

So let's start with how leaders should define and understand networking within a leadership context.

- 1) First, could you provide our audience with YOUR thoughts on a working definition of “networking” in the context of effective leadership?

Answer: Good afternoon everyone, and thank you Lina for having me in today's Learning Café. You know “networking” is a topic that I am very passionate about. With a career that has spanned 37 years, I, along with the organizations that I have served, have relied heavily upon networking opportunities to get things done. Thus, my working definition of “networking in a leadership context” is simply “deliberately connecting with others to achieve mutually, beneficial relationships.”

So let's unpack that definition. ***“Deliberately connecting with others.”***

Effective networking has to be intentional, not accidental. To quote Stephen Covey, Leaders should “begin with the end in mind” by determining the purpose for the deliberate contact. Why are you attempting to establish this connection. What is the desired outcome? Is it to obtain career advice? Is it to associate with people who share common, professional interests? Is to establish coalitions of advocates and allies committed to achieving organizational priorities?

***“to achieve mutually, beneficial relationships.”***

The relationship has to be mutually beneficial to increase the probability of sustainment. Think about it if someone is always giving, giving, giving to you, and you are always taking, taking, taking with no trade-offs, you will eventually wear out your welcome.

So does that definition make sense?

- 2) Let's talk about connection and building relationship. How does networking related to those concepts?

Answer: As I mentioned connections and building relationships are critical steps in the networking process. To effectively network, you have to connect intentionally with others, to achieve mutually beneficial relationships that result in sustainable networks that assist in getting things done.

- 3) As you reflect back on your career, I'm sure there have been times when you found yourself relying on networking to pull off something successfully. Can you share an experience with us, and what you were facing, and how networking resulted in a win?

Answer: I can truly attribute my professional successes to having exceptional networking abilities. The best example I can share relates to my TSA experience, establishing baggage, passenger and cargo screening operations at the Jacksonville International and Gainesville Regional Airports. So let's step back in time ...

- 4) I bet you're quite in demand in terms of leaders who people want to network with – including me :) Tell us about an experience where you found yourself being called upon by someone else to help deliver success – and what did YOU learn from it?

Answer: You are too kind Lina, and in fact, if it's okay, I would like to share two brief experiences. The first is in reference to the call I made to you a couple weeks ago. TELL STORY

The second example involves the DHS Science and Technology/Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers Contracting shared services agreement entered initially entered into in the 2005/2006 timeframe. As a way of background, TELL STORY

- 5) I think of networking as a gateway really. It's an action and an intention that plants seeds for what really matters: collaboration, relationship, and partnership. Networking can lead to mentors, new jobs, new friends, and on-call SMEs. Yet, it's not something that many leaders have the time – or sometimes even the interest – to invest in. Some don't realize the value, and some do, but don't know how to go about doing what is considered networking. What advice would you have for leaders about how to engage in networking and why to engage in it?

My advice to leaders on how to engage in networking is simple. Networking is a recognized, critical leadership and executive competency. In fact, the Office of Personnel Management has established it as an executive core qualification under the auspices of building coalitions/communications. It's a skill that must be developed, so with that develop it through education, training, mentoring and practicing. As a leader, you will be required to demonstrate networking proficiency in order to facilitate organizational successes. If you learn how to do this well, your job as a leader will have gotten much easier.

We all know those people who “do” networking wrong. They are aggressive, relentless, and while they want to be applauded for their initiative, they sometimes end up being confused that they are rebuffed. What would you say are some of the do's and don'ts to effective networking?

That's a great question. Let's start with my top Do's.

1. Be Prepared – Network with a purpose by planning strategies to achieve that purpose. Share Senior Executives Association example.
2. Be Authentic – Be yourself, but your best self.
3. Be Enthusiastic and Engaging
4. Be Honest and Forthright

Now the Don'ts

5. Don't Talk More Than You Listen, Listen More and Talk Less
6. Don't Strive to Take More Than You Give
7. Don't Forget to Follow-Up, Sustain Viable Networks

6) Do you have a network that you call upon frequently? Tell us about them.

Thank you for that question, and yes, I do. The network I call upon depends on the issue at hand. For example if I am contemplating a career decision, I mostly consult with my professional foremothers and forefathers, as most are retired from Federal service. Those people I have established alliances with over time. I either worked for or with them. They know and appreciate my character and competence, and I theirs. And, they genuinely care about my well-being, as they have invested in me. They will tell me what I need to hear vice what I may want to hear.

Second example, I have a business community of interest network. These are networks built on associates and advocates that are reputable, competent and share my values related to program and operational excellence.

Last example, I have a wellness network, a physical, mental and spiritual network of associates, advocates and allies in which we focus on mutually beneficial interests in those realms.

- 7) We promote leaders at all levels and networking, connection and relationship building is one of the most fundamental – and accessible skills – for leaders at any level. What advice would you give to leaders about the importance of relationships and networking throughout your career?

It's a critical core competency that leaders have to become effective in demonstrating repeatedly. Leaders have to prioritize this competency, as your success as a leader depends upon your ability to relate with others. Those people that you will be relying upon to achieve desired performance outcomes. I reflect upon the individual recognition I received back in 2017, as a Presidential Rank Award recipient. The very first thing I did was to say thank you to those throughout my organization and other networks that trusted and invested themselves in me and committed to achieving organizational performance outcomes.

- 8) As you plan to conclude your federal career in the next few months, I'd like to take a moment and simply ask you: what do you most want us to know, remember and take to heart about being DHS leaders?

Public service is honorable service, and serving as a DHS leader is a privilege. No matter your position, grade or rank, you can choose to lead from where you are. First by effectively, leading yourselves leveraging self-awareness and continuously learning, developing and contributing. Second, if you are charged with leading others by virtue of occupying a formal position or role, take that responsibility seriously. Demonstrate the behaviors you would like others to emulate. Aspire to inspire. Invest in leaders at all levels.