that a person's expertise and past performance will transfer to new groups and settings, and that the sum of individual talent equals the overall capability of the organization.

The too-often invisible half of the talent equation is revealed with the *social capital* perspective. Social capital is the advantage that is created based on the way people are connected to others. Organizations that factor in this view consider how well an individual is *positioned* in networks to leverage their abilities and view organizational capability as more than a collection of individuals applying their skills.

To adapt to the new world of employee mobility and fuel effective role transitions, organizations need to address this second half of the equation. We have over 20 years of combined quantitative and qualitative evidence indicating that **organizations must ensure that new hires and newcomers cultivate networks in specific ways for optimal success.** When organizations treat talent as atoms—as isolated from the networks that enable their success—they experience more talent disappointments, like Marcus, and over-rely on a few effective, consistently high-performing, well-networked individuals, like Holly.

As part of our research over the past two decades, we have mapped employee networks across more than 300 organizations and, in each case, plotted employee tenure against network position. The broad finding from this work is that it takes 3-5 years for most newcomers in strong-culture companies to replicate the networks of high performers. This work has also helped us visualize the degree to which many transition failures occur because of the dominance of the human capital perspective. Standard HR processes and management practices do little to help people rapidly integrate into the invisible networks critical to work. When something goes wrong, the individual is blamed. Poor performance is never considered a failure of network strategy. Given the frequency of transitions, leaders need more effective approaches to shrink the timeframe for entry into critical networks and raise the odds of transition success.

The good news is that our quantitative work also revealed people we call fast movers—those who became much more connected into the organization than their similarly tenured peers. These new hires and newcomers were more productive more quickly, more likely to stay, and reported higher engagement scores than their peers.

The even better news is that through our qualitative research, we were able to demystify the network strategies this group employs that contribute to their success. We conducted interviews with 160 leaders (80 men and 80 women) across 20 diverse organizations. These interviews provided rich detail regarding successful role transitions such as moving into a new organization, changing roles within a unit, being tapped for a new project or team, or being promoted or laterally transferred to a different unit or location.

Through the quantitative analytics and our interviewees' stories, we were able to identify specific actions of successful people—on entry and over the first 9-12 months—that others can replicate to decrease time to performance and avoid career de-railing mistakes. Broadly, our successful people did twelve things in three categories:
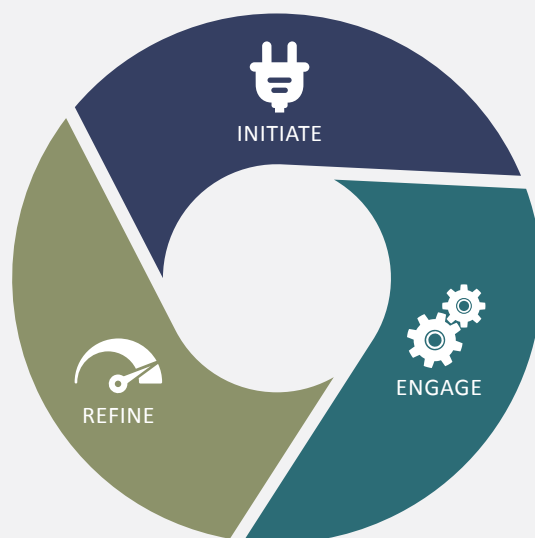
Initiate diverse networks early and establish specific relationships critical to success.

▶ Pursue a broad, cross-boundary network in the first 60-90 days

▶ Find people to help address skill gaps or cultural/political awareness required in a new role.

▶ Identify and engage people who are opinion leaders, or network influencers, to create legitimacy, reputation, and organizational know-how.

▶ Lean on established relationships for honest feedback and personal support during the inevitable setbacks and uncertainties of a transition.

Engage others by building energy, credibility, and reciprocity to create pull into networks.

▶ Position their expertise to align with others' goals and objectives.

▶ Simultaneously build their network and cultivate their reputation through early accomplishment.

▶ Engage others by pursuing mutual benefit.

▶ Build trust quickly to gain entry into the networks needed to accomplish work and achieve high performance.

Continually **refine** networks to avoid traps and create collaborative efficiency for long-term success.

▶ Assess and refresh networks to ensure diverse, enterprise-wide connections and relevant external ties.

▶ Pursue work and non-work activities that align with aspirations.

▶ Shift patterns of interaction to proactively manage collaborative overload.

▶ Avoid network traps that cause otherwise high performers to struggle or derail.

INITIATE
Jump-start productivity and inclusion by cultivating relationships critical to success

In the first 90 days in a new role, people make choices about *who* to prioritize, which sets the foundation for future success. When new hires and newcomers ***initiate*** relationships critical to success, they jump-start their productivity and inclusion into valued networks. However, they rarely know how to do this. Early on, some people prioritize visibility or access to formal stakeholders and gaining political support. Others believe they must hit the ground running and choose to focus only on doing work with their immediate team. Still others may prioritize meeting a lot of people but neglect the specific network-building that could enable rapid integration into the organization and shorten their time from entry to productivity. At the time, these steps may seem like wise choices—and are considered conventional wisdom—but our research shows these patterns are, in fact, network missteps that can have significant consequences.

Like Marcus, Erin faltered during an important career transition. Promoted internally to manage a 200-person client-services group, she felt well-prepared for the role. She knew people in the department and had worked with some of the teams before. What she did not anticipate was how much she would need to rely on a broad network across functions, roles, and levels to be effective. Nor did she consider the importance of colleagues to help her identify and remedy gaps in her technical skills and political/cultural awareness that she needed to be successful in the new role.

While she was getting a handle on the day-to-day work, focusing on her teams, and learning how to lead a much larger group, she became overwhelmed by directives from above and incoming requests from other departments. Rather than reaching out to more experienced peers for perspective or building relationships with the leaders who were placing expectations on her, Erin just pushed herself to work harder. "I was overwhelmed, but figured if I could hang on, it would get better." When a long-time friend asked how Erin's new job was going, she shrugged and said, "Just the usual learning curve." When her boss noted that she should be delegating and leaning on her team more, she took it as a

sign he didn't think she was capable, rather than viewing it as good advice from an experienced leader. She did confide in her brother that she might be in over her head. Knowing that she rarely asked for help, he encouraged her to talk to her boss, but she was concerned about giving him another reason to question her ability.

As demands continued to accelerate, Pat, Erin's HR Business Partner sent her a friendly email asking if she would be open to coaching to help identify new strategies for success in her new role. While Erin thought it might be a good idea, she felt too busy and chose not to prioritize Pat's offer for feedback and help—a decision that Erin, in retrospect, wished she had handled differently.

If Erin had relied on peers, mentors, and trusted confidants during this time, she may have avoided a mistake that stalled her career for some time. When a key customer threatened to leave for a competitor, she did not have allies in place across the business to help her find a solution. Too late, she pulled in her boss, who did have the relationships to mitigate the problem and negotiate a solution for the client. Erin remained in her role but was given less leeway, and one of her responsibilities (and a team of eight) was moved into another department. "I was always one to jump in, fix a problem, or say, *Here's what we're going to do.* It's what made me good at my job. But the scope was bigger, and I couldn't do it all or know it all no matter how late I worked. What should have been a great time in my career turned out to be really difficult and a setback that stuck with me for a while."

