

## Networking (2-24-15)

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“No man is an Island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main;” (Donne, n.d.)

“Know what you know, know what you don't know, and know who knows what you don't know.” (Drogan, n.d.)

**net·work**  
*/ˈnet,wɜrk/* 

*verb*  
gerund or present participle: **networking**

connect as or operate with a network.  
"the stock exchanges have proven to be resourceful in networking these deals"

- link (machines, especially computers) to operate interactively.  
"networked workstations"
- interact with other people to exchange information and develop contacts, especially to further one's career.  
"the skills of networking, bargaining, and negotiation"

 Translations, word origin, and more definitions

(Google)

**Dun·bar's num·ber**

*noun*  
noun: **Dunbar number**

a theoretical limit to the number of people with whom any individual is able to sustain a stable or meaningful social relationship (usually considered to be roughly 150).  
"even in the age of Facebook, the number of friends with whom you keep in touch is likely to be less than Dunbar's number"

 Translations, word origin, and more definitions

(Google)

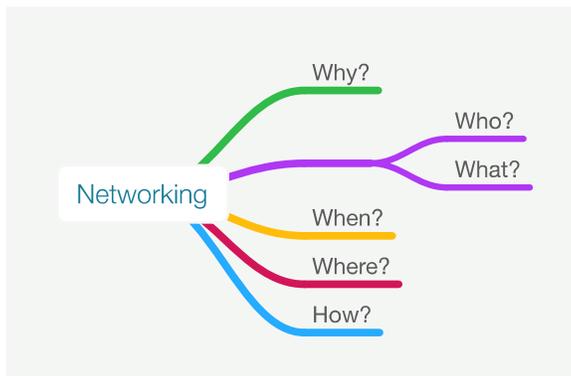
### Discussion

Networking is associated with different adverbs – social, business, computer come to mind. Essentially, however, it is another word for relationships, a word that has been with us, in one form or another, since the beginning of time.

For the purposes of this paper I propose to examine the topic using Rudyard Kipling’s Six Best Friends: who, what, why, where, how, and when. I’ve also decided to do as little research as possible on the subject. That is left to the reader. Rather, I aim to draw upon my almost 50 years of experience in the business and education.

### The First Question

Are Rudyard Kipling’s Six Best Friends all equal? I think not. I hypothesize a relationship between them that dictates one’s approach to networking. After a bit of noodling on this matter of relationships I came up with the following diagram.



While I am a fan of serendipity, I believe that the value of networking is a function of clearly understanding *why* you wish to network. *Why* has pride of place in this scheme.

Consider, for example, why we communicate (Drogan, 2006).

1. To be polite.
2. To attract attention.
3. To inform.
4. To prompt [or forestall] action.

We should think of a similar list of reasons for why we wish to network. For example:

1. To get a job.
2. To learn something new.
3. To make new friends.<sup>156</sup>
4. To ask for assistance.

When we lack a clear understanding of *why*, we are likely to squander our resources, the most precious of which is time.

We also run the risk of squandering something almost as precious as time – reputation. There is an old saying that one has only one chance to make a good first impression. This applies, it seems to me, more to the *who* of networking than the *what*.

 The advent of the Internet and the World Wide Web has fundamentally and forever changed the nature of networking. Often, our interlocutor is not a *who*, but a *what*.<sup>157</sup> Consider the interactions you have during the day. The notation *who* : *what*<sup>158</sup> is changing.

I have drawn the diagram in this fashion for we have a choice of networking partners. Some of you who read this will not recall anything other than this choice. However, there was a time when networking was exclusively between the *who*.

Be that as it may, we now have a choice. This raises the question of the considerations associated with making a choice between, say, monster.com and a job fair.

There is an interesting question here. Do we turn to the *who* first or the *what*? I suspect the answer lies in understanding how much time you can devote to finding the information you seek, on the one hand, and the breadth of information you need on the other.

