



Effectively Managing Transitions

REFINE

A Revised Approach to his Network Yields Success for a Leader Moving into Senior Executive Role

REFRESH ENTERPRISE AND EXTERNAL NETWORKS FOR LONG-TERM PERFORMANCE AND GROWTH

Assess internal and external connections to ensure you have the diverse networks you need as demands, goals and circumstances change. Avoid the natural tendency to settle into the network that you first establish in a new role by investing in connections critical to ongoing success.



MALE

Level: SENIOR LEADER

Industry: PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

MANAGING TRANSITIONS

Entry into a new organization, changing roles, new responsibilities and promotion all place demands on you that can most efficiently be met by leveraging networks. Make transitions successful by investing in networks in three ways:

Initiate

Jumpstart productivity and inclusion by cultivating essential connections broadly and before you need help from others.



Engage

Energize people in your network and pull colleagues to you and your ideas when engaging with new groups.



Refine

Re-calibrate networks and collaborative practices for long-term effectiveness and well-being.



Recruited to a consulting firm right out of college, Lars has been all-in with his career and company for 17 years.

“It’s never been just a company for me. It is part of my identity ... When I started, I just put myself out there. I would tag along, just to get to know everyone. I would do anything, roll up my sleeves—and I’m still like that.” His extroverted, hard-charging style and commitment factored in to his ability to learn and deliver business, and he was rewarded with regular promotions. Six months ago, he moved into the senior ranks of the firm and has dramatically revised his approach to work and collaboration.

Lars’ pattern of promotions to this point has been tied to driving results. “Looking back, I see that right before I got promoted, my world got very small and focused ... I was just driving, driving, driving.” He saw that three kinds of people get ahead and are successful in the firm: 1) People who hustle, produce big and would rather make a mistake than slow down; 2) People who are always at the right hand of a successful manager and are likeable; and 3) People who have a unique skill and are so good they can’t be replaced. Lars says he was definitely in the first category. *“I was a bull, not a collaborator ... We’d be killing ourselves, very deep in whatever we were doing ... The people close to me, I would pull them closer and charge over the hill. And then someone comes in and says, *By the way, you’ve been promoted. All that you’ve been doing, that’s not your job anymore.* Then, all those people that you blew off or didn’t appreciate or didn’t collaborate with, you’ve got to go back and repair all those relationships.”*

“I’m learning the higher you go up, it’s less about individual performance and more about lifting up the whole institution. That is what’s very different in this promotion. It’s really not about me anymore. It’s getting everyone else to operate the best.” Making this shift has been a major change for Lars. *He has been focused on rebranding himself and building relationships and supporting people more broadly. “I have had to make friends with people I ignored, or wouldn’t have been friends with, or I battled with or I wouldn’t take their advice.”*

One thing Lars is doing is to give his time and attention to peers and colleagues broadly. *“I value my time above all else ... Before, I would not go to a meeting if I didn’t think it would be productive or have direct value to me, even if others wanted me there.” Now, building relationships and working through the network is his job—even when it doesn’t feel as if he is accomplishing much. “One of my mentors, said, *You’ve got to think about what it costs you not to do those things.*” Those words keep him focused on helping more and showing up in ways that matter to others.*

Lars is now an advocate for his team, helping people develop, connecting them with other leaders and going to bat for them. Increasingly, his identity is tied to developing others and seeing them do well. “There’s a shift in what is valuable ... My purpose now is to give all my employees the same experience that I’ve had. I’ve always had great managers, people who believed in me. I have to do that for them.”

Lars also has the self-awareness to see that he was good at building relationships up the hierarchy, but not laterally with his peers. He would always say yes when someone higher in the hierarchy wanted to grab a coffee or lunch and step up to get involved in visible projects or firm activities. But, he saw his peers as competition. In his new role, “I’m spending a heck of a lot of time trying to fix that.” No longer relying on the formal hierarchy, Lars is working to be involved and reciprocal. “Before, collaboration was one-sided. Now, if I can help someone, I will.”

He has reframed his belief that success is all about effort and hard work: “I’ve been the guy who would be better prepared, work longer and harder than anyone else.” Now, he’s at a level where that doesn’t work, and he must rely on his direct reports more and more. He appreciates their diverse skill sets and styles: one is similar to him and others are introverted or take completely different approaches. He gains ideas and counters his weaknesses (including an aversion to administration) by developing his team and giving them runway. “It’s very hard for me, but I am trying to leverage other people, give them a platform.”

He works to delegate within the team, both to build and leverage talent and to prevent overload. “I have less ability to forecast what I am going to be doing every day, week or month, so more has potential to drop. So, I don’t do anything alone.” He keeps up with his priorities and pushes back on unnecessary meetings by keeping a detailed journal. “Every day, I list what I have to do in three columns: strategic, tactical and personal. In the first few months everything was tactical. I have tried to change that, and I am getting to the strategic more and more.”

Lars’ all-in mentality has not changed. He continues to work 60- or 70-hour weeks, but when he’s home, he is home. “I don’t want to be always *sort of* working. I focus on using my time well and when I leave, I’m done.”

Network Insights

Lars was a hard-driving manager who moved up the ranks via high performance in focused areas. He got results, but when he became a senior leader, he saw how he damaged relationships along the way. He began to mend those relationships and drive success in new ways:

- **Showing up and making others a priority.** Where you give your time says a lot about what you value. Lars consistently goes to meetings if asked and volunteers ideas and support to show that he is serious about his colleagues’ interests as well as his own.
- **Re-defining success as developing and supporting others.** Seeing other people do well—stepping up in meetings, presenting their ideas, having their own big wins—is success for a senior leader. This was a major shift for Lars and is an important part of his brand and identity in his new role.
- **Reaching out to people with different talents and styles.** A common network trap when taking on a new role is to rely on the same people and the same skills that led to prior success. Lars staffed his team with managers who have complementary skills and styles to prevent him from thinking narrowly and missing opportunities.
- **Focusing the work and the network.** Lars sets daily tasks around tactical, strategic and personal priorities. He engages peers and colleagues intentionally in each area so that he does not fall back into his habits of making decisions and doing the work unilaterally.

High Performers Have Non-Insular Networks

The top 20 percent of employees have networks that keep them from narrow, biased thinking. They reach out in five ways:

1. **Up the hierarchy.** Your boss and select formal leaders provide a breadth of information, context, resources and political support for your initiatives.
2. **Across to peers.** Lateral connections in the organization are important for brainstorming and best practices.
3. **Among energizers.** High-quality connections create your reputation, draw emerging high performers to you and engage subordinates in a way that yields greater effort.
4. **Outside to experts.** External knowledge and perspectives yield innovations and novel opportunities.
5. **Over to customers.** Ties with internal or external customers ensure satisfaction and fuel learning.

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, Edward A. Madden Professor of Global Leadership, Babson College. 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 rcrossjr@gmail.com.