

# Network to Stay and Grow

## Why You Need to Network Internally and Five Practical Ways to Do It

By Ed Evarts

**Y**ou have a busy day ahead of you. You have several meetings scheduled, you have work which you need to complete, and you have one or two personal errands to run. By the time you put artificial sweetener and lactose-free soy milk in your coffee, you are already behind. As your workday ends, you take a moment to reflect. You moved so quickly between meetings, you barely had time to say hello to colleagues you passed in the hall. You rode the elevator with the new Vice President of Sales. “Hi, Bill,” she says. (Your name is Bob.) “Hi, Mandy,” you reply. (Her name is Mary.) You made progress on the work you needed to complete, yet your progress came with a cost—other than the meetings you attended and a few moments to grab lunch at the local deli, you never left your desk. You realize if there was a calendar for workers who represent a “heads-down” mentality, you would be Ms./Mr. November. The day feels like so many others.

Time passes, and one day your boss calls you into his/her office to tell you that although you have been a good employee, your position has been eliminated, effective in one month. Your boss tells you that during this time period, while you are transitioning your work to others, you can work with Human Resources to locate another position within the company.

At home that evening, once the news has sunk in, you realize the colleagues you pass in the hall, the coworkers with whom you attend meetings, and the executives with whom you occasionally ride the elevator, *see* you, but don't *know* you. As you begin to look around for your next opportunity with your employer and encounter individuals who know little about your contributions and capabilities, it becomes apparent to you that you should have picked your head up a lot earlier.

### THE CHANGING WORLD OF WORK

Regardless of your age or the tenure of your career, the world of work is changing at an exponential rate. Head-spinning advances in technology, endless bottom-line financial pressures, growing networks of global economies, and changing workplace demographics are significantly impacting our experiences in the workplace.

**Employers are acting as though employees are contractors.** The classic career path is transforming from a linear track leading from supervisor to vice president into a series of job assignments – roles that exist within an organization to achieve a defined objective and end once the objective is achieved. We move from role to role and from company to company with greater comfort, ease, and fluidity than any previous period in modern management history.

**Employers are looking to their employees to do more with less, and do more—faster.** With new technology being integrated into organizations and co-workers being exited from organizations (and their jobs not filled), workdays have become something you survive instead of experience. Workers are busy and multitasking reigns.

**Employers are expecting their employees to transition more quickly.** There was a time when companies were proud of their stability and consistency. Acquisitions were infrequent, coworkers with whom you attended new hire orientation twenty years earlier still were around to join you for lunch, and a hard day's work provided job security. Today, strategies, initiatives, floor plans, and organization structures are like the "secretary" in the 1990s sitcom *Murphy Brown*—every day when you come in, a

new secretary is waiting for you. As if a lot of transition was not enough, organizations also need to change quickly and nimbly. The competitive global marketplace shows little mercy for organizations that are slow to raise the bar for their customers and their employees.

**Employers are reducing costs by creating virtual work experiences.** Companies repeatedly look to technology to reduce costs and increase efficiencies. Webinars and teleclasses are replacing classroom training. Telepresence meetings and conference calls preclude the need to meet in person. The need to be virtual is so omnipresent a coworker sitting in the cubicle next to you is more likely to send you an email asking if the report you are working on is ready, rather than take a few seconds to walk over and ask in person. Opportunities for colleagues to

see each other and interact in person are slowly diminishing.

With the behavior of many companies reflecting the "do more, with less, and faster" virtual culture, the "busy day" scenario described earlier is increasing in frequency. Employees have little to no time to build broad awareness of the unique combination of competencies, skills, and value they bring to their organization. These "heads-down" contributors barely have time to drink their coffee, let alone proactively build their visibility with decision makers who may provide a new opportunity when the employee is faced with a demotion or job loss. When experiencing a change which impacts their career, employees are alone and vulnerable.

#### **VALUE + VISIBILITY (V2)**

As employees navigate the changing world of work, new paradigms are needed to reduce demotion or job loss exposure. While most employee/employer relationships are at-will, individuals can take steps to minimize the likelihood and impact of an unexpected job-ending announcement. To increase the likelihood of a new opportunity with your current employer, the V2 formula, Value + Visibility, is a good place to start.