Erin didn't know that she needed to reach out and proactively initiate a different set of relationships and network ties in order to be successful in her new role—and she didn't allow herself to rely on others to ensure a smooth transition. Unfortunately, creating essential connections is not a matter of following typical networking advice, such as attending social events or building a large contact list. Nor do essential connections usually come from taking the advice of well-meaning managers or onboarding programs.

Our research shows that initiating *specific* kinds of relationships in the first 90 days and continuing to prioritize network development throughout the transition is a differentiator. When new hires and newcomers know specific categories of people to focus on, they can be proactive, invest their time well, and position their efforts in ways that yield success. Four network strategies help people initiate key connections early on:

❶ Pursue a broad, cross-boundary network in the first 60-90 days. On entry, more effective new hires and newcomers seek connections across function, level, and expertise to gain a full view of the people, the work, and the challenges in their new context. They methodically identify and set up exploratory meetings with 1) *formal leaders;* 2) *stakeholders/ customers;* 3) colleagues in *functional or support roles;* 4) *direct reports;* and 5) *peers.* They quickly and intentionally

build relationships in all five categories, rather than over-valuing any single group, which creates broad access to critical information, resources, support, and feedback.

❷ Find people to help address skill gaps or cultural/ political awareness required in a new role. Rather than assuming they have the needed capabilities—or that they will quickly see what they are missing—more effective people are reflective and ask others to help them spot *and*

supplement skill gaps. They think broadly about capabilities required in a new role, including technical/functional skill, cultural/political awareness and collaborative/leadership practices, then learn what is needed or mitigate gaps through access to others in the network.

❸ Identify and engage people who are opinion leaders, or network influencers, to create legitimacy, reputation, and organizational know-how. A connection with one or more network influencers leads to more successful outcomes for projects and goals, as well as opportunities for new hires and newcomers to be drawn into future work. Potential influencers fall into four categories. *Central Connectors* have many informal connections and are influential within a group—typically within a function, location, or capability. *Boundary Spanners,* or *Brokers*, have ties across groups or geographies and can help to integrate networks and perspectives. *Energizers* create passion and enthusiasm in their interactions. *Resisters* are negative influencers; they may be vocal about their opinions, passively resist, or simply pursue different goals.

❹ Lean on established relationships for honest feedback and personal support during the inevitable setbacks and uncertainties of a transition. Trusted advisors and confidants—a colleague, a former boss, a mentor, friends, and family—can offer input, validation, pushback, reality checks, and emotional support. *Truth Tellers* will give needed, sometimes brutally honest feedback—a true gift at a time of change and challenge. *Emotional Anchors* provide support and encouragement, and help people keep their work transition in perspective.

When Jesse was recruited to head up a corporate function of a global technology company, he took an expansive approach to building a broad network rapidly. Jesse had held the same role in another company, but his experience was in a different industry. Knowing he would need to re-create his network to understand and navigate a new context, he arranged to travel to every location in the first four months in the role. He set up meetings with all the managers in his function, business unit leaders, and other corporate managers, noting, "I would not make headway or be effective if I didn't have face-to-face interactions and build relationships quickly." Then he always went one step further. At the end of each of these meetings he would ask who else he should meet with to help identify the critical network influencersnot on the formal organization chart. Through those initial meetings with the formal leaders, Jesse began to build a broad, cross-boundary network and identify the informal network. "As I was gathering information about *what* I needed to know to do the job, I was also getting a handle on *who* I needed to know. Who had important information or resources? Who was influential and respected, and why? Whose interests were linked to mine?"

Right away, he set a bi-weekly meeting with two peers who could make him smarter about the industry and context and serve as sounding boards as he navigated the new role. "They helped me see what I was missing because I was an outsider, but also where that perspective had value. They checked my thinking to see if it aligned with the corporate culture and helped me understand the politics." In addition, he quickly sought to understand the expertise of his direct reports, so he could effectively delegate or seek their advice on issues where he lacked skill or experience. Early on, he also arranged to sit in on several client calls and on-site client meetings to better understand their context and the problems they were facing.

Despite the intensity of this transition, Jesse continued to preserve time for monthly calls with a long-time mentor. "We had been through a lot together in my last company; we knew each other well and could be honest. He had supported me in seeking this new job and wanted to keep up with how I was doing. I was able to vent or process things out loud in a way that I couldn't yet with my new colleagues."

Critically, Jesse's mentor advised him to reach out early to hidden opinion leaders, including critics, when he began to explore a solution to a chronic, cross-functional problem. "I was easily getting positive response and buy-in from my team and a few managers, not a lot of pushback. My first impulse was to run with it; instead, I started to ask, who else knows something about this or has worked on something similar? Who will be affected by this change? I had informal conversations with people at lunch, or at their desks, to figure out who is influential." Jesse and his team then refined their approach by creating an extended team that included well-respected employees. "People were going to talk about the changes—and they were either going to embrace them or not. By including the hidden influencers in the process early on, we won half the battle."

Jesse's approach to establishing his network early on allowed him to be engaged quickly, learn the specifics of his role, and begin to understand the informal networks of the organization. By engaging stakeholders across the organization, he facilitated an innovative and well-received solution to a vexing problem. The effort greatly reduced redundancy of work for key groups, established Jesse as a valued member of the leadership team in the eyes of peers, and introduced him to team leaders and influencers within key functions.

By initiating a broad array of critical connections in the first 60-90 days, newcomers and new hires like Jesse establish a robust network in one-third the typical time. Their network paves the way for access to expertise, resources, support, and information. The work they produce gets broader visibility and their reputation builds more quickly due to their connections with key opinion leaders. Overall, they are able to understand the new context more clearly, adapt accordingly, and accomplish much more than if they approached their new role with only the traditional strategies.

IN ACTION: How to *Initiate* Diverse Networks Early and Establish Specific Relationships Critical to Success

STRATEGY & TIPS	ERIN'S TRANSITION	JESSE'S TRANSITION
Pursue a broad, cross-boundary network in the first 60-90 days.	Grade: **B**	Grade: **A**
DO ✓ Identify people in 5 categories: 1) *formal leaders*; 2) *stakeholders/customers*; 3) *colleagues in functional or support roles*; 4) *teams/direct reports*; and 5) *peers*. ✓ Set a meeting with each to learn about their context, role, and needs—not for an immediate request. ✓ Tailor interactions based on the person. Learn how they prefer to work, offer help, and build rapport. **DON'T** ✗ Over-prioritize making a connection—and good impression—with formal leaders and under-invest in informal networks. ✗ Focus only on the obvious or most pressing connections. Don't assume network development is done once you've met your team, direct reports, manager, or client.	Erin knew people in all five categories but did not re-establish connections in the context of her new role. She over-prioritized her teams and direct reports, mistakenly assuming her key to success was immersing herself in the operations of her group. She believed she needed to implement important changes internally before she should add external priorities; she pushed back on requests from leaders outside her group.	Jesse immediately mapped out a meeting and travel schedule that allowed him to have introductory/exploratory meetings with people across location, level, and function. At the end of every initial meeting, he asked who else he should meet or whose role connected in some way. He sat in on several client calls and on-site meetings. This helped him reframe the problem space and got these key stakeholders invested in his success early. While he met top formal leaders during the interview process, he arranged meetings with each after he got to know the organization's context, roles, and needs more broadly.
Find people to help address skill gaps or cultural/political awareness required in a new role.	Grade: **D**	Grade: **A**
DO ✓ Seek a clear-eyed assessment of gaps in your capabilities that may be revealed in a new role. Identify specific people who can help you address concerns and mitigate weak spots. ✓ Use newness to your advantage. During the first 60-90 days in a new role, give yourself full permission to ask questions, seek help, or admit what you do not know. **DON'T** ✗ Expect your track record of success, technical ability, or expertise alone to propel you through the learning curve of a new role. ✗ Assume you are self-aware enough to know your strengths and weaknesses and have an accurate read on the success of your transition.	Erin expected herself to have all the answers or figure out her new role on her own. She did not ask subject experts or experienced people in her group for their ideas or feedback. She brushed off input from her boss and peers and declined an offer for coaching. She missed opportunities to learn what she did not know and was blindsided by a customer problem.	Jesse quickly identified two peers to help him understand the industry and political context. He leaned heavily on his direct reports for their skill and perspective, explicitly telling them to speak up with ideas and feedback. He responded positively when they did and learned rapidly.