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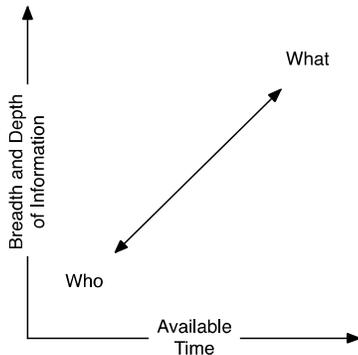
<sup>156</sup> Consider the phenomenon that is Facebook, especially the number of friend requests you might receive, often from people you do not know.

<sup>157</sup> The most famous of the *what*, google, has become a verb.

<sup>158</sup> For those of you, like me, who need a reminder, this is the mathematical notation for the ratio of one thing to another.

When we have but a short time to reach a decision (i.e., there is a requirement for a very fast SIDAL loop<sup>159</sup>) we tend to turn to those we trust (*who*) for information. We do the same thing when we are overly lazy.

I might characterize this decision space like this.



Most of the time, of course, we strike a balance between the *who* and the *what*. There are other characteristics of the information (e.g., historical, contemporary) that influence our decision as to where in this space we should be.

The *what* is generally indifferent as to the relationship with *who* or another *what*.<sup>160</sup> Google cares little about you when you tap it on the shoulder and ask for something.

Of course the same is not true of the *who*. The *who* may care and, with that in mind, we need to be sure that we have a relationship with the *who* before we need the contact.

This leads to the fundamental reason to network; to establish meaningful relationships before they're needed. The less the time available to gather the information the more one needs the relationship.

**When?** There is generally a time better than others when the network effort should be made. Often, however, this decision has been made for us, especially when we're first developing a relationship. For example, we may be at a conference. As relationships develop, however the time of contact with the *who* becomes increasingly our decision and we may wish to pick the specific time when our conversation may be most effective. For

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<sup>159</sup> The SIDAL loop has its genesis in *Adaptive Enterprise: Creating and Leading Sense-And-Respond Organizations* (Haeckel & Slywotzky, 1999).

<sup>160</sup> I realize this is not strictly true. My bank, as an example, is not indifferent to who is trying to have a relationship with it.

example, if I'm the *who* the best time to contact me if you want my undivided attention (I'll come back to this phrase in a moments) is in the early mornings before the chaos characteristic of most of my days has had an opportunity to develop.

But suppose you don't want my undivided attention. Suppose you want me to hear and acknowledge the message, but don't want me to have an opportunity to think about it very much. Then you would figure out a time to see me when I am swimming amidst the chaos.



Where you want to be on this continuum is a function of several variables.

- The *Why*.
- The relationship that exists between us.
- How you think I might react to what you have to say.

I'm not suggesting that there is anything devious going on here, but you, as the instigator of the conversation, have a desired outcome and you ought to select the *when* that maximizes your odds of success.

You want to be as close the right end of this graphic as possible when you are networking.

**Where?** Networking takes place in time, the *when*, and space, the *where*. You have an equivalent decision to that associated with *when*.



And there is set of prior decisions that will affect the decision here.

**How?** And we come to the last of the ideas regarding networking, *how*. This notion can perhaps be best covered by thinking about the *Principles of Communications*.

1. The grammar and syntax is understood.

2. The information communicated is relevant.
3. The medium of communication is acceptable.
4. There is a desire to communicate.
5. There is confirmation of understanding (Drogan, 2009).

My argument is that the factors covered above – *why, who, what, when, where, how* – and the *Principles of Communications* require consideration if one is to network successfully.

### The Second Question

Is that all there is to networking? No, I don't think so.

You considered Rudyard Kipling's Six Best Friends in a certain order and placed certain emphasis on each (e.g., the *when* and the *where*). Suppose the other party in the conversation has a different order and emphasis? What should you do to maximize your odds of success?

The simple answer is to understand as well as you possible can how the other party views Rudyard Kipling's Six Best Friends and the principles of communication as summarized above. Adjustment of your order and emphasis may be required.

Consider, for example, how the order and emphasis may need to change if the other party is your boss as opposed to, say, your subordinate.

What's important is your success at achieving your desired outcome. You may need to adjust the means in order to achieve the end.



I spent some years at IBM, famous, at one point in time, for this single word.

It was and continues to be good advice.

Or, to paraphrase Davy Crockett, "Be sure you're right, then go ahead."

