

## Careers and development

### Yeung At Heart –

#### Be connected to workplace success



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*It's not what you know, it's who you know.* The old adage says that success comes less from the expertise that we have and more from good connections with decision makers.

When I left university and started my career working as an associate for a management consultancy firm, I believed that promotions would be awarded on merit. I later learned that this wasn't the whole story. Clearly, you wouldn't get promoted if you had performed appallingly. However, it turned out that it mattered less how hard an individual had worked than *whether enough of the partners knew who you were and were willing to vouch for you.*

So doing exceptional work but keeping to yourself was likely to scupper your chances of promotion. Instead, doing reasonably good work but making sure you made a point of speaking to a handful of partners and building robust relationships with them was more important.

#### **The art of Connecting**

I don't think that most bosses set out deliberately to reward only the people that they like. However, bosses are busy people and simply don't have the time to gather all of the facts to make wholly egalitarian decisions. They take shortcuts and try to make the best decisions that they can. Perhaps subconsciously, they naturally tend to look more favourably upon those individuals that are well known to them.

Some employees bemoan the fact that this is an unfair situation. They say that this state of affairs panders to those who engage in office politics and that organizations should change.

True, the situation may be less than entirely fair. But is it really reasonable to expect the world of organizational life to change? No. The savviest employees know that it's pointless to gripe about what is fair versus unfair.



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Instead, the best strategy is simply to work on our relationship building and networking skills – something that I call Connecting in my book *E is for Exceptional*. Whether we're looking for an internal promotion or a new job elsewhere, the skill required is essentially the same.

### **Connecting in action**

The first step in raising our profiles with the people who count is merely to acknowledge and take on board the message that opportunities do not always go to the most hard-working. Once we accept this, we can begin to take further action to ensure that our achievements are noticed by those who matter.

A vital step is to think about the time you have with your boss. Whether you have a regular one-to-one meeting or just occasional informal discussions with your boss, you need to think about ways of making sure that your boss has a good perception of you. This begins by making sure that you don't always go to your boss with problems that you expect him or her to solve.

By all means communicate to your boss the problems or issues that you are facing. However, try to come up with solutions to each. That way, when you do deal successfully with each problem or obstacle in your work, you can then tell your boss that you dealt with it and that there's nothing to worry about. Now *that* is the kind of news that impresses bosses.

You can raise your profile further by volunteering for initiatives that may be happening within the organization. Join working parties, committees and cross-departmental steering groups. That way, you not only add value to the organization but get to be *seen* to be adding value too.

### **Connecting externally**

The adage that it's not what you know but who you know is also true when it comes to pursuing jobs externally. Over the years, I have cultivated a strong network of contacts at other management consulting firms and also within the human resources departments of many clients. As a result, I get phone calls from people wanting to offer me a job at least several times a year.

Having people phone you up to offer you a job is clearly a much easier way of finding your next job than having to send your CV out to multiple employers in the hopes one of them may be interested in you.

So try to find time in your schedule to attend the occasional industry meeting. Go to seminars and workshops where you can network with other like-minded people. If you can be helpful to a colleague in another business, they will in future be much more predisposed to be helpful to you too.

I know some employees feel that they are too busy with their studies or their day-to-day work to leave the office and attend industry events. Unfortunately, they're the ones who are most likely to get overlooked for promotions and new jobs. Don't let that be you.