STRATEGY & TIPS	ERIN'S TRANSITION	JESSE'S TRANSITION
Identify and engage people who are opinion leaders, or network influencers, to create legitimacy, reputation, and organizational know-how. **DO** ✔ Identify potential network influencers—*connectors, brokers, energizers,* and *resisters*—related to a priority project or goal. Don't over-rely on people that are structured into your work (e.g., assigned to teams you are on or regular attendees of meetings you are a part of) and be wary of first impressions. ✔ Enroll each influencer in a unique way. Know what they care about, look for common interests or perspectives, try to understand barriers, and seek mutually beneficial goals. **DON'T** ✘ Ignore naysayers and resisters hoping they will come around eventually, or that they will not have a negative impact in the long run. ✘ Assume the quality of your work or the strength/logic of your argument alone determines acceptance and interest by influencers and opinion leaders.	Grade: **C** Erin didn't realize that a small team within her group was viewed as the trusted source for information and direction. The high-performing team could directly or indirectly sway others. When they disputed her approach to the client in question, Erin overrode their concerns thinking they would eventually see her point of view. She did not have access to support outside her unit when she realized the problem was beyond her scope.	Grade: **B** Jesse received positive reaction early on from his team to his approach to solving a problem. His impulse was to move quickly, but he took a mentor's advice to find the hidden power brokers and influencers whose ideas would make for a stronger solution—and whose acceptance or rejection would determine success. He created an extended, cross-functional group to advise on the project and spent 1:1 time with stakeholders who were resistant to change.
Lean on established relationships for honest feedback and personal support during the inevitable setbacks and uncertainties of a transition. **DO** ✔ Identify *Truth Tellers* for brutally honest feedback and *Emotional Anchors* for support and perspective. Consider who you could lean on more or in different ways in addition to current advisors and confidants. ✔ Schedule and protect time for honest and authentic conversations with your confidants. Be willing to share challenges, frustrations, and possibilities. Ask them to test ideas and perspectives, validate your thinking, and give advice. Carefully consider their assessment of you, your situation, and how to proceed. **DON'T** ✘ Assume that no one (not colleagues, friends, or family) can understand what you are going through, or that only you can solve problems. ✘ Tell people that things are going well when you are uncertain or struggling with the dynamics of a role, or think you should push through the next couple months rather than leaning on others.	Grade: **C** Erin did not want to show that she was overwhelmed, so did not discuss her challenges with a close friend or colleagues from her previous role. She downplayed her frustrations and did what she had done to be successful up to this point: she worked longer and harder. Erin did confide in her brother that she might be in over her head; however, she did not take his advice to talk to her boss about it.	Grade: **B** Jesse held regular calls with a long-standing mentor who knew his tendencies, and he trusted to tell him when he was off track. Jesse did not feel comfortable talking about the new job to his close friends or partner. He would have benefitted from support as he adjusted to an intense travel schedule and the pressures of the role.

ENGAGE
Create *pull* into networks by building energy, credibility, and reciprocity

Our research indicates that *how* new hires and newcomers engage people in their networks is just as important as *who* they connect with during role transitions. Early on, they can either shut down or open up valued networks by the way they present themselves and interact with others. When new hires and newcomers **engage** in ways that build energy, credibility, and reciprocity, they are *pulled* into valued networks. Early, positive interactions begin to establish their reputation as someone others want to work with. In turn, established colleagues begin to include them in conversations, ask for their ideas, and refer them to others. By engaging with others in a way that pulls them into networks, successful people accelerate their transitions and create a platform for future success.

Unfortunately, too often new hires and newcomers take the opposite approach, using *push* strategies when they enter into new roles. Often unknowingly, they stay in "interview mode" sharing what they did at their previous employer or group, making sure others are aware of their knowledge, experience, or brand. Or, they may over-rely on their formal authority to motivate others to accept them and their ideas or contributions. Such strategies are commonly endorsed through onboarding programs and recommended by career advisors. However, our research shows these practices drain energy, undermine credibility, and discourage established people from giving their time and energy. When people promote themselves too rapidly or forcefully, or neglect the needs and interests of others, they often are rejected rather than accepted by the network.

Craig, a rising star in a prominent manufacturing company, was asked to take an interim role for a high-profile product line, filling in for a colleague on leave. He successfully led the team through a critical time. Soon after, he began looking for a new job. "I felt like I had been with the same company too long; my peers from grad school had all made career moves much faster, and I was worried I would fall behind. I needed to leverage my big win."

Craig's credentials landed him a management role in a smaller competitor, with the mandate to help the company grow. He quickly sought to make himself known, describing his background, specific technical expertise, and past successes as he was introduced to new people and groups. Intent on driving quick results and gaining credibility with his project team and stakeholders, he suggested solutions or made decisions by replicating what he knew from prior roles. He leveraged the strong reputation of his prior company, often saying, "Let me tell you how we did it." When he was unfamiliar with a process, he offered an opinion rather than asking exploratory questions; if something was out of his scope or expertise, he never let on. "I thought I was expected to know things I didn't know, and that if I put on a confident front I could figure it out."

Craig continued in this vein for months but struggled to hit the right note with his team or fellow managers. When he wanted to change a key process, he presented a detailed plan and made his case at a project review meeting. The pushback was instant; people disagreed with his concept and pointed out details he never considered. Stunned at the intensity of the disagreement and what he had missed, he pulled a long-time employee aside to try to figure out what went wrong. "I was told that I came into the company with an ego, as if I had all the answers and was the hotshot who would solve our problems. When I talked about how I had done things before, they thought I was name dropping and not interested in learning about how things work here and why. My style came across as if I didn't care about other people's opinions, or what else they have to do, or their interests. I shut people out, and they shot me down."

"The funny thing was, I was excited to be there; I just wanted to be successful. I assumed I needed to come in strong with my brand and what I knew to prove myself. I didn't think about how I was building relationships and engaging other people. I tried to course-correct, but I never hit my stride and was job hunting within a year."

During entry into a new role, more effective people engage others in four ways to create *pull* into valued networks:

⑤ Position their expertise to align with others' goals and objectives. Rather than pushing their knowledge or experience out of context, successful new hires and newcomers ask questions, listen closely, and tailor how they present their expertise to address colleagues' problems or help with challenges. They consider whether their behavior in meetings and casual interactions creates enthusiasm or disinterest. More effective people show genuine interest, are positive, give respect and status to others, and co-create mutual benefits of working together. They follow up and stay connected without expectation, recognizing that some of these early interactions are likely to benefit them and their work eventually.

