

Bridge to success built on reputation

Good relationships are crucial to your working future, writes **Robyn Webb**

THE VALUE of building and maintaining effective business relationships may be obvious to people in sales-related positions, but positive workplace relationships can impact any person's career. In an environment where many opportunities stem from recommendations and referral, every interaction has the potential to influence future career success.

How positive are your workplace relationships? Would your manager, colleagues, customers or suppliers recommend you?

The process of building business relationships comes more easily to those with a genuine interest in the people they work with, beginning with colleagues and extending to customers or suppliers.

People notice and recommend people with whom they have beneficial interactions and where they have been left with a positive impression.

Diane Hallifax, human resources specialist of Everest Group, points out that most people value a relationship where there is personal interest and connection, rather than just a business transaction. The trick to this stems from being a good listener and remembering details about the other person, such as asking after their family or whether they enjoyed their holiday.

"People like to know that someone is listening to them and are generally really impressed when details about themselves are recalled in later conversations."

Odette Shearer, consultant with Pohlen Kean, agrees that sharing a little about oneself helps to foster effective relationships and that to capitalise on the relationship there needs to be

mutual trust, built through regular contact, understanding the person's objectives and communicating with honesty.

Within a workplace, internal understanding, communication and co-operation are integral to achieving organisational objectives. Positive relationships between teams are fundamental to achievement and a career may well be impacted where the importance of such internal relationships is overlooked.

Lynlee Wilson of the People Group says that effective relationships exist where employees are actively meeting with other people within the business.

The intent is to gain a better understanding of each other's roles to work together more effectively.

Wilson finds "people are often surprised on our management programme that there are specific skills they can learn about engaging with other people".

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ODETTE SHEARER
POHLEN KEAN CONSULTANT

Internal Opportunities

Internally, it is often the people who have been identified as having "high potential" who are successful in being identified for promotional opportunities, says Wilson. "This tends to happen with employees who are fully engaged and have demonstrated their willingness and skills to other people in the organisation, not only their immediate manager."

Within a larger organisation, Shearer suggests the benefits of fostering relationships with managers of other divisions, alerting them to interest in their area of the business and seeking feedback as to the likelihood of consideration to join their team. While demonstrating commit-



WORD OF MOUTH: Taking an interest in co-workers and presenting yourself as a positive person can open doors.

ment to career growth, the individual would gain insight into how they are perceived by other managers and where any personal development might be beneficial.

Hallifax highlights the importance of open relationships with managers, including having the confidence to discuss aspirations. If goals are not expressed, they are less likely to be achieved. "People who develop effective relationships get the breaks in life because their managers know what they aspire to and can provide them with opportunities to realise their dreams."

External Opportunities

The "hidden job market" refers to employment opportunities that are not openly advertised. It is significant, says Wilson, because often, in anticipation of an opportunity within their organisation, the hiring manager will

explore the market through their networks to source suitable "pre-validated" candidates. Wilson says taking a long-term view is important. "People are constantly moving around and may at some point have an opportunity for your skills and experience, as long as they know of you and what you can do."

Recruitment consultants actively invite referrals within their networks. Shearer refers to the "six degrees of separation" by which, through establishing a relationship with one person, the potential exists to access all the people within that person's network. "Where effective relationships exist, opportunities open up," says Shearer. Conversely, the impact of negative behaviours can become a major hindrance to a person's career. Wilson sees the New Zealand marketplace as perhaps having only two degrees of separation when the ques-

tion is asked, "do you know Person X?" To build effective relationships, recommendations include:

- Active listening to understand other team members.
- Awareness of other people's objectives and priorities.
- Demonstrating a genuine interest in people's lives.
- Actively contributing to organisational projects and initiatives.
- Acknowledging the achievements of others.
- Inviting and providing feedback.
- Offering referrals and recommendations.
- Respecting confidentiality.
- Supporting organisational change.
- Embracing opportunities.
- Building relationships outside your current organisation.
- Maintaining contact with former colleagues and managers.

How can an individual assess the

strength of their relationships? Hallifax says a good measure is that you are remembered, that you receive a positive response when you make contact, that people ask to speak to you directly or make the comment "I have heard about you".

A LinkedIn profile page not only supports active networking but also provides a platform to ask for recommendations or, better still, allows the people with whom you interact to post unsolicited recommendations.

Wilson recommends people with an online presence to Google search themselves to measure their online profile.

For more formal feedback, Hallifax suggests asking the question of the direct manager at a performance review, or seeking customer comment through customer surveys. Building effective business relationships takes time and commitment, but the benefits are valuable.