**What is value?** In the world of work, value is generally viewed through the lens of business performance. Employees who help the organization reduce cost, increase revenue, improve margins, and execute are generally considered to be valuable. Being valuable, however, is different than being a good performer. The unemployment landscape is littered with outstanding "heads-down" performers who believed good performance equaled value. Faced with choosing between two otherwise equal "above expectations" employees, an employer is likely to be swayed by the contributor who consistently reduces expenses, generates revenue, improves margins, and executes. Employers who believe they are receiving a good return on their investment (ROI) from employing you will feel a sense of value.

**What is visibility?** To achieve the goal of being visible, two foundational



activities exist— the intangible being “known” and tangible being “seen”:

**Being known is your reputation.** Individuals successful in this area are known for the business value which they provide the organization, even to colleagues who have yet to meet them. The old adage, “your reputation precedes you,” continues to exist due to individuals who are very successful in managing their reputation and providing recurring business value to their organization.

**Being seen is your presence.** Individuals successful in this area seize opportunities to provide business value by “picking up their heads,” getting out of their office, participating in high profile projects, and building relationships. They identify opportunities to be seen in different ways (i.e., subject matter expert, team member, cross-functional contributor). These individuals have modified the phrase “MBWA—manage by walking around” into “NBWA—network by walking around.”

Focusing only on your reputation or on being present within your organization is not sufficient. You need to ensure that the targets of your efforts are key decision makers in your organization. You also need a balance between value and visibility, as illustrated by the Value + Visibility Matrix on this page.

### NETWORK INTERNALLY TO BUILD YOUR VALUE AND VISIBILITY

The changing world of work has created a new workplace paradigm which requires individuals to illustrate business value and visibility as a strategy to increase the likelihood of continued employment. One of the key ways to identify and secure your next internal opportunity is networking. When we typically think of networking, we think of times when we are transitioning from one organization to another. Less frequently do we think of the value of networking when looking to increase the likelihood of staying with our current employer.

Individuals looking to successfully traverse the new landscape of work will be defined as those individuals who take personal responsibility of the value they

provide their organization and take action increasing their visibility at work. An individual with perceived high value and high visibility is more likely to be successful than an employee with perceived low value and low visibility.

Networking elicits a variety of emotional responses from many individuals. Many are uncomfortable networking, as they feel they are selling themselves to a disinterested buyer. Others feel that networking is an ambiguous activity – for these individuals, what networking is and how to network successfully is unclear. At work, many professionals believe they do not have time or opportunity to network. Adopt a new foundation upon which to look at networking, using the following definition: “activities designed to build value and visibility within my organization.”

### FIVE PRACTICAL WAYS TO NETWORK TO STAY AND GROW

Networking within your organization is a purposeful activity. Networking at work takes time and requires planning. Consider the following as ways to build value and visibility and reduce the likelihood of unemployment.

**1. Assess your value in your organization with your boss.** Schedule a conversation with your boss, ask for his/her feedback on your performance, and

discuss the business value you bring to the organization. While some employees may not have a direct impact on revenue and margin, most employees can impact expenses to a degree and almost all employees are expected to execute. Ask your boss for his/her ideas on how to create more business value. Shifting a conversation with your boss from performance to value is likely to be compellingly different and helpful.

**2. Build a network of internal advocates.** Take out a blank sheet of paper and write down the names of five decision makers in your organization with whom you want to build your visibility. Schedule about forty-five minutes of their time over the coming months, and meet face-to-face with each of them.

- Be transparent about your desire to build your visibility and value within the organization.
- State that you are looking to understand more about their role and their function’s role in the organization.
- Ask them how they see the future of the company unfolding.
- Share with them your background with the organization and your professional interests as part of that unfolding future.

Ensure that you include your boss in your plans. Following your business-

**Value + Visibility (V<sup>2</sup>) Matrix**

<b>High Value</b>	~ Moderate Risk Level	✓ Low Risk Level
<b>Low Value</b>	X High Risk Level	X! Very High Risk Level
	<b>Low Visibility</b>	<b>High Visibility</b>

- **Low Value + Low Visibility** — You are at a **high risk level** when a headcount reduction occurs. You might survive if you keep your head down even lower!
- **Low Value + High Visibility** — You are at a **very high risk level**, as you are providing little value; the reputation which precedes you is not a reputation that others covet. How have you survived this far?
- **High Value + Low Visibility** — You are at a **moderate risk level**, as the value you are providing is there – only no one knows it. Build your reputation and be more visible, so as to improve your chances of surviving a headcount reduction.
- **High Value + High Visibility** — You are at a **low risk level**, as you are providing value and you are visible. You have a great reputation and are well known among key decision makers in your organization. While no one can guarantee you employment, you are reducing the likelihood of ending out on the street.

value conversation with your boss, let him/her know that you would like to take action on building value and visibility by meeting decision makers across the organization. Be explicit that your goal is not to find another job nor should these conversations be considered as a job interview. Your goal is to ensure that you are working now on the future.