⑥ Simultaneously build their network *and* cultivate their reputation through early accomplishment. Prioritizing *either* network development *or* early accomplishment over the other misses the opportunity to build the network *through* the work. More successful people pursue a few early accomplishments with network development in mind. By engaging key stakeholders in routine work, new projects, or solving problems, the new person builds needed relationships and a positive reputation. The

reputation and relationships they create through this process speeds integration into the organization and creates a network foundation for future success.

❼ Engage others by pursuing mutual benefit. Pursuing a mutual win with stakeholders and teams will produce better, more substantive results and more effective network ties. When new hires and newcomers help people see solutions to their problems and ways to attain their goals in work they are proposing, they generate more interest and greater ownership. Colleagues are more creative and willing to help when they see a benefit to themselves or their group. They are likely to contribute time and support later as the work evolves or is implemented. Pursuing mutual wins also helps the new person establish a reputation as someone others appreciate and want to work with.

❽ Build trust quickly to gain entry into the networks needed to accomplish work and achieve high performance. Trust is the foundation for how work gets done through networks; more effective transitions are often accompanied by rapid trust formation. With trust, reservations fall away, information flows efficiently, and people become more enthused about supporting the new person. Colleagues are willing to offer opportunities, take risks, and help. In a new role, people rarely consider how their early behaviors and interactions provide clues to others about whether to trust in their abilities and intentions. New hires and newcomers pay careful attention to the many small actions that inspire trust in their competence, benevolence, and integrity. For example, they engage others with prototypes or working models rather than coming with just the idea. Though subtle, this has the effect of shifting the conversation to "What can we do with this?" and away from "Do I think this person knows what they are talking about and will come through?"

Karla learned in her first job that how she engaged people during role transitions was as important as who she met or assignments she was given. "I was just naturally open and curious. I asked a lot of questions, found people were willing to share with me, and learned new things. I got to know people— what they do at work, but also their interests and life outside of work. I was very personable, so that opened doors, but once they saw that I learned fast, helped where they needed it, and was effective, my value grew. People wanted me on their projects. A couple years later, my boss supported me for promotion to a different part of the company."

Karla replicated that approach in each of her role transitions, including her most recent promotion to division director in a pharmaceutical firm. In the early weeks, Karla focused on learning the priorities of others: her new team, project stakeholders, and colleagues across the division. She asked questions and listened attentively to understand each person's experience, interests, and current role. Importantly, in each interaction she had the person identify the biggest obstacles they were facing and then worked very hard to remove those obstacles over the following two weeks. She shared a few highlights of what she had worked on previously but noted that she expected many things to be different. "I did a lot of repeating back what I heard, asking follow-up questions to be sure I understood or to explore options. I had a lot of lunches and coffees, just to get to know what people cared about, what was going on with them personally and professionally."

Karla was also transparent about what she didn't know and eagerly relied on others' expertise. She would say, *I'm not the expert here, educate me, help me understand*. "This helped me get up to speed quickly, and it set a tone of openness with the people I worked with. I was clear that nobody has all the answers; don't worry about looking dumb or asking a stupid question."

Not long into her director role, Karla learned through a hallway conversation that a peer was fighting to hit a crucial customer deadline. She offered to help. If her team could give time in the next two weeks, they could solve the immediate problem— and prevent a back-up that would impact Karla's team down the road. Karla's understanding of how her team's goals overlapped or intersected others, and the initial level of trust she had established, allowed for a collaborative solution. These positive, energizing interactions and experiences quickly set Karla's reputation, which helped to further create the network she needed to access information and see opportunities.

Engaging new colleagues in these intentional, compelling ways may seem like too much work when people are already overloaded with the demands of a transition. However, these *pull* strategies are a key differentiator between those that integrate quickly into a new organization or group, and those that do not. By focusing on others first and engaging in ways that that build energy, credibility, and reciprocity, new hires and newcomers quickly become known as useful resources and people others want to work with. They find themselves invited into projects and asked to contribute their ideas. These early interactions expand and strengthen a newcomer's network quickly and positively, setting them up for ongoing success.

IN ACTION: How to *Engage* Others by Building Energy, Credibility, and Reciprocity to Create *Pull* into Networks

STRATEGY & TIPS	CRAIG'S TRANSITION	KARLA'S TRANSITION
	Grade: **D**	Grade: **A**

Position your expertise to align with others' goals and objectives.

DO

✔ Set up many exploratory meetings to ask questions, understand colleagues' work, and gain insight into how you might contribute. Be curious, open, and ask a lot of questions.

✔ Slowly morph your expertise to others' goals and objectives, rather than expecting them to appreciate your experience or directly apply your skills.

✔ Respect established coworkers' expertise and perspective, generate energy, and offer help. Pitch in with your time or resources, provide information, prep a colleague for a difficult conversation. Giving to others invokes a sense of reciprocity that often yields surprising benefits at a later point.

DON'T

✘ Focus on marketing yourself or over-sell your experience or past role at the expense of learning about others and morphing what you know to others' needs.

✘ Name drop, reference what worked in the past, use the word "we" to reference previous employer or team, or assume you have the right answer until you have context for how your expertise is relevant and valued by others.

Craig's column: Craig expected his new coworkers to be impressed with his experience and his former company, and so touted his credentials and made recommendations for how to replicate what he used to do. He used jargon and examples from the larger company, rather than learning and listening to his new colleagues' context and needs. This was not appreciated in his new culture, and people resented that he had taken the job but was not "on our side." They blocked him out of their informal networks, and he did not gain access to the information and influence he needed to be successful—much less create enthusiasm and engagement.

Karla's column: Karla realized that how she interacted and presented herself was a differentiator. She was welcomed and pulled into teams and groups when others were not.

She asked a lot of questions in early meetings—in a respectful and curious way, to explore and understand rather than judge. She showed her knowledge in conversation, by applying or adapting it to her new context.

Importantly, she offered to help others, allowing her to demonstrate her skill and contribute to others without expecting something in return. This created a sense of reciprocity among her colleagues, who in turn offered their time or insight and wanted to see her succeed in the new role.

	Grade: **D**	Grade: **A**

Simultaneously build your network and cultivate your reputation through early accomplishment.

DO

✔ Commit to a high-profile project and bring in a broad network to ensure the outcome meets influencers' needs. Good work that gets broad attention naturally builds your network and reputation.

✔ Turn projects into network-expanding assignments by involving multiple stakeholders early to understand scope. Leverage the work to build your network in authentic ways.

✔ Remove obstacles and address pain points for your team or key stakeholders. By helping them find solutions, you build trust and reputation.

DON'T

✘ Over-focus on *either* getting established in the network through meeting people *or* producing results via a visible win.

✘ Wait for a visible or key project to come to you. Any new opportunity can create the network that will pull you into bigger things over time.

Craig's column: Craig focused on managing up: building his relationships with his boss and finding opportunities to connect with other leaders. He expected that visibility to lead to the kinds of projects that mattered most and would prove his value.

Within his team, he was viewed as all talk. He held meetings and talked about change—but did not dig into the work to understand or address current obstacles.

He was waiting to take action until he had "wrapped his head around the work" and found the "right" project—rather than pursuing early accomplishment through the network.