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## The Dunbar Number

It matters not how many names there are in your contact list, but on the nature of the meaningful relationships you have with them. Robin Dunbar<sup>161</sup> explored this and, in my experience, he pretty well captured the essence of meaningful relationships.



Here's a shot of my home Rolodex.<sup>162</sup> There are more than 150 contacts here. I've another Rolodex at work; I've contact lists in my work and personal e-mail systems, and on my smartphone.

Go to a conference and people hand you their business cards even before they introduce themselves.

It's not the number of contacts that counts, it's the number of meaningful relationships you have that count.

Albert Einstein is said to have remarked, "Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts."

I suggest that you manage your contacts for maximum present value. I no longer have the relationships I once had. Their needs and my needs changed over time. This, in my view, is a natural process.

"Relationships - We all got 'em, we all want 'em. What do we do with 'em?" *Fruitcakes*, Jimmy Buffet (1994). You manage them for value. This can become a bit tricky because the value of the relationship may be different for each of the parties. What do you do when someone needs a relationship with you more than you need with him or her? It can't be, it seems to me, that you can simply ignore the needs of the other person.

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<sup>161</sup> There are a number of references to this that can give you the background. Google "the dunbar number."

<sup>162</sup> Google "Rolodex" is you are unfamiliar with the term.

The Third Question<sup>163</sup>

A 1997 article in the McKinsey Quarterly observed:

**The modern world economy** is in the early stages of a profound change in the shape of business activity. Two centuries ago, dramatic shifts in the economics of transformation—of production and transportation—precipitated the Industrial Revolution. An upheaval of equal proportions is about to be triggered by unprecedented changes in the economics of interaction.

Interactions—the searching, coordinating, and monitoring that people and firms do when they exchange goods, services, or ideas—pervade all economies, particularly those of modern developed nations. They account for over a third of economic activity in the United States, for example. More than that, interactions exert a potent but little understood influence on how industries are structured, how firms are organized, and how customers behave. Any major change in their level or nature would trigger a new dynamic in economic activity.

Just such a change is now beginning to occur. A convergence of technologies is set to increase our capacity to interact by a factor of between two and five in the near future. This enhanced interactive capacity will create new ways to configure businesses, organize companies, and serve customers, and have profound effects on the structure, strategy, and competitive dynamics of industries (Butler et al., 1997).

These interactions are the means whereby relationships and thus networks are established.

This development suggests 1.) an increase in the speed with which networks are established and changed, 2.) an increase in the number of objects in the network, and/or 3.) both increases happening together. In any event, there is an increased bandwidth likely to occur

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<sup>163</sup> This question was added September 27, 2015.

and, should it become a competitive advantage, become a requirement for business.

One wonders whether an increasing number of networks will be between technology-enabled agents thus disintermediating the human. The human will not be able to keep up.

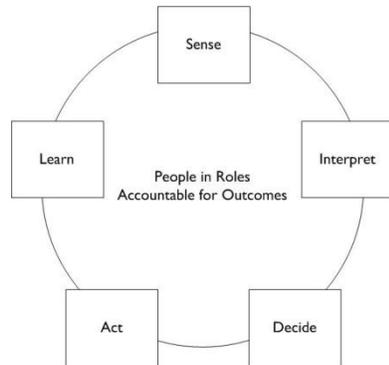


Figure 108 SIDAL Loop

Networking in business is about developing better understanding leading to better business decisions (see the SIDAL loop to the left). Increasing speed creates issues for humans. Hence, we have automatic collision and lane departure warnings, and automatic application of brakes in modern automobiles.

Will humans, in a sense, be left behind?

#### Coda

Networking is about establishing a set of relationships that provide value. Value may be easy to define as in the need for a recommendation letter or as difficult (impossible?) to define as in an affair of the heart.

If you wait to develop a relationship until you need it you are too late.

Relationships come and go. This is a natural thing.

It's not the number of contacts, but the value of the relationships that counts.

James Drogan  
February 24, 2015

#### Additional Reading

Schumpeter - The Network Effect. (2015, January 17). *The Economist*, 66.

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