**3. Participate in projects outside of your normal work zone.** The concept of participating in special projects is not a new one, yet they always seem to go to certain people. Rather than wait for someone to come to you, speak with your boss about participating in projects outside of your normal work zone, rather than a project within your functional area. After all, if you are going to participate in a project, it might as well be one that stretches you and maximizes your visibility. You may be thinking to yourself, “Who’s got the time?” This is where the changing world of work comes into play. As part of your ongoing professional development, work with your boss to make this effort part of your work week instead of an addition to your work week. Use the following simple process to start this conversation:

- Step 1: **START** with the details/facts about what you want to do.
- Step 2: **MOVE** to the big picture of the benefits to you and the organization.
- Step 3: **TALK** about the logical reasons to participate in the project.
- Step 4: **SPEAK** from the heart as to why this is important to you.

**4. Help an internal advocate execute.** Your networking conversations with internal advocates will likely create a number of opportunities for you. Listen for ways in which you can help an internal advocate solve a problem, make progress on a project, reduce expenses, generate revenue, improve margins, or execute. Your help doesn’t have to be a huge undertaking for you. Even small ideas, suggestions, and support can be significant contributions in the eyes of your colleagues.

**5. Start a networking circle.** Learning more about your organization and building your value and visibility is not something you have to experience alone. There are other individuals in your organization who share the same self-improvement goal as you do. Speak with your boss and start creating a list of cross-functional colleagues. Look for ways to connect with these individuals, using internal social media technology. Meet during lunch one a month to hear from decision makers across the company. Ask about their successes and challenges, and look for ways that you and your networking circle can provide value to this individual.

You have a busy day ahead of you. You are meeting with your boss to talk

about how you can increase the business value which you provide your organization. Your networking circle is meeting at lunchtime with Mary, the new Vice President of Sales and the group is committed to look for ways to help Mary successfully transition into the organization. You have a quick meeting this afternoon with an internal advocate who wants to get your thoughts on something. By the time you put artificial sweetener and lactose-free soy milk in your coffee, you are already ahead. ■

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#### CASE STUDY: VALUE AND VISIBILITY IN ACTION

“The day after I heard that my third position with my company was being eliminated, I received a ten-year service award catalog in the mail,” reflects Paul Pellicio, a financial executive at a global business-to-business service company. “I wasn’t sure if receiving the catalog in the mail was an effort by some cosmic force to add insult to injury or a good sign!” The next few days would show Paul that receiving the catalog was indeed a good sign.

Paul was soon offered a new role at his organization. This move should not have surprised Paul, as he always had soft landings internally. Why? *Paul had spent his career building his business value and visibility at his organization.*

A decade earlier, Paul had started at the company as a Financial Services Manager. He worked hard to create visibility and built a reputation as a hard-working team player. “I did what I was asked and did it well,” attests Paul. Thirteen months into this role, his company merged with one of its largest competitors and Paul’s position was eliminated. However, due to the reputation Paul was able to build during his brief tenure, he was offered a promotion to a new role.

While in this new role as Assistant Controller, and due to the perception of the business value Paul provided, he was asked to lead the organization in two significant financial initiatives. Recognizing the opportunity to raise his visibility in the company, Paul smartly accepted. However, after successfully completing these two initiatives, once again Paul was informed that a company reorganization would result in the elimination of his position. But once again, Paul’s inherent value and visibility within the company resulted in a new opportunity as a Director of Corporate Accounting.

The importance of Paul’s value and visibility to the company continues to be rewarded and appreciated. Most recently, internal advocates he had built over the years helped Paul land his current role as an Internal Audit Manager.

“My history of adding business value to key projects facing the organization, my reputation, and the visibility I created by being flexible to new opportunities as they arose, have allowed me to thrive,” observes Paul. “I have enjoyed working at this company; and, as I look back on my career, I can see the benefits of my efforts to network, stay, and grow.”