Karla's column: Karla invested heavily in cultivating a broad network and good relationships. Early in her career, she easily created a positive reputation from early achievements and involving multiple stakeholders and advisors in her projects.

During her more recent transition, Karla was slow to earn a visible win, as she got established into her role. Her manager pushed her to do both and shortened her proposed timetable to launch a new product. She then moved quickly to identify stakeholders and additional team members to understand the scope and engage them in planning the launch.

STRATEGY & TIPS	CRAIG'S TRANSITION	KARLA'S TRANSITION
Engage others by pursuing mutual benefit.	Grade: **D**	Grade: **A**

Engage others by pursuing mutual benefit.

DO

✔ Look for points of shared interest and ways your group or project could also be valuable to others. Let possible contributors or partners know what you are working on and explore/establish synergies.

✔ Co-create solutions, goals, and outputs. Allow for conversations and relationships to shape and define work.

✔ Be comfortable in ambiguity. Stay open to adaptation of the work as ideas emerge. Share work-in-progress and preserve "open space" in meetings for people to add their perspective, offer ideas, and contribute in ways that support their goals.

DON'T

✘ Assign work or make requests based only on your perspective and needs, then try to convince others of your view.

✘ Present fixed or one-sided plans to stakeholders and teams, or discourage others from adding their perspective, offering ideas, or connecting your ideas with broader needs.

CRAIG'S TRANSITION — Grade: **D**

When Craig did identify a key project, he developed a plan largely in a vacuum, rather than bringing in others to help define the problem and contribute ideas.

His solution came out of the blue to stakeholders, and his (to him) logical presentation was forcefully rejected.

By not having exploratory conversations early on, Craig did not have a full understanding of the people and systems involved, did not address pain points, and missed the chance to build others' interest and ownership.

Craig's expected big win damaged his reputation, and he never recovered.

KARLA'S TRANSITION — Grade: **A**

Karla's biggest wins over her career were also the ones in which her team was energized and committed. Knowing this, she always sought to work with people who had a mutual interest in solving a problem or achieving a goal.

During early project meetings with her teams, she didn't worry about pitching her idea or preparing a perfect presentation. Instead, she held working sessions to draw out multiple perspectives and ideas and see who showed energy or saw a clear benefit.

Similarly, Karla was always running ideas and challenges by colleagues outside her group and asking about theirs. In doing so, she successfully partnered with her peer to solve a customer problem. And, they were able to get people from each group on board by co-creating the solution with acceptable roles, processes, and trade-offs.

STRATEGY & TIPS	CRAIG'S TRANSITION	KARLA'S TRANSITION

Build trust quickly to gain entry into the networks needed to accomplish work and achieve high performance.

DO

✓ Establish *competence-based trust* by being direct and transparent about your abilities—and candid about areas in which you do not have expertise or knowledge. Don't make assumptions about your role or be unaware of others' perception of you.

✓ Instill *benevolence-based trust* by showing others that you have their interests in mind, not just your own. Be generous with your time, resources, insight, information, or referrals. Show that you care about people beyond their work.

✓ Earn *integrity-based trust* by being consistent in word and deed. People want to know they can count on you. Do what you say you will do and take actions to do the right thing even when it doesn't benefit you or causes additional work.

DON'T

✗ View building trust as something that will naturally happen over time rather than a goal to work on in your new role.

✗ Overstep your boundaries of expertise or over-promise, even if for good reasons.

Craig's Transition

Grade: **D**

Craig was so trusted at his prior job, he never considered how essential trust was to his working relationships and his professional success.

Unfortunately, he made missteps that prevented him from building all three forms of trust with his new colleagues.

He was not candid about what he did not know, thinking that would make him look weak. He didn't ask direct reports and team members about their interests and priorities. He kept to himself unless he had a question, a need, or a specific business reason to interact.

People on his team saw him behave differently with formal leaders, often socializing and offering his help. He would often change his position on an issue or assign new work after talking to leadership, without any explanation.

Karla's Transition

Grade: **B**

Karla was comfortable relying on others for their expertise. She was clear with her new team that she didn't have all the answers. When she was asked to get involved in something that she saw as outside her scope or skillset, she said so. As a result, her role was clarified, and people appreciated her honesty.

Karla also went out of her way to get to know people as people, then showing she cared about them in small ways—asking about family, checking in on how they were doing, sending thank-you emails. She also gave assignments based on others' goals and interests, not automatically what would be easiest for her.

Occasionally, she would over-promise or agree to something that she could not deliver. She saw this as the optimistic part of her, but others got in the habit of waiting for a second confirmation before believing a decision was firm.

REFINE
Foster long-term success by continually re-calibrating networks

During the early months of a transition, new hires and newcomers have a valuable window to create broad ties, gain perspective, and build relationships. More effective people surge into the role and the network, initiating and engaging a disproportionate number of relationships compared to other times in their career. These relationship investments smooth the initial transition and create the foundation for success, yet the network strategies to establish essential ties and engage people early on has a downside if people do not adapt network strategies over time. Nine-to-12 months into the transition, new hires and newcomers need to *refine* their networks and collaborative practices to avoid pitfalls that lead to burnout, disengagement, or derailment as they move into years two through four.

Ruby accepted a position with a company across the country to gain needed senior-level, strategic experience. Neither she nor her spouse were excited about the relocation but recognized the long-term benefit of the role for their family. Ruby appropriately surged into the work and built her network, establishing herself as a trusted, key player. Whether on-site or after hours, she was always willing to get involved, help with decisions, and respond to colleagues' needs. She eagerly represented her group to formal leaders and in high-level customer meetings to establish herself as the reliable point person and domain expert early on. She engaged quickly in "firefighting" meetings, often getting called in by a colleague who wanted to run issues by her. She was pleased that her new colleagues and team members appreciated what she brought to the table.

As the months progressed, Ruby felt like she had a handle on the standard work but was unable to make progress on key strategic initiatives. Much of her work should have been handled by her two direct reports, but both continued to rely on her for everyday decisions, and she was overloaded by requests large and small. Ruby felt unable to say no or to cut back on the attention she gave to the people she spent months winning over. "There is never enough time. The 24/7 responsiveness doesn't bother me much; it comes with the territory. The problem is that I feel like I'm on a hamster wheel and not doing what I was brought here to do on a strategic level." Instead of working creatively to solve big problems, she felt stuck in a cycle of working with a small group of operationally focused colleagues. She began to wonder if she had made the right decision to take the job.

Ruby tried to address her concerns with her manager by saying that she was worried she wasn't getting the high-profile, strategic experience that mattered to her career. He then assigned her to represent him on a strategic new project led by corporate finance—an offer that was meant to signal how much he valued her, but backfired. "He felt that the way to

make me feel valued and productive was to give me another strategic assignment and some interaction with corporate. It didn't solve my problem; it just made me busier and accountable to another set of people." She started to feel as if she had lost control of her career—but wasn't clear what she wanted or needed to regain purpose and direction.

The pace and expectations of her role kept Ruby from getting to know her new peers elsewhere in the organization. She missed having trusted sounding boards for her ideas and colleagues who could help navigate the political dynamics or talk her through her challenges. As deadlines and pressures loomed, she cancelled a trip to a conference where she had hoped to bounce ideas off a couple long-time colleagues and get a fresh perspective on her work.

