



SCALE
IDEAS &
IMPACT

A Consultant Scales His Impact & Career Success by Creating Pull in Networks

CASE CONTEXT

An experienced management consultant enjoys career growth by building networks of trust and respect with clients and teams. His positive reputation results in a constant flow of opportunities, talent and ideas, which benefit the business, the clients and him personally.



MALE

Level: FIRST-LINE LEADER

Industry: PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

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.



Chad is a management consultant, working with clients across industries and continents. He emphasizes his role as a generalist, able to “help get leaders and companies through difficult, complex situations.” Every few years, he transfers his base of operations, most recently finishing work in the U.S. and moving to Europe. Each move has been linked to a promotion or major new client opportunity that has come about due to his network. “I’ve moved around quite a bit and done that without losing traction. The network I built has been an accelerator of my career growth. At each step, the network has played a huge role.”

Chad’s experience reflects what two decades of research show: the strongest predictor of success is “pull” in networks. People who create pull and scale their ideas and expertise are *four times as likely to become and stay high performers as any other network predictor*. Chad’s approach to building his network—and his reputation—has resulted in opportunities and people coming to him. Rather than putting effort into self-promotion or marketing his skills and experience, Chad has grown his network organically. “Creating that pull is one of those things that I have done without thinking about it ... My experience is that you work on a client, you work with leadership, you do a bunch of new stuff. Then you blink, and it’s a year later. You’ve expanded the network, created a bunch of opportunities and that snowballs into other things.”

Chad gravitates toward networks within his client companies and is “notoriously bad at internal marketing. I don’t market the things I’m doing or tout my success inside my firm. I don’t really network with partners outside my immediate area or do things to gain access or exposure.” Instead, he focuses on driving results and letting that shape a positive reputation. “It’s my natural inclination to work with clients as if they were colleagues, to focus on the practical impact that we have in organizations, rather than creating the perception of success ... The natural result of that is that the results and the positive feedback from clients and my consulting team do flow up ... I have only regretted not self-promoting at one point, when I was part of a team that I knew was never really able to deliver the work. In consulting, there is no tolerance for underperformance, so there was some negative fallout from that. But, overall my approach has worked and it’s consistent with my style and who I am.”

Chad’s style also involves working through the networks of client organizations. Rather than only spending time with senior-level leaders, he identifies people who are highly capable and motivated to make a difference, regardless of their formal role or level or function.

He spots the potential influencers and change agents by looking for people who are well connected. He observes cross-functional teams solving problems to see who offers really good ideas. He asks who people turn to for help on relevant areas of expertise.

By investing in the informal network, Chad believes he can have the greatest impact on results. “I try to understand who they are, what they are trying to achieve, what their strengths are. I figure out how to help them and help the client at the same time ... I help them grow and develop and they give me support, rich data, a good sense of the political and operational landscape. Over time, they will echo the positive messages and help lay the foundation or infrastructure for more sustainable change ... Looking back, that approach has led to impact over the long term for my clients.”

Chad success is due in part to creating pull with clients and partners, via reputation and referral. He creates pull in another way as well: people want to work with him. His proven track record is part of the appeal, but Chad’s interest in growing talent also creates stronger ties. He mentors and builds his project teams, even using negatives or performance gaps as development opportunities. By working with people to learn and grow from experiences, people invest in him and give greater effort because they know he has an interest in their well-being. “There’s definitely some risk in doing that in the short term, but in the long term it’s the right way to go, for me personally and for the company as well.”

Chad’s network strategies—some intuitive, some intentional—have paid off in terms of promotions and high-value assignments ... not as a product of him reaching out but because unexpected benefits and opportunities flow his way through network connections due to his reputation. “Things come up out of the blue that have been the perfect thing at that time.” A chance to work for three months in Australia came about from a former colleague, aligning a new business venture and a vacation with family. In another instance, family demands put Europe as his next destination for transfer. Soon after, he partnered with a new colleague who happened to have a major assignment opening up in France. Within a few months, Chad was there. “Because of the network, things have played out quite well.”

Network Insights

- **To create pull, focus on results and authenticity first.** Let behavior and outcomes speak and let others (in Chad’s case clients and colleagues) do the communicating for you.
- **Maintain a long-term orientation with teams and talent.** Provide learning opportunities and use setbacks to develop others. It will be paid forward by greater effort to your projects and more talent and opportunities flowing to you.
- **Develop and leverage well-connected, motivated people in networks (not just formal leaders).** Help these influencers be more effective through coaching and genuine interest. The effort will produce results, your team will stay engaged and your reputation will grow through the positive echo about the work.

The 9 Behaviors of Energizers in Networks

Identify 2-3 behaviors that if you exhibited more consistently when under stress or pressure would have an impact on your ability to energize others and create pull in networks:

1. I maintain an effective balance between what I ask for and what I contribute to those in my network.
2. I consistently do what I say I am going to do and follow through on commitments I make.
3. I am committed (and show it) to principles or goals that are larger than my own self-interest.
4. In meetings and one-on-one conversations, I engage others in realistic possibilities that capture their hearts and their imaginations.
5. I am fully engaged in one-on-one conversations and meetings and show my interest in others and their ideas.
6. I create room for others to be a meaningful part of conversations or make sure they see how their efforts will contribute to an evolving plan in the future.
7. When I disagree with someone’s plan or a course of action I do so in a way that focuses attention on the issue at hand and not the individual contributing the idea.
8. I use humor (often at my own expense) to lighten tense moments and to remove unnecessary status or politics from interactions.
9. I maintain an effective balance between pushing toward a goal and welcoming new ideas that improve on a project or process for getting to a goal.

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 or email Rob at rlcrossjr@gmail.com.