



Connected  
Commons



Leadership  
Resources

# Avoiding the Disconnected Expert Network Trap



INSIGHT BITE



# The Disconnected Expert



## DISCONNECTED EXPERT



### ISSUE



This otherwise high performer does not address skill gaps – deficiencies of technical expertise, decision-making ability, or interpersonal style – by leveraging relationships.

### OUTCOMES



The disconnected expert will ultimately fail when a new role or changing times demand new skills.

### NETWORK REMEDY



Develop self-awareness and actively build ties to those who can help complement skill gaps.





# Avoiding the Disconnected Expert Network Trap



## Avoiding Network Traps That Derail Careers

If not cultivated and adapted to current demands, networks can hurt performance and derail careers. Our research over the past two decades reveals four common derailing traps for rising stars and leaders in transition.

### Trap 1 – The Bottleneck

The bottleneck occurs when people create too heavy a reliance on themselves in networks. Bottlenecks use their own time – and that of others – inefficiently, so they invisibly hold up work and innovation in the network.

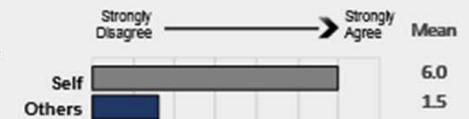
I strive to build capability around me so that I avoid the network trap of the bottleneck.



### Trap 2 – The Formalist

The formalist relies too heavily on formal structure to implement plans. S/he has an inaccurate perception of the informal network and therefore fails to leverage it as a means to get work done.

I strive to understand and leverage the informal network in order to avoid the network trap of the formalist.



### Trap 3 – The Disconnected Expert

The disconnected expert does not leverage relationships sufficiently to address skill gaps – deficiencies of technical expertise, decision-making ability, or interpersonal style – brought on as a product of a transition requiring new capabilities.

I leverage relationships to help me keep my skills current and avoid the network trap of the disconnected expert.



### Trap 4 – The Biased Learner

The biased learner allows certain people (such as those from a similar functional background or physical location, or with common values) to become disproportionately important in information and decision interactions.

I strive to maintain a diverse network of relationships to avoid the network trap of the biased learner, where certain people have a disproportionate "voice."





## Avoiding the Disconnected Expert Network Trap



Doug – a new first-level leader struggled before tapping into experienced leaders and cross-functional network

Started task focused, not team focused

Learned to adjust his managerial style

Found advisors and peers outside his unit, helped him see solutions and succeed

“I have learned more in this job than any other.”



# Avoiding the Disconnected Expert Network Trap



Reached out to his boss for advice and took feedback to heart. Showed improvement and given new opportunities and more responsibility.

Paid close attention to his reactions—and the reactions of others—for insight into what is going well and what isn't.

Asked for advice from others who have been in his role.



## Avoiding the Disconnected Expert Network Trap



Rapidly identify blind spots,  
get help from others

Use newness to advantage

Pay attention to *who*  
and *what*

Maintain ties with a few  
people who know you well





# Avoiding the Disconnected Expert Network Trap



 Connected Commons

Connected Leadership | 

 LEARN & ADAPT

## Self-Awareness Leads to New Networks & Opportunities

**CASE CONTEXT**

A results-driven manager realizes his behaviors are causing problems at work and home. He changes what he can control, addresses skill gaps and builds ties to those who can help him learn and succeed in an expanded role.

 **MALE**

Level: FIRST-LEVEL LEADER  
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.

Driven, proven performers face transition points in their careers as they gain more responsibility or step into new roles. One risk they face is becoming a “disconnected expert” — someone who does not have the skills and network needed to thrive at next level. By interacting with and relying on similar people over time, they limit their access to valuable know-how, perspectives and influencers. Doug, a first-level leader, stumbled for a time in his new role, before gaining the insight, support and experiences he needed to succeed. With guidance from his boss and a growing cross-functional, cross-level network, Doug was able to adapt his managerial style and take on a primary role in piloting a company-wide change initiative.

The challenge for Doug came when his team wasn’t performing well and, at the same time, he was dealing with significant family concerns, which required his time and emotional energy. “Things outside of work were negatively impacting my performance inside of work. We like to think we check ourselves at the door, but we’re human and that’s just not the case ... I am a results-oriented person, and I came to my team meetings saying, *OK, this is where our goals are, this is where we’re at, I need you guys to do better.* It didn’t work. My team was sinking; they became disengaged. I saw metrics and goals drop. People were missing work. It just blew up. I came into work in a bad mood. I was in a bad mood at work. I went home in a bad mood. It was a vicious cycle.”

“Driving home one day, I just thought, this is a bad situation. Something has to change. I may not have control over everything, but I do have control over what I say, how I say it, how I react.”

Doug took this moment of realization and acted on it. “I spoke to my direct superior. *What advice do you have?* She pointed out that she doesn’t react to me with anger or condescension when she thinks I’m not doing something right. It came down to treating other people how you want to be treated. That’s when I decided to change.” Doug started to relate to his team in different ways. Rather than pushing the metrics and motivating via force, he took time to check in with each person and connect with them on a personal as well as professional level. He ask for input from them about how to get better results. Small changes in behavior — adjusting his tone, not clenching his fist in frustration — had a calming effect on him and his team.

Over time, the team’s morale and metrics improved. Doug’s new effectiveness got him thinking about what’s next.

©2016 The Network Roundtable LLC. All rights reserved.





Connected  
Commons



Leadership  
Resources

## IN SUMMARY:

Be open

Know what you don't know

Find your truth-tellers