Unfortunately, and understandably, the challenges Ruby faced also affected her personal life. She declined opportunities to get involved in her new community. A gym membership went unused, even though she was a fan of cycling and previously made time for Spin classes two or three times a week. She cancelled or was often late to activities with her family, and the strain of the job clouded the time she did spend with them. Ruby was so overwhelmed by work and the pressure to succeed that she gave little attention to helping her spouse and kids adjust to the significant change of moving across the country. Their school, community, and work lives grew increasingly separate from Ruby's.

In a short period of time, Ruby had become a valued performer, but she was working in a way that could not be sustained. She wasn't gaining the experience she wanted, was isolated from a broader professional community, and was sacrificing her personal well-being. She began a search for a new job—and surprised her employees and boss when she gave notice after just 18 months with the company.

Our research shows that Ruby's experience is all too common. New hires or newcomers might quickly establish a broad network and engage in ways that pull them into networks and projects. By doing this, they receive positive affirmation from being included, accepted, and increasingly central to the organization's success but at the expense of working longer hours to support others and deliver on expectations. Too often, their managers believe all is going well, when in fact they are beginning to lose a sense of purpose in their work, suffer on a personal level, and even begin to face health concerns. These overwhelmed and unhappy newcomers hope at some point the pace will improve or the direction of work will change. However, unintentionally, they have set up their network to fuel collaborative overload, performance challenges, and career drift. Without intervention, they are likely to become burned out and leave the role.

The good news is that new hires and newcomers can plant seeds early on that prevent negative consequences and make network shifts that propel them to high performance, purpose, efficiency, and adaptability. They can, in fact, use transitions to steer their careers and set a context to thrive by refining their networks in four ways:

⑨ Assess and refresh networks to ensure diverse, enterprise-wide connections and relevant external ties. Our research shows that 9-12 months into a new role—and periodically as demands, goals, and circumstances change—more effective people evaluate their networks to ensure they are investing in relationships needed for long-term performance and growth. Four kinds of relationships are critical and should be assessed in the context of key projects or priorities slated for the coming six months.

- **Connections for emergent ideas, creativity, and innovation.** These are people who operate in expertise domains, functions, clients, cultures, or social groups that are outside one's current scope. More effective people reach out to others whose work is adjacent to, downstream, or upstream of what they are doing, or who can simply offer a different perspective. They seek access to clients and consider external experts.

- **Connections for expertise, depth, and best practices.** These are people who do similar kinds of work in a different context. High performers reach out to others with technical or functional expertise in various internal groups, as well as in other companies or associations. They connect with colleagues who face similar challenges or manage similar processes in other groups, geographies, or organizations.

- **Connections for professional growth and career development.** These ties may be a mentor, manager, or peers who can help someone understand their role, what is changing, and how they might learn and develop through experience. More effective people actively seek others to give them regular feedback and challenge their thinking.

- **Connections for political support and influence.** These ties include formal leaders who have resources, voice, influence, and perspective *and* informally powerful people who may provide resources, energy, legitimacy, and support.

⑩ Pursue work and non-work activities that align with aspirations. More effective people craft their role and protect time for what is important to them. The networks created through these activities *propel* people into even more opportunities and roles that are meaningful; these valued connections and purposeful activities sustain them through difficult times and mitigate more challenging relationships. And, even though there is pressure for new hires and newcomers to be all-in at work, they will be more effective over time if they create or maintain valued non-work connections as well. Commitments to one or

two outside groups (e.g., joining an adult soccer league, volunteering regularly at a youth organization, organizing a monthly book club) help employees keep a broad perspective on life, build confidence, and foster physical and emotional well-being. Without non-work networks, people who try to prove themselves in a new role risk becoming uni-dimensional and reactive at work.

⑪ Shift patterns of interaction to proactively manage collaborative overload. In transitions, a surge of work to build a diverse network is necessary to grasp a new role and context. But the patterns and habits of involvement and communication that are helpful early on can become inefficient and overwhelming. After 6-9 months, new hires and newcomers should evaluate their priorities and impose structure to streamline collaborative demands, alter mindset regarding when and how to collaborate, and adapt behaviors to be more efficient in interactions. When people don't do this well, they get over-utilized, create reliance on themselves that cannot be sustained, and are at risk of derailment because they are unable to meet expectations or adjust to new demands. In contrast, more effective people gain back 18-24% of their time by making just three or four small changes.

⑫ Avoid network traps that cause otherwise high performers to struggle or derail. Our research over more than two decades has revealed four traps, or network archetypes, that derail rising stars, high performers, and leaders. The *biased learner* places too heavy a reliance on a few trusted, well-liked, or familiar people, or over-values one or two groups. The *disconnected expert* does not know when the skills they have used in past roles are insufficient. The *formalist* over-relies on titles, org charts, and positional authority and does not adequately engage network opinion leaders and informal influencers. *Bottlenecks* create a heavy reliance on themselves that cannot be sustained. When people are alert to the common network traps, they can adjust patterns of collaboration and connection to avoid network-driven failure over time.

Notably, people have more autonomy and control over their situation than they realize. For example, they can avoid the slippery slope of collaborative burnout by setting limits and intentionally pruning the network that grew from those first intense months. As new hires and newcomers gain clarity on their role, it is not only okay, but necessary, to dial back and dial up different relationships. And, clarifying personal and professional priorities and values is equally important. Successful people make many small decisions that drive or

reinforce their North Star aspirations (such as scheduling and keeping one-on-ones with a mentor, leading a professional group, working with people who share values and interests, blocking time each week for high-priority work rather than waiting for an ideal time). They unapologetically preserve time for commitments and interests outside of work as well, which helps them gain perspective and feel refreshed.

Devon, a senior leader with many role transitions in his past, has given a lot of thought to the quality of his network. "I am always thinking about what's next—and, ironically, I have stayed with the same organization most of my career."

One of his first jobs taught him the value of connecting outside his team and across the business. As an individual contributor, it would have been easy to settle into his role and his tight-knit group. Instead, he made it a habit to meet people in other groups and look for synergies or mutual wins that could be accomplished by working together. He would attend forums or presentations, but also just strike up hallway or lunchroom conversation. If he had a specific question or problem to solve, he would ask around to see who might have an insight or different way of framing the problem. By building a diverse, enterprise-wide network, Devon was in a strong position when the company merged, and his group was eliminated. "When my group went away, I wasn't an unknown to other teams. And I had a sense of other areas of the business and how I could translate my skills." He was quickly brought into a different group—a lateral move but one that was a "huge growth opportunity with interesting challenges."

A few years later, Devon took a promotion into another division. Once he gained an understanding of the priorities and interests of a broad group of stakeholders, he began to steer the direction of his work to create a context he knew he would thrive in. Learning and being challenged always kept him motivated, and he knew the area of technical expertise he wanted to develop. He volunteered for work he cared about and politely declined work or recommended someone else if a project would be too consuming or not aligned with his North Star aspirations. He consulted with or brought in other people he respected and enjoyed working with. "Early in the role, I started to put into motion what I was most excited to work on. People are surprised that I did this, but you can control more than you think. It didn't always work in my favor, but over time, I ended up doing more of what I liked. And it made a huge difference my career path and how engaged I am."

Promoted several times since, Devon always follows advice from a former boss to "never go to meetings alone" and routinely brings a co-worker or direct report to client meetings or project updates. In doing so, he ensures he won't be the only one up to speed and then a bottleneck. "Plus, it gives other people experience and opportunities they need for their own development and satisfaction." After the initial surge into a new role, Devon also takes small actions to prevent him from becoming trapped in a cycle of inefficient collaboration.

