**BUILDING YOUR TRIBE**

Networking is the way everything works. That old saying is true: “It’s not what you know; it’s who you know.” But exchanging business cards and a LinkedIn connection is just scratching the networking surface. Many of these superficial connections will have no impact on your search.

The people who will make a difference are your tribe. It’s fine to have 500-plus LinkedIn connections. But it’s crucial to have a group of people with whom you have actual relationships, who are interested in helping you reach your goals and who depend on you to help them reach theirs. I have a rather large network, but my tribe consists of about 150 people.

Your tribe is the group of people who will get you through your Career Pivot. Believe me, while you're coping with all this change, facing uncertain prospects and being humble while asking for help, you need people rooting for you. Your tribe is also the group you can call on for an introduction or some advice over coffee. And they can call on you, too—whether for themselves or for a friend who wants some intelligence about your areas of expertise. It’s like a community barn-raising: You help your neighbor build his barn, knowing—without asking—he’ll show up with lunch and a hammer to help you raise yours.

**A TRIBE WILL GET YOU THROUGH THIS**

When I was a teacher, I began sending regular emails to friends and other teachers about my experiences. I talked about the kids who seemed overwhelmed and the strategies I devised to help them. I talked about their low self-esteem and the issues they were struggling to overcome, and how hard it was to communicate something as abstract as algebra in the midst of their concrete problems. I learned that many people I sent those emails to forwarded them to friends and family members in the school district. I unwittingly built a tribe of people who were rooting for me, and for my kids, throughout those hard years. I couldn’t have made it without them.

Don’t try something as challenging as a Career Pivot without a tribe.

**CULTIVATE YOUR TRIBE**

The thing about a tribe is, you have to cultivate it, like a garden. You need to weed it from time to time of people you have no real connection with. You have to water it when there’s no rain. You may need to apply fertilizer. Most importantly, you should not neglect it. You need to give it TLC. It needs to be part of the way you think and live, or it will wither.

Do you have friends you have not seen in months? Take a day each week to reach out with an email and check-in. At least once a week, I glance through LinkedIn or Outlook contacts and find someone I have not heard from in a while. Then I send a check-in email.

It could be as simple as:

*Bob,*

*I have not heard from you in a while. How are you doing? How is your family? Things are going well with my business. Son is getting married in October ...*

*Let me know how you’re doing. Do you want to meet for a cup of coffee sometime soon?*

*Marc*

The response is often:

*Marc,*

*Thanks for checking in with me. Life is good ... Too busy to meet for coffee but check back in ... Bob*

I now know how he is doing and he knows that I care about him. Networking is all about building relationships. Are you cultivating your network? Are you doing something new and original that you would like to share?

There is no substitute for face-to-face meetings to establish and maintain relationships. I like social media, but that good old face-to-face meeting where you get to shake hands and read body language is critical to long-term relationships.

When do you have the time to do this?

**MAKE IT A HABIT**

I like to have coffee meetings at 7 or 7:30 a.m. When our son was small, I learned it was easy for me to keep that hour clear for networking. My wife, boss, teammates and son could schedule things for me to do at any other time. But first thing in the morning was sacred. Sometimes a "coffee meeting" doesn't involve meeting for coffee. Here in Austin, people often meet while walking around Lady Bird Lake in the center of town. It might even be for a game of tennis or similar sport. But no matter what I’m doing, it’s about the connection.

What time works for you? Lunch? After work for a beer or other libation? Or maybe Saturdays?

Pick a time — once a week, once every two weeks or once a month — to meet face to face with someone in your network. Make it a pattern.

**LET KARMA DO ITS THING**

When you network, it is all about the other person, and you should expect nothing in return. When I am meeting with someone and if I determine I can be of some help, I just do it. Cultivating good karma will always pay off somewhere. Don’t ask for it. Your payback will happen in a way that’s better than what you might have asked for.

Recently, I met with my image consultant, Jean LeFebvre, to order a new shirt. Jean told me she was looking for client companies that cared about how their employees dressed and would be willing to hire someone to make them look spiffy. In Austin, casual is king, so she didn't have many prospects. The one industry we could agree met her criteria was the legal field. Austin is the state capital; we have lots of lawyers.

I offered to introduce Jean to Susan Baughman, who has a business called Lawyers Don’t Know Marketing. Susan creates custom marketing programs for law firms.

I sent Susan an email with the subject line “Virtual Introduction” and copied Jean. I explained Jean's situation and asked Susan if she could help. As it turns out, Susan was looking for an image consultant for her clients and was willing to educate Jean on the art of dealing with law firms in Austin.

Making this kind of connection isn’t just a fluke. Part of cultivating your tribe is looking for opportunities to do things like this for other people and not expecting anything in return. It’s goodwill, good karma. Somewhere down the road, it will come back to you.

In the situation I mentioned about connecting my two friends, one of them may one day be dealing with an attorney who wants to make a career shift, and, instead of just listening sympathetically to the attorney’s frustration, she’ll introduce them to me. Who knows? The point is, cultivating good karma as a habit will always pay off somewhere.

**DON’T FORGET TO SAY THANK YOU**

If someone makes a connection for you, don’t forget to send a quick note or email to tell them what happened and thank them.

*Dear Barb,*

*Thank you so much for introducing me to Stephen. We have connected over coffee and found several places where our business objectives might lead to really fruitful partnerships.*

*I don’t know if we would have ever discovered each other without your help. Thanks for taking the time to do that!*

*Leslie*

People don’t need a reward for helping you. But you should give them the gift of letting them know that they did, in fact, help.

Building your tribe, cultivating it and giving it TLC might be the most valuable and enriching part of making a Career Pivot.

***ACTION STEPS:***

* Connect regularly with members of your tribe, friends and associates. They provide emotional support and may have leads for you.
* Thank them promptly with a note for any help they give you and let them know the outcome of their help.
* Seek ways to help others in their career or business goals without asking anything in return. Karma works.

For additional resources, check out:

Repurpose Your Career Resource Center <https://careerpivot.com/RYC-Resources/>