



## CAREER VISION

### Five Steps to Reinforcing Your Support

How do I put in place a good support network? Besides taking stock and making a list of all the people you know, there are five steps that can help with your progress. Remember the "6 degrees of separation" theory? Your access to information and resources is greater than you think.

1. **Clarity.** People who are new to building a support system are sometimes at a loss for where to begin. The issue is not "who" to approach, but "why." What is it that you are trying to learn more about? Do your homework. The answer to this question will naturally lead you to identifying individuals who can be a resource to you.
2. **Specificity.** People naturally like to help, yet often appreciate some direction. Be ready to specify what a particular person can do. For example, does she know someone in a specific industry, company, or department? Does he know how you might enter his field without a traditional background? Does she know other professionals who are using a new technology of interest to you?
3. **Communication Strategy.** It's smart to plan what you want to ask, and how to go about it. See if someone who is familiar with your contact knows his preferred way of being approached: email, phone, letter, or face-to-face meeting? Is this person more formal or pretty casual? Also, make sure you have established consistent criteria for all discussions, in order to consolidate the information and make accurate comparisons and conclusions.
4. **Appreciation.** Every phone call and meeting granted by your support persons is an investment of their time and interest in you and your career. Respect the time they give by valuing their opinions and advice. A good investment of your time is a personalized thank you note. Often neglected, it is a simple gesture that can make a huge impression.
5. **Reciprocation.** Building a support system requires an investment in social capital. Learn to cultivate relationships that result in ongoing mutual reciprocity, where you give as well as receive. The networks that are built by individuals facilitate cooperation and collaboration, and help all parties achieve mutual benefits.

A healthy, vibrant support network keeps you going when the going is tough, attracts career opportunities, and provides occasions for you to help others.

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