He always establishes norms for email use, meetings, and after-hours availability with his team, including marking emails clearly for level of urgency and type of action, using text or IM for quick response, and protecting email-free weekends. He habitually blocks time on his calendar every week for focused, non-collaborative work. During one intense period, he negotiated to work from home one day a week, which he found incredibly productive and rejuvenating.

At points of change, Devon also takes a systematic, critical look at his network with his boss or mentor to create a plan for nurturing, pruning, and planting relationships based on strategic objectives. "Have I narrowed it down to an insular group? Do I have reach into networks that will help me stay current and innovative? Am I spread too thin with too many people and interactions that demand my attention, but are not my priority? Have I over-focused on current work goals to the detriment of the big picture?" By knowing the network patterns that are needed for long-term success, Devon has been able to adapt and thrive throughout his career. "I have been steadily promoted, offered interesting assignments and created my own opportunities. At each step, the network I built accelerated my career growth, opened doors, and kept me committed and engaged."

Like Devon, more effective people consider their long-term success and personal well-being as they adjust in their new role. Recognizing that some of the things that are necessary early on are not what works for them over the long term, they pay attention to who they connect with and how they collaborate, continually investing in connections critical to ongoing success.

IN ACTION: How to Continually *Refine* Networks to Avoid Traps and Create Efficiency for Long-Term Success

STRATEGY & TIPS	RUBY'S TRANSITION	DEVON'S TRANSITION
Assess and refresh networks to ensure diverse, enterprise-wide connections and relevant external ties.	Grade: **C**	Grade: **A**

DO

✔ Make it a habit to initiate, rejuvenate, and prune connections to ensure a rich, boundary-spanning, non-insular network. After the initial surge, review your network for relevant connections and relationships for the long-term.

✔ Round out your network with 4 kinds of connections shown to matter over time. Engage with people that provide: 1) *Emergent Ideas, Creativity, and Innovation;* 2) *Expertise, Depth, and Best Practice;* 3) *Professional Growth and Career Development;* and 4) *Political Support and Influence.*

DON'T

✘ Become so focused on your current project or task that you become too busy to reach out to people in other expertise domains, functions, companies, or locations.

✘ Neglect external ties—connections within your industry or profession, or colleagues in other organizations.

Ruby's Transition: Ruby immersed herself in her new role but was quickly consumed by the demands coming at her. She did not prioritize the cross-boundary connections she needed to make progress on the strategic elements of her job.

In addition, Ruby did not rely on peers who would have helped her think through strategic and political challenges. She neglected her external contacts, which would have provided specific expertise and career perspective.

Devon's Transition: Devon learned early in his career to continue network development after his initial surge into new roles, but to shift his focus.

His priority was to keep a vibrant network outside of his group or function. This provided access and support to adapt his role to changing circumstances. He also gained knowledge of different segments of the business and ways of working—valuable for both creative problem-solving and for career planning.

STRATEGY & TIPS	RUBY'S TRANSITION	DEVON'S TRANSITION
Pursue work and non-work activities that align with aspirations.	Grade: **C**	Grade: **B**

DO

✔ Craft the role you are stepping into rather than being trapped by initial assumptions or the way things were done before. Look for ways to address others' needs and pursue your goals and interests. Show your abilities in work you want to be known for.

✔ Pursue relationships and interactions that provide purpose and energy. Find people who value similar activities (co-creating, taking action, thought leadership, serving others, etc.) and initiate work with them.

✔ Invest in people and activities to remind you who you are outside of work. Anchor in life beyond the job through one or two non-work groups *(e.g., sports, family traditions, volunteering, academic or artistic interests, social groups, religious and spiritual practices).*

DON'T

✘ Let your role be dictated by the system or by outdated expectations, leaving you working with people and on projects that are draining and not aligned with what matters to you.

✘ Neglect your "tribe" at work—the group of people who care about the same things in work as you.

✘ Ignore life outside of work and view non-work commitments as optional or easily cancelled.

Ruby's Transition: Ruby's North Star was to gain senior-level, strategic expertise so she could take a categorically different career and financial leap in 4 or 5 years. She also valued working as a creative partner to solve big problems.

She was stuck in assumptions other people made about her role and stayed reactive to their demands. She ended up with more than she could handle and began to resent her boss and coworkers.

Ruby was so immersed in the job that she became isolated. At the very time she should have been getting to know her new city, helping her family adjust, and making new personal connections, Ruby created a downward spiral of doing more and more work—and little that aligned with her North Star priorities.

Devon's Transition: Devon knew what motivated him professionally: learning, being challenged, and specific technical expertise. He was proactive in seeking those experiences by initiating work with people who had similar values and interests.

Devon asked questions when he was given an assignment or asked to do something. Often, he was able to modify the work to align with his aspirations and and interests. Over time, he ended up doing more of what he enjoyed.

A self-described workaholic, Devon's life and identity revolve around his job. He rarely gets involved in non-work groups and activities. His wife works at the company, so together they are heavily reliant on the organization for their well-being.

STRATEGY & TIPS	RUBY'S TRANSITION	DEVON'S TRANSITION

Shift patterns of interaction to proactively manage collaborative overload.

Grade: C   **Grade: B**

DO

✔ Reduce collaborative overload after the initial surge of work by *imposing structure* (adapting roles, routines, and interactions for efficiency); *challenging beliefs* (understanding how identity and ways you choose to engage drive excessive collaborative demands); and *altering behaviors* (employing appropriate communication channels and promoting efficient network norms).

✔ Plant seeds early on that will help you become more collaboratively efficient, including: *avoid being the indispensable expert, don't own all the relationships, and get involved only when you have unique value to add.*

DON'T

✘ Get involved where you don't need to just because you want to be viewed as an expert who is always in the know, in control, and able to help.

✘ Lock in to the scheduling patterns and collaborative habits that you set when you began the new role without evaluating what could be reallocated, delegated, or addressed more efficiently.

RUBY'S TRANSITION

Ruby knew to implement best practices for running efficient meetings, using her calendar to block time, and using collaborative tools—but she faltered when she allowed herself to be the indispensable, high-value expert early on.

Wanting to be seen as the go-to person, Ruby created a norm of hyper-responsiveness. She attended meetings she didn't need to, or stayed long after she could have bowed out. She inadvertently trained her direct reports to run everything through her, rather than having confidence to make decisions. Her boss saw her broad capability and it was in his short-term interest to keep her involved.

The overload of these (largely self-induced) expectations came to be too much.

DEVON'S TRANSITION

Devon's go-to strategy for avoiding collaborative overload is to avoid "owning" all the relationships. Often people do this for a sense of control, but it results in too many people and groups demanding a single person's attention. Devon invests in developing others by bringing them to his meetings early on; gradually, they are up-to-speed and able to take on more. He sends others to meetings in his place ("They will let me know if they really do need me.").

Devon knows to clarify when and how he needs to be involved in discussions or decisions. But his desire to be hands-on and helpful can cause others to be overly reliant on him, creating inefficiency and overload.

Avoid network traps that cause otherwise high performers to struggle or derail.

Grade: C   **Grade: A**

DO

✔ Defend against excessive reliance on people you relied on in your prior role (the *biased learner*).

✔ Avoid over-reliance on your past expertise and personal judgment (the *disconnected expert*).

