

THE CURRENCY OF TRUST IS NETWORKING AND KNOWLEDGE



By: **Dr. Constantina Skenteri**

Networking or “connections” or “public relations” is the key to everything: securing valuable licenses, permission to build real-estate developments, reaching a win-win negotiation, landing a distribution deal, identifying potential customers for luxury or expensive products/services, even finding that special villa in Ponza. Fortunes have been made and lost based on whether the “hunter” has a good or bad networking. It is often stated that *“your personal value is not what you know, but who you know”*.

The old concept of networking is starting to make room for the new. People working in the public sector and private sector; in particular bureaucrats as well as business people are gaining access to networks that revolve around shared work experiences or taking classes together (such as Executive MBA courses in universities inside and outside of Italy). The current situation imposed by the pandemic saw these classes shift to online mode, encouraging online networking. Digitalization can facilitate communication; nevertheless, it cannot substitute the impact of a face-to-face contact.

Networking that once happened in private rooms at smart restaurants now goes in plain view – at wine tastings for the nouveau riche, at forums held for entrepreneurs at stylish ski resorts or posh islands like Capri, at sport circles or fashion clubs, at avant première of a movie or theatre, or at international shows and exhibitions in Milan. By taking advantage of these informal-formal groups, the government and large-scale companies including multinationals can improve their understanding of the marketplace, hire the best talent, and more than that find potential business partners and negotiations.



Fine networking breeds success.

Networking is a notion that goes back thousands of years and is based on values of loyalty, reliability, accountability, and reciprocation – the notion that if somebody does you a favor, you will be expected to repay it one day. Playing fairly the networking game is a necessity for everyone, including foreign investors. It is important to have friends in different sectors and industries, and meet people from different cities and countries. The digital world has smoothed information flow, and since people become more experienced and savvy, they want something more professional and strategic for their relationships. It is frequently alleged that *“it is fundamental to create allies”*.

Taking into consideration the public sector, valuable networking can rise from seminars providing digital training to the senior employees in order to minimize the digital gap with younger generation. The end of the seminar could be celebrated with barbecue or wine tasting, along with the award of the Certificates. These seminars represent value-added activities as they foster education, knowledge and mindset; even more they stimulate building long-lasting relationships.

In addition, some networking events in elegant-fashionable places could be organized for Managers working at important public institutions. In such a way, leaders and directors could have the possibility to share their ideas and problems, and seek for novel solutions in order to continuously enhance their working approach. These events would create and promote a warm, friendly and positive environment where new connections and business partnerships could arise.

Moving to a more formal approach, specific training could be provided to executives or managers on how to develop skills to manage effectively range of possible threats and opportunities, closely linked also to the current pandemic situation. Executives could bring problems or opportunities to these sessions of education, and work in teams to discuss their individual challenges, explore possible solutions and discuss how best to employ proposed changes. In order to increase the diversity of viewpoints, there could be a fusion of executives from different functions and departments, and at times even rearrange the teams so as to keep them fresh.

Investing in executive development offers good value for money and time. The benefits of this approach are that it enables managers to understand interactions between various parts of the institution and spot opportunities for productive collaboration and networking. Moreover, continuing exposure to the issues faced by different components of the organization helps executives realize the connection between things, especially when this is difficult to notice, and as a result to understand the situation as a whole and complete the puzzle. Lastly, this training approach builds up general management skills by helping executives refine the capacity to recognize and deal with a range of challenges. These training courses are relevant to both public and private sector.

Overall, the public administration could be run as a “real successful business” that is focused on satisfying the needs of its citizens, by providing top service.

Undoubtedly, multinational companies provide rich opportunities for networking too. Following the lead of other developed countries, multinationals in Italy could hold annual parties for former employees, many of whom are hired from other major companies in the sector or other sectors. Obviously they can become a priceless networking for the multinationals. Consequently, this could lead also to an improvement in their referral strategy.

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***Talent goes beyond than a referral.
Yet, a mix of talent and referral can be unbeatable.***

Regarding referrals, in both the public and private sector, connecting enables the contacts to understand what someone does and afterwards to determine how inspired they might be to provide a referral. The chances of receiving a referral increase greatly if contacts understand what you do, the problems you solve, the level of trust, how you help other people, and how you might inspire them to make that referral for you.

While high-level communication and networking is principally a face-to-face activity, as mentioned above, the pandemic accelerated the online networking including social media circles of professional acquaintances. Thriving in today's world requires strong interpersonal skills and specialized knowledge. People are paid for their ability to learn, problem solving and critical thinking.

To put it in a nutshell, building personal networking is a powerful drive. It is crucial not just to initiate a networking relationship, but above all, to maintain it. It takes **trust, honesty, work** and **perseverance**. The challenge is to **build mutually beneficial long-term connections**; to make the best use of your friends and contacts, however, without being manipulative. The finest networking seems to be from individuals that concentrate their effort on people they most like, and who seem to like them back; as well as from individuals that are perceived to have a wider purpose to their working life.

Networking encourages not only business partnerships, but also the **development of the culture** and **mindset** that Italians need right now. We must fully acknowledge and successfully leverage the **beautiful existing potential** Italy has in terms of imagination, creativity, art, culture, fashion, technology and innovation. Prosperous networking, which is selfless and altruistic - supporting long-term connections without expecting something in return, and receiving support without forgetting this kind gift - could make world a better place, essentially more civilized.

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In the end, your personal value is what you know and who you know.

“...Imagining a less individualistic society thanks to knowledge and consciousness of the past can help build a different present and better future. We have to recover quality overcoming the obsession of quantity. We have to ask ourselves what is necessary to have, what we truly want to be...”

- Giorgio Armani | 2021 -