



ADVANCING YOUR CAREER THROUGH WEAK TIES

by Kathy Graham

What does a person’s professional success—be it as an entrepreneur, employee, executive, or Board Director—have to do with a drop of water in a small pond becoming part of the ocean, which contains 96% of all water? The larger your weak ties, the more you’ve moved from being a drop of water in a minor body to tapping the potential of the whole ocean. Here’s what you need to do to make that happen.

A person’s success in their career at any level is greatly enhanced by the flow of information between:

- **closed networks**—business units, organizations, and other small well-defined groups, quite similar to small ponds—of **strong ties**—individuals who are in those closed networks, quite similar to drops of water in small ponds
- and other closed networks of strong ties becoming connected by rivers called
- **brokers**: those individuals who know strong tie individuals in numerous closed networks AND who have the capability and willingness to help share relevant, useful information and even introduce individuals from different closed networks.
- The new relationship that the two different individuals who have strong ties to different closed networks develop is named **weak ties** because the amount of time, emotional intensity, mutual confiding, and reciprocal services are less between them than with their strong tie colleagues in their own ponds.¹ You’ve tapped the resources of the ocean for you/your pond each time you create/foster a new weak career tie.

LinkedIn in 2022 with its study of more than 20 million job seeking participants² confirmed Granovetter’s 1973 research about “the strength of weak ties.”³ LinkedIn’s study definitively proves that a person creating new weak ties will have more than double the success than if they had interacted more with strong ties they did not know—in the same pond, not yet introduced.

In 1988, Luthans, Hodgetts, and Rosenkrantz proved that managers/leaders who spend most of their time working with colleagues/employees in their group—i.e., building stronger strong ties—ARE NOT PROMOTED as quickly as those managers/leaders who spend the majority of their time “socializing, politicking, and interacting with outsiders,” i.e., building weak ties. Their research still holds true to the present day.⁴

Cross, Pryor, and Sylvester’s 2022 research shows that those starting new roles within a company who “establish extremely broad, mutually beneficial, uplifting connections”—i.e., weak ties—throughout the organization are the most productive, ‘the fast movers,’ ... which is much better than being a member of the almost up to 50% of executives being promoted who are then deemed “failures or disappointments two years later.”⁵

BOTTOM LINE: If you’re looking for work (be you an entrepreneur looking for clients, an employee—be you staff or CEO—looking for the next opportunity internally or externally, or a corporate Board Director looking for your first or fourth board positions, IT’S YOUR WEAK TIES—acquaintances, people you meet in professional situations, friends of friends, etc.—that will gain you that work/that role.

There are requirements, however. *You have to authentically:*

1. **KNOW WHAT YOU WANT TO DO NEXT.** Your scarcest resource is time – determine first your next step/future goal. **“If you don’t know where you are going, you might wind up someplace else.”—Yogi Berra**
2. **CREATE THOSE WEAK TIES YOURSELF⁶.** You need to learn how to talk to a stranger in such a way that they become a new weak tie friend/acquaintance/trusted advisor/etc. **“The competitive advantage of brokerage doesn’t come to those who wait for a network to deliver it. The advantage provided by network brokerage depends on personal engagement.”—Ron Burt, *Neighborhood Networks***
 Turning strangers into “new friends” is a multi-step process and is a bit different for each person.
 - ✓ Creating your own weak ties in your own unique style has been a bedrock of all HQ’s Career Growth services for professionals, through executives/C-Suite, and Board Directors.
 - ✓ Plus, The HQs always give tips/articles freely to those pursuing such growth on their own and now on HQ’s new website, [Breaking Bread, Making Ties](#), which is dedicated solely to helping individuals grow more weak tie career connections. Enjoy—it’s our gift to you as we’re committed to growing companies through growing you.
3. **HAVE TO GIVE TO GET.⁷** Do your homework first about a potential weak tie. Know what you have in common so that when you meet you can start by giving a bit about who you are first. Sharing something you authentically have in common with a stranger in a friendly, non-bragging manner can begin a long-lasting, mutually rewarding relationship. **“Fixating on what you get doesn’t move it toward you; the “liking principle” does—the human tendency to comply with requests made by authentic people we like.”—Wayne Baker, *Achieving Success Through Social Capital***

In other words, “make new friends, but keep the old; one is silver (weak ties), and the other is gold (strong ties)” because you need both to advance your career and grow your organization/company.

The flow between strong and weak ties is what causes your career to be more profitable, grow to the highest levels attainable, and actually be more fun for everyone, if done well.

References

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² Wang, D., & Uzzi, B. (2022). Weak ties, failed tries, and success: A large-scale study provides a causal test for a cornerstone of social science. *Science*, 377(6612), 1256-1258.

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³ Granovetter, M. (1973). The strength of weak ties. *American Journal of Sociology*, 78(6).

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⁴ Robbins, S., & Judge, T. (2019). *Organizational behavior*. (19th ed.). Pearson. (Page 8).

⁵ Cross, R., Pryor, G., & Sylvester, D. (Fall 2022). How to succeed quickly in a new role: Five ways to build a strategic network. *HBR Special Issue*.

⁶ Burt, R. (2010). *Neighbor networks: Competitive advantage local and personal*. Oxford University Press.

⁷ Baker, W. (2000). *Achieving success through social capital: Tapping the hidden resources in your personal and business networks*. University of Michigan Business School.