



# Building a Broad Network of Experts, Advisors & Influencers to Deliver Results in an International Rotation

## CASE CONTEXT

An HR professional learns to adapt and build her network in transitions, including during a six-month international assignment. She gained experience and visibility among corporate leaders for her outcomes and effective approach, leading to a significant promotion.

In five years, Leah has held HR roles in three functions, plus one international assignment. Always optimistic, eager to learn and take on new challenges, she has become skilled at building relationships to help her adapt and succeed in each new role. Her six-month international assignment was her most exciting—and significant—stretch. The assignment took her from a regional facility to a corporate role in the U.S. and immersed her in a distinctly unfamiliar culture. Plus, the work was completely new, taking her from an HR generalist post into a learning and development role creating a virtual training platform to serve employees worldwide.



FEMALE

Level: INDIVIDUAL  
CONTRIBUTOR

Industry: HEALTHCARE

The U.S. assignment emerged through Leah’s visibility over time. Through formal succession management systems and ongoing work, she had the opportunity to meet corporate and senior HR leaders and to be on calls and projects with peers in the U.S. “Over a few years, I had built a relationship with these people. They got to know me, my background, my strengths, my weaknesses, my interests.” To prepare for the transition, she and her new manager focused on setting clear expectations of each other and the work. *“Clarifying expectations is one way to build trust. We know we are pursuing the same goal. We are aligned and we don’t have gaps in understanding.”*

## HIGH-PERFORMING LEADERS LEVERAGE NETWORKS TO DO 5 THINGS

Based on 20 years of research in more than 300 organizations, we know that the quality of your professional relationship play a significant role in your success. We have extended this research to describe the way high-performing leaders leverage their networks to: Innovate, Execute, Scale, Thrive and Adapt.

Prior to arriving in the U.S., Leah had not focused on building a new network or engaging with new colleagues. “I am someone who is open to new cultures and willing to take on a challenging experience. I thought I’d just give it a try ... I didn’t spend a lot of time talking with people to make sure I am fully prepared ... I wanted to just go experience it.” Then, very quickly on entry she looked to meet people and learn. “My idea was to be open, don’t make assumptions, ask questions. I just really expressed interest to get to know people, the food, the culture, likes, dislikes. I found people are very willing to share with me, and I learned new things ... Yes, there are differences, but I looked for the things in common ... There is a lot more commonality than difference. We are all human.”

An important step in moving into this rotation was building out her network by holding one-on-ones with many people. Her boss started the process by giving her a list of people for her to speak with in different functional roles or units. These conversations helped her identify existing resources or content that needed to be included in the virtual training. They also helped her “just get to know people,” gave her context and generated ideas for what could be done more broadly.



In each conversation, as people learned what she was trying to do, she was given referrals to other people she would not have known about. “When you talk with one person, they’ll say, *So-and-so would be a very helpful resource or, Oh, there is another person you should meet.*” In this way, she grew her network and identified a library of tools and several online training courses that could be expanded and made available broadly as part of her project.

Leah was able to gain help from her growing network by approaching people in ways that build rapport, create trust and provide interest. “I always try to seek a win/win instead of just asking people to help me win. I share the plan, the mission, the big purpose we are going toward ... Trust, too, is built by transparency, so I show a willingness to share what is behind the scenes. Then, people can fully evaluate if they want to get involved or not.”

She also networked with senior leaders and diverse influencers early in the process to get ideas and generate interest and support. It was especially valuable to engage regional stakeholders, to adapt ideas to different contexts and create ownership. Leah identified informal influencers by asking for referrals: *who else should we talk to?* “The informal network helped us polish our ideas. We might not understand what is happening in a group or in a country, so we could gain perspective and adjust our ideas ... It also made the project their own, not only a corporate idea. They could get on board, *OK, this new thing is coming and I can do something locally to help launch it.*”

Leah’s project was a success, generating greater impact than expected and earning a corporate award. The process of working on the project in a collaborative way created visibility for Leah, who was passionate about the work and authentic in her interactions. Through this project and her approach, Leah seeded interest in her capabilities. She developed relationships and reputation with senior HR leaders and functional leaders, which led to her next promotion—a post running HR for a manufacturing division of the company. The promotion moved her two steps up, from individual contributor to a manager of managers. “I never thought I’d be put in the manufacturing world. Part of why I got the role is the connections I made during my time at corporate.”

## Network Insights

- **Build awareness of what you do and who you are through work and activities that cross boundaries.** Leah built exposure with local leaders, which then gave her the chance to meet senior leaders from corporate and work on projects with their U.S. teams. These interactions gave her visibility and established her background.
- **Get to know people through 1:1s and referrals.** In her foreign assignment, Leah built her network largely one meeting at a time and always asking who else she should meet.
- **Engage others in ways that build trust.** Leah always looked for a win/win with her collaborators and support functions. She was transparent about herself and her needs. She helped others see the purpose and connect to why their contribution had value.
- **Bring in influencers early on to improve ideas and generate interest.** For Leah, senior leaders, resource owners and opinion leaders were needed to contribute expertise and perspective, as well as to foster ownership and, later, drive adoption.
- **Continue to build a strong reputation for both delivery and a collaborative approach.** Leah learned that sharing a prototype or project with others was an effective way to achieve goals, while creating visibility and reputation for her.

## 7 Ways to Collaborate & Build Ties to Succeed in Role Transitions

Leah has experience with extreme role transitions. She’s managed multiple domestic and international rotations and was recently promoted directly to a manager-of-managers level. Relationship-building has been critical to her success.

1. **Establish a win/win relationship.** Help other people see the benefit of interacting with you. What’s the why, the bigger purpose? And, what’s in it for them?
2. **Reciprocate.** Send information, make referrals and help before you are asked.
3. **Be transparent about yourself and open to feedback.** Let people know where you are coming from and respond to ideas and suggestions with curiosity.
4. **Genuinely care about other people.** Support their success, development and interests. Don’t pretend—people will know.
5. **Act on suggestions or explain why not if you don’t.** This builds trust, shows good will and lets people know you value their opinion and perspective.
6. **Be willing to defend your team.** They need to know you have their back and can be trusted.
7. **Lean on your allies and truth tellers.** Rely on one or two non-work colleagues to provide emotional support. Go to mentors or colleagues who have known you a long time to give good advice and be honest if you are off track.

### ABOUT THE RESEARCH & ROB CROSS

Building on 20 years of research with more than 300 organizations, the Network Leader Research Project seeks to understand the approach and strategies that enable certain leaders to consistently achieve peak performance. The research includes 160 in-depth interviews conducted by Rob Cross, a Professor of Management at University of Virginia’s McIntire School of Commerce. The Connected Commons is currently focusing its research on leadership effectiveness, talent optimization and organizational alignment and change—three areas where network insights can clearly drive performance. For more information visit [www.connectedcommons.com](http://www.connectedcommons.com) or email Rob at [rlcrossjr@gmail.com](mailto:rlcrossjr@gmail.com).