Effectively Managing Transitions | ENGAGE

An Early-Career Professional Builds Network & Delivers Results with Authentic Collaboration

SIMULTANEOUSLY BUILD YOUR NETWORK *AND* CULTIVATE REPUTATION THROUGH EARLY ACCOMPLISHMENT

Invest heavily in network development *and* in pursuing a few notable wins project, do good work on a network-expanding assignment, or solve a problem for a team or client build needed ties and a positive reputation.

MALE

Level: INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTOR

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.

Tyler joined a consulting firm straight out of college, following a summer internship that introduced him to the idea that his education and interests could be applied in a variety of ways. Now, four years into his career, he has worked on interesting projects, delivered solutions and built relationships that have pulled him into roles of increasing responsibility. By pursuing new knowledge, doing good work and collaborating and building his network in authentic ways, Tyler is seen as an effective contributor with a valued specialty. "I've been pulled in on a bunch of different stuff. At this point, I'm known to a fair portion of the company as someone who can set up a team and help them deliver."

Tyler's first assignment was within a software team. His role was to automate a process, which would speed up the delivery of work to clients. The process improved outcomes within his team, and he was able to help other software teams adapt his framework to their needs. Now, the automated process is used company-wide. "My manager saw that I had a good background and work ethic and gave me something that would be challenging but also interesting to me." The skills he learned and the network he began to build on that first project led him to his next assignment and subsequent success and reputation. "I was picked by a different software team to do similar work, but then it expanded … I took over a whole lot of different responsibilities and got to work directly with the client. Now, I manage that project."

To succeed in that first role, Tyler invested in both the specifics of the work and building his network. His manager helped him see the business value of the project and how developing his expertise would transfer to other areas. He met with each of the team members, as well as a few people in other groups who might need something similar in the future. He partnered with a developer on the team to manage the technical aspects. "He taught me a lot about how to actually do the stuff we were trying to do." Tyler enjoyed the work and pursued additional skills that would allow him to be even more hands-on with the software development. When the new code was finalized into the system, Tyler was able to demonstrate how his idea worked in practice. He would chat about it with people doing similar work, just as they bumped into each other in the hallways or at lunch. His manager, too, would speak up about Tyler and the success of the project within her network. Those interactions led to invitations to share the code, train other software teams and, eventually, a presentation at a lunch-and-learn session. "I talked more in-depth to a few people there, including the person who ended up being my boss on my next project."

Tyler's experience was common to high-performers early in their careers: *Having a product or output to speak to dramatically helps others see how to leverage that person's skills and, as a result, begin to pull them into projects and work*. Tyler also found that interacting with others in ways that he was comfortable with (e.g., hallway discussions) brought out his expertise in a genuine way. His approach and his tangible work product continued to build his reputation as a trusted, reliable contributor.

When he moved on to a second big project, Tyler initially thought he would directly transfer his knowledge. "My approach was to try to just copy everything that I had done on the first project, because that's what they asked for. But, it became clear that it wasn't going to work. I wasn't going to be able to port it over without making changes. I asked a lot of questions, which got me involved with other aspects of the project … They just had a lot of other challenges that I helped to bring to light … The problem I was brought in to solve, we ended up not doing and I took a bigger role in the project." By engaging collaboratively and morphing his expertise to existing needs, Tyler was drawn into the work and contributed in ways that increased his value.

Tyler continues to do good work, offering to take on more or fill gaps and then letting people spread the word. "When I'm asked to go in for a new project, they pull me in because they heard that I did something for another team." In a short time, he's built a good reputation within his division—and is one of the younger project leads in his area. He relies on people he has a relationship with to grow his network as needed to execute his work. "I don't go out and actively market myself, or go to events … I like to meet people and share ideas with them. If I'm working on something, I'll talk to somebody I've worked with before … Then I hear about someone who's one or two degrees away from me that I can reach out to and talk to."

Looking back, Tyler sees how his first bosses gave him visibility and encouraged him to build his skills and his network. "People who don't have a network outside of their team have fewer choices and it becomes a burden to figure out how to make sure they are utilized … There are definitely more opportunities for the people who do a good job *and* get out there and meet more people."

Network Insights

- **Use quality work to create the network.** Building new skills, doing needed work and engaging well with others demonstrates your abilities and builds trust. This fuels your reputation and give peers and managers reason to continually pull you into their work and networks.

- **Pitch yourself by showcasing an example of what you do.** A demo, outcome or prototype gives you something specific to talk about and relate to others' work or needs. This is an effective, authentic way to build a network that will pull you toward more work that leverages your skills and interests.

- **Shape what you know to other people's problems and interests.** Effective collaborators ask lots of questions and morph their expertise to needs rather than pushing their knowledge or experience directly.

5 Ways a Millennial Built Relationships to be Successful

Tyler's lessons reflect our research on how interactions lead to reputation and experiences that are key to career success:

1. **Do really good work and always ask,** *What else can I do?* "Stick your fingers in every pot."

2. **Build relationships outside of need.** Get to know peers and colleagues. Bounce things off of each other without expectation. "Sometimes those relationships end up being helpful, but I'm not thinking of it that way."

3. **Learn skills that are needed in an area adjacent to your current role.** "Everyone should learn more things and broaden their horizons." Put new skills to use and let your boss and others know what you're doing.

4. **Know what matters to your audience.** "Some people need to see you assert your skills and intelligence … More often, people are receptive when you show how much you don't know and you are willing to learn."

5. **Build trust with your boss early on.** This allows for autonomy and bringing your best effort. "The people who have managed me have allowed me to be in charge of things, so I've grown a lot and learned a lot."

"I could have gone to another company by now, and it's good to ask yourself, *Why are you staying?* One thing for me is, if I changed companies, I would have to start over to build my network. I spent a lot of effort building it here."

ABOUT THE RESEARCH & ROB CROSS