✔ Counteract the impulse to overlook or underestimate the value of the informal network (the *formalist*).

✔ Refrain from becoming overly involved or too-central in the network (the *bottleneck*).

DON'T

✘ Isolate yourself or avoid feedback if you are struggling in the new context and what worked for you in the past isn't working now.

✘ Ignore signs that you are not living up to others' expectations in your current role, or that you are not making needed progress.

RUBY'S TRANSITION

Ruby clearly fell into the trap of making herself too-central in the network; she was a bottleneck within her team and later to her cross-functional financial task force.

For the most part, Ruby kept her concerns to herself, thinking that she had done similar work before, so she could stick it out. When she decided that the path she was on was unacceptable, the only solution she could see was to find a new job that better fit her expectations.

DEVON'S TRANSITION

Devon has been successful through many transitions and promotions in the same company largely due to his ability to refine his network and avoid common traps.

Devon is well-established into the informal network and has habits that prevent him from becoming a bottleneck. He brings new people and perspectives into each role transition. He seeks feedback and information broadly, rather than assuming his past experience and long-term colleagues provide all the answers to his current challenges.

How to Help New Hires and Newcomers Succeed in Role Transitions

Too often, companies place the burden of success on the person transitioning into a new organization, new role, or new group and don't consider what the organization needs to do to create a context of success. While our work shows that people can and should take steps to proactively understand and manage their networks during transitions, organizational practices and actions of leaders and managers can accelerate and scale the process.

To improve their track record of effective transitions, organizations can facilitate transitions on two levels:

- **Teach network practices.** Educate all employees in the ways that networks are critical to success and give them research-based guidance for initiating, engaging, and refining networks at key points.

- **Embed network practices into key processes.** Help new hires build personal connectivity and relationships through onboarding *and* ensure network connections are facilitated by leaders through day-to-day interactions, project start-up practices, career planning, performance management, and leadership development.

Organizations may use this paper and our research-based resources to provide new ways of thinking about networks—not simply espousing the importance of networking. They might educate employees through virtual learning sessions or in-person workshops on network development in transitions, with the goal of mapping a network strategy or listing specific actions to take to initiate, engage, or refine networks.

Individual leaders can also facilitate network connections apart from any organization-level teaching. As they learn about the research, they may share it with new hires and newcomers and support effective network practices within their teams or groups. Simple actions, such as prompting awareness of each other's expertise in early meetings, pairing newcomers with established colleagues, and intentionally pulling in new voices to projects or discussions, can make a big difference to how well people transition into new roles.

Network-building experiences and processes can be embedded into a new employee's earliest interactions, even before their first day. Along with benefits information and standard paperwork, organizations can communicate norms for collaboration, tips for creating an effective network, and a customized list (from the hiring manager) of people to meet in the first weeks on the job. Orientation activities could be conducted within small, cross-boundary groups, and onboarding can be designed with connection-building as an explicit outcome. One company's new-hire orientation involved writing algorithms to engineer seating

charts that would facilitate cross-boundary connections. Another company created a "connections app" for new team members to get to know one another through a series of increasingly self-disclosing questions. Another company ended each new employee orientation with a small community "giving back" project to nurture connections and group identity. The best organizations continue onboarding and connection-building into the first year, creating network-building modules on their LMS, sponsoring cohort or affinity group activities, and holding managers accountable for helping newcomers build networks.

Network practices can be embedded into talent management and leadership development as well. One company designs leadership programs in which up-and-coming managers solve problems that cut across silos, deepening relationships in groups that will enable their success in the future. Others replace performance reviews (or supplement them) with a "connections audit" 12-18 months into a new role. A trusted coach, sponsor, mentor, or manager helps people examine their network, evaluate the productivity of their relationships, and flag ineffective collaborative behaviors and risk of overload. Together, they create a plan for cultivating, pruning, and planting relationships based on their strategic objectives.

The table below shows a range of tactics organizations and leaders or managers can take to help new hires and newcomers initiate, engage, and refine networks to ensure successful transitions.

	Leader/Manager Actions	Organizational Actions
INITIATE	• Give new hires and newcomers a list of people they need to meet to do their immediate task and to gain cross-boundary perspective. Explain why these people matter and make personal introductions to jump-start the relationship. • Bring new hires and newcomers to your meetings with internal or external clients. • Meet regularly with new hires and newcomers in the first 6 months; discuss who they are working with or connecting to as much as what they are doing. • Give honest feedback as a matter of routine. Don't wait until formal reviews.	• Provide insights and perspectives to cultural norms and behaviors prior to new hire or newcomer start date. • Build networks into the hiring process by including diverse stakeholders, especially for senior-level jobs. • Design onboarding activities beyond administrative tasks to facilitate exposure to broad networks. • Encourage new hires to participate in extra-curricular activities (e.g., clubs, projects, company sporting activities, affinity groups) where they can connect with colleagues who share similar interests to accelerate a sense of belonging.
ENGAGE	• Leverage manager's social capital to broker strategic connections for new team members. Guide new team members to look for overlapping interests, ways to help, and solutions for mutual benefit. • Shape introductions that position a newcomer's expertise in a way it can be appreciated and put to use. • Provide frequent feedback and coaching on how to build three types of trust.	• Organize activities around affinity/belonging groups (e.g., function, age, gender, race, outside pursuits). • Include the power and importance of connections as a key consideration in the organization's talent strategy. • Design the nurturing of networks and connections into fabric of learning and leadership programs. • Curate micro-mentoring meetings that pair company "veterans" with new hires for a casual coffee or lunch meet up with someone outside their immediate network.
REFINE	• Set expectations for involvement and commitments outside the group, encouraging high-value interactions and reducing role in areas of lesser value. • Facilitate a network audit after the first year to strategize where an employee's network needs to be refined to deliver on business objectives. • Consider the importance of connections and collaborative overload in talent reviews and succession planning. • Ensure employees take time off and set boundaries to recharge and refresh.	• Host company or division-wide socials, sporting events and/or volunteer activities to facilitate relationship nurturing and renewal. • Establish communities of practice and adaptive space networks to facilitate ideas and innovations moving between business functions. • Provide information about and support strategies for detecting and avoiding collaborative overload. • Evolve talent review and succession practices to consider the importance of nurturing and balancing connections. • Create career programs that help employees understand how aligning their work with North Star purpose and passion fuels long-term thriving, high performance, and retention.

Conclusion

Organizations are bringing in new talent and moving people into new roles and groups at an increasing pace. It is in everyone's best interest to make these transitions quick and successful.

Helping individuals, managers, and organizations apply network research, insight, and strategies to accelerate the personal connectivity of new hires and newcomers is increasingly becoming a competitive imperative and business advantage. When done well and at scale the outcomes include:

- Employees feel included and confident in their decision to take on their role. They adapt and integrate more quickly. They enjoy improved personal effectiveness that translates to greater innovation, execution, and thriving in their current role and over time through multiple transitions.

- Managers and leaders see new employees learn and contribute quickly. They are able to leverage fresh perspectives and deploy talent more fluidly and effectively to meet business demands.

- Organizations improve employee retention, hold on to organizational knowledge, and make more successful internal transfers. They cultivate a more agile employee base, as people are able to work across boundaries, transfer their skill and knowledge, and remain motivated and enthused about their work, their colleagues, and their organization.

Endnotes:

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ACCELERATING TRANSITIONS