



SCALE IDEAS & IMPACT

CASE CONTEXT

Through a successful project that rolled out globally to more than 2,000 sales representatives, a marketing specialist gained experience, confidence and a network that he needs to grow and thrive in a large healthcare company.



MALE

Level: INDIVIDUAL
CONTRIBUTOR

Industry: HEALTHCARE

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.



An Individual Contributor Scales a Strategic Technology Within a Global Sales Force

Stuart is a few years into a job he loves, after making a career shift from engineering to sales and marketing. He turned the

difficulty of a layoff during the last recession into an opportunity to get a business degree. His next job came through his network and being open to new ideas. A friend suggested that he go into sales and introduced Stuart to a marketing director at a large healthcare and pharmaceutical company.

"At first, I said, *No, I'm not a sales guy*, but I listened and had lunch with the director and he sold me on their approach ... Turns out, I love it!" Stuart took an analytics role to start and was involved in a range of projects, with an eye towards building his reputation and getting the most out of every opportunity. "My friend had confidence in me and put his neck on the line for me. I thought, this is my chance and I can't let him down. I went in with the mindset of failure is not an option; I've got to be the best I can be."

After two years, he agreed to take on a new, fairly undefined role in the same group. "It was cool and I ended up making it my own." He became involved in creating a sales tool that would consolidate key resources and systems used by the global sales force. The idea for the project emerged as sales reps were asking for easier access to data through their phones and tablets, and Stuart and his team were tasked with finding a solution based on key parameters. "We wanted to create an app that would combine 20 different reports and tools that sales used and that different groups were creating in different formats and locations ... My job was working with those teams to standardize processes, get everyone on board, meet project timelines to launch something that the sales people would see as valuable."

Within Stuart's core team collaboration was easy. "Everybody was engaged and bought in pretty easily. There was an aura that what we were doing was cool and people wanted to be involved. Folks were committed to doing what we needed to do to get it launched in a short time frame and were working long hours to get it done." At the same time, it was challenging to influence the contributors from other internal functions, such as planning, compensation and finance. He learned to influence without authority. "I had to find ways to make sure everybody was getting things done." Structured meetings and clear roles were important, and if something looked like it was sliding, Stuart benefitted from good relationships. "I tried to sincerely get to know people; I asked them about their lives as we do work together ... I also found that people tend to want to work with you if you there is a mutual value exchange, or if you show them you are willing to help them out when they need it."

To build interest and iterate a solution, Stuart and his colleagues talked to the sales teams. “We asked, *What info do you need most? How do you need to access it? How do you need to interact with the info? What are your priorities? What are your concerns?*” By involving stakeholders early on, he was able to understand the needs of sales. He brought those requests to the larger group of contributors to mesh them with the various reporting functions and the mechanics of the app. Stuart wisely avoided designing the app in isolation, instead gaining input and collaborating on possibilities. This resulted in clear direction and a solution that would address key needs and preferences.

The team created a prototype based on the collective ideas and feedback, and Stuart was charged with the initial presentations to sales directors. “I did a road show to demo the app. I said, *This is what we are looking to do; this is what we’ve created; tell us how we can make it better and what you need to promote it to your teams.*” Stuart’s team made changes and then asked a couple sales groups to be part of a pilot, using the app for a couple weeks and then giving input via survey or focus group. Again, Stuart’s team refined based on what people wanted and suggested. By the time the app was launched to the full force of more than 2,000 sales reps, awareness and interest in using it had trickled down.

The launch was successful; the app was well-received and uptake was faster than expected. Stuart took over as the app manager and continued to communicate and collaborate to improve it. “Over the next year, I continued to reach back out to the field, to look at usage data and metrics to learn how to improve. *What changes would be good? What else do you need?*” Matt realized there were some “power users” who were taking full advantage of the app; other people wanted more training to know how best to use it. New information was added and changes were made to improve ease of use. “We kept asking and responding. Our user surveys are showing time savings and convenience is appreciated by the reps, and they can devote their time to their priorities, which translates into positive impact for the business.”

Network Insights

- **Leverage clients and network influencers early to develop a solution.** Many people falter by developing solutions in isolation. Trust is built by engaging people along the way.
- **Find the positive and engage the personal.** Collaborations are more effective when contributors see what they are doing as positive and important. Influencing is easier and people want to work with you if you sincerely get to know them, share the benefits and help them, too.
- **Create a prototype for stakeholders to test and react to.** This dramatically improves the quality of the collaborations and feedback. It also builds trust and engagement, which reduces resistance when it’s time to execute and scale.
- **Continue to co-create and refine.** After initial deployment, maintain the network that got you to launch. Have a process for seeing and solving problems, communicating changes and making updates and improvements over time.

9 Ways to Create Energy in Networks

Energizers are usually high-performers. They are able to influence without authority and boost morale, learning, innovation and performance. They consistently exhibit nine behaviors—even when under stress or time pressure. Use this checklist to gauge how effective you are at creating energy in networks:

- ✓ I maintain a good balance between what I ask for and what I contribute to those in my network.
- ✓ I consistently do what I say I am going to do and follow through on commitments I make to people in my network.
- ✓ I am committed (and show this commitment) to principles and goals that are larger than my own self-interest.
- ✓ In meetings and one-on-one conversations, I engage others in realistic possibilities that capture their imaginations.
- ✓ I am typically fully attentive in meetings and one-on-one conversations and show my interest in others and their ideas.
- ✓ I create room for others to be a meaningful part of conversations and make sure they see how their efforts will contribute to an evolving plan.
- ✓ When I disagree with a plan or a course of action, I do so in a way that focuses attention on the issue not the individual.
- ✓ I use humor—often at my own expense—to lighten tense moments or remove politics from interactions.
- ✓ I maintain an effective balance between pushing toward a goal and welcoming new ideas that improve the project or the process for reaching 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.