

# What goes around comes around

**Most people start networking when they are unhappy in their job or have been made redundant. Too late. Put your network of contacts to work on your career at all times. You never know when someone you used to know comes around again.**



*Bear in mind the endgame, now.*

The endgame of a brilliant career includes some non-executive directorships. It's a good life. You are paid a modest sum of money a year for preparing for and attending a board meeting every month. If asked, you can always take on a one-off project on behalf of the board, to keep your hand in. And if it gets a little niffy or unpleasant, like the grandchildren you simply hand the problem back to the people who own it and just walk away. But to get these directorships you need to push.

There are many things I like about politicians but one thing above all. They wear their ambition on their sleeves. Seldom do they try to hide the fact that they are playing to win, and winning means getting more and more power. They expect us to think that. They seem to relish the battle and to pursue their careers even though they must be aware that almost all of them, when they eventually succumb to the people's will, are going to be denigrated and probably despised by their

Here's an  
idea for  
you...

**Make a regular plan for staying in contact with a wide range of people in your address book. I don't mean a circular letter at Christmas; just a personal note asking how they are doing. This keeps your name alive, triggers thoughts and will give rise to all sorts of opportunities.**

conquerors. Yet such is their vanity or their self-belief – or both – that they plunge into the fray. It is easy to use words like battle and war in this context, and when you come down to it, in the business environment as well. It's either you or someone else. One gets the glory and the other stays in a job that firstly bores them, secondly irritates them and finally embitters them.

So, if you're in business you may as well join the mêlée and cut loose your ambition. You need to stand out in the crowd and get yourself noticed. If you want to join the board, people must see you as utterly unflappable and competent. They must notice that you are normally right and always confident. You will make them feel their own inadequacies. But how do you close the business and get the job? Well, you start now by keeping in contact with people you have worked with or for, with old customers and with suppliers. Henry Lewis, a former CEO of Marks & Spencer, was offered non-execs by many of his suppliers. One of them was so keen that it kept back a sizable chunk of shares so that it could offer them to Harry when he retired in exchange for his coming on to its board.

### **KEEP A LIFETIME ADDRESS BOOK**

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Look at it this way. Some companies place such value on their database of knowledge of their customers and prospective customers that they quantify it and put it on the balance sheet as an intangible asset. Companies have changed hands because one bought another for its market information, and mergers have taken

place where the only real synergy was complementary customer lists. Your version of this is your address book. Never take anyone off it. You never know when they might come in useful. Organise it in sections so that you have a reminder of where and why you met each contact.

**A good source of opportunity in the non-exec area is the older members of the senior management team. Have a look at IDEA 32, *Help the aged*.**

Try another idea...

A man who was on a training course that my colleague John ran some fifteen years ago rang him up recently. Since the man was in the delegate section of his address book John was able to demonstrate his remarkable memory. He also had recorded the opinions of himself and the other managers running the course on how good they thought this guy was at the time. All of this proved invaluable: now a senior manager, this man is currently one of John's prospective clients.

I have never met anyone who has kept a long-term address book say that it has been a waste of time. I have heard many regret that they didn't. I'm one of them, dammit.

***'The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and, if they can't find them, make them.'***

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

Defining idea...



How did  
it go?

**Q I've been pretty systematic in communicating with my network, but don't you find that making contact often goes the opposite way? When I contact old colleagues, for instance, the ones who come back to me are almost always the ones who are looking for help in their careers. One of them continues to pester me for a job a year after my note to him. Surely I can take him off the list?**

*A I wouldn't if I were you. In the chaos of the business world I have stopped being amazed at some of the people who make it big. One of the people on my graduate trainee intake was seen as pretty useless by the rest of us. He is now a knight and advises government on various issues. I should have kept in contact.*

**Q Another thing. I sent one of your little notes to a person I used to sell to some years ago. They were very friendly in return and suggested lunch. It was a fairly gruesome affair. I knew very quickly that there was no way our careers were going to connect again, and it was just a big (and not inexpensive) bore.**

*A Do a bit more qualifying before you agree to the sort of time involved in lunch, and filter out those you think can't help. But sometimes, yes, you have to swim through some treacle.*