N. Renee Thompson, Ph.D.
Michael Lawrence Faulkner, Ph.D.
Andrea R. Nierenberg

NETWORKING
FOR BLACK
PROFESSIONALS

NONSTOP BUSINESS NETWORKING THAT WILL CHANGE YOUR LIFE

Networking for Black Professionals

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*To all the professionals of color who have made networking
a tool of their success and continued success.*

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Foreword

When I retired from professional baseball, I was asked to join the car business by one of the owners of a baseball team. I had no aspiration of owning a car dealership; however, Ron Tonkin, one of the largest auto dealer group owners in the nation and part owner of the Portland Beavers baseball team, thought I would be good at selling cars. You never know who's looking at your skills or recognizing your potential. Follow destiny, it will take you somewhere. I was in the right place at the right time and connected to the right person—a simple definition for *networking.*

During that time, a lot of pressure was being placed upon the automobile industry for minorities to run or be partners in dealerships. I knew that I had to bring more to the table than just being a minority. I had the 3 C's (**C**ompetitive edge, **C**ompetence, and **C**onfidence) to make this opportunity a reality. I was under a lot of pressure and assumed full responsibility because if I failed as one of the first minority dealers in the country then those behind me wouldn't have a chance. I took my work very seriously, and I knew I would do my best to achieve a successful business of my own.

So when I go to work every day now, I realize this is my business and know what I must do to sustain it. I network with people daily to make quality customer service a priority. I take pride in knowing that my customers are happy. How do I accomplish this? I network. I go out and talk to my customers; I listen and establish practices that produce high customer satisfaction ratings.

Networking and connections are interchangeable terms. Connections are the influencers who can help you get better networked into your targeted industry, or who may even be able to share ideas with you to think about areas to explore that you haven't considered, and connect you to people who you may not otherwise have the opportunity to meet. Meeting the coauthor of this book, Dr. Renee Thompson, is a demonstration of how networking really works. She was introduced to me through someone I met at a conference where I was the guest speaker.

By the way, conferences are great opportunities to network. This is the perfect place to walk up to someone and introduce yourself, exchange business cards, place a note on the back of your business card, and of course, compliment the speaker.

Dr. Renee actually employed her networking strategies by reaching out to me directly. I was not a member of her strong ties (people in your immediate circle) as referenced in this book; I was a weak tie (people who are not in your close-knit group, a population or audience that would not be accessible). Apparently, there is strength in weak ties so be sure to take advantage of what is offered in this book for African American professionals. This book provides a step-by-step guide, as well as strategies and tips on how to expand your networking opportunities by going beyond your immediate circle. Don't let fear hold you back, take the ride and see where it leads you!

Dorian Boyland,
President of Boyland Auto Group.
(4th largest African-American dealership in the United States.)

Acknowledgments

About the Authors

Dr. N. Renee Thompson is the founder and president of a non-profit organization, Transitions Education Center (TEC), and employed as an associate dean of the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences at DeVry University. TEC is an organization with a strong foundation that seeks to stimulate and expand educational and sociocultural opportunities for minority and low-income students seeking higher education. Thompson is committed to diversifying the spectrum of college graduates by empowering students to develop professional and leadership skills. She is also the founder of Girlfriends Listen!—a fun-loving core group of women that shares interesting and valuable insight. This group was started to share experiences with other women to empower others to reach their full potential.

Dr. Michael Lawrence Faulkner is a U.S. Marine Corps Vietnam veteran who served from 1964 to 1970 and rose to the rank of Staff Sergeant. He spent 30 years in a variety of leadership and management ("coaching") positions with Dun & Bradstreet, the Direct Marketing Association (DMA), and entrepreneurial start-ups, as well as helping run the family business before moving into the academic world. Today Michael is a professor at the Keller Graduate School of Management at DeVry University. Michael is a member of MENSA, a former two-time national champion of Athletic Dueling, and an International Rotary Fellowship award winner. He has been published in peer review journals, dozens of magazines, newsletters, websites, and blogs, and has written half a dozen white papers, including one that was circulated to all elected members of Congress and the major media outlets. He has written or coauthored 11 books.

Andrea R. Nierenberg, best-selling author, speaker, and world-renowned business authority, is the force behind The Nierenberg Consulting Group. Called a "networking success story" by the *Wall Street Journal*, Andrea founded The Nierenberg Consulting Group in 1993. With a stellar 29 years as a leader in sales and marketing, Andrea is an in-demand business expert both at home and abroad. Her company partners with an array of the world's leading financial and media industry businesses.

What You Will Learn from This Book

We live in a highly competitive world. Today it is never too early to learn the business and life skills that will give you the competitive edge when you embark upon the networking journey. This book gives you the hands-on steps and processes to take you from your current position (even if you're a student or unemployed) to a job, a promotion, and subsequent leadership positions. *You will learn that you might already be networking—you just might not call it that.* You will learn everything from creating connections to being aware of how each person you meet can be a potential connection who you can help—and who could possibly help you.

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1

What Is Networking, and Is It Any Different for African Americans Than Anyone Else?

I ndividually, you are unique and special—just as everyone else is. And everyone has the same choice to makex, at about the same time, about whether and how to network. Unfortunately, and this is where you begin to separate yourself, the vast majority of people won't recognize the moment of networking opportunity and, therefore, won't have the same choices that you will. What separates you from them is that you are reading this book and opening your mind to the networking possibilities that await you.

This missed opportunity is so unfortunate for all the others because this is a choice of whether you will have maximum control over your own pathways to life's success via networking. This is one of the few egalitarian moments in life when you have the opportunity to experience near-perfect *equality of opportunity for your own future.* This is a moment when you decide on the equality of the outcome of your choices.

WHAT'S BEHIND YOUR CONCEPT OF SELF

Psychologists call the belief of self-empathy "internal locus of control." Skeptics and doubters, whom Michael refers to as sheep-like people, are those who prefer to live their lives among flocks of others like themselves, who dress alike, look alike, talk alike, work alike, think alike, act alike, believe alike, and like alike. They want you to believe that life has a kind of predestined pathway. These people believe that life is like a linear path—certain things are expected of you at certain times, and certain things either come your way or don't. In other words, you have no control over life.

Psychologists sometimes talk about the self-concept theory (SCT), which simply states that many of the successes and failures people experience in their careers and lives are closely tied to the ways they are accustomed to viewing themselves through their relationships with other people, including their parents, teachers, spouses, partners, bosses, managers, and supervisors.

SCT brings up three critical points. First, self-concept is learned; we're not born with it. We learn it through repeated experiences, and it's rooted in our expected outcomes of those experiences, particularly experiences with people in more powerful or influential roles. Second, self-concept is organized. We organize the feelings, beliefs, and worldview of our self-concept because we generally desire order and harmony in our lives. Lastly, self-concept is dynamic, meaning that we view the world not in isolation, but in relation to our self-concept, which is subject to continuous reevaluation as we attempt to assimilate new ideas and get rid of old ones. Individuals try to maintain their self-concepts regardless of how helpful or damaging to themselves or others these self-concepts become. This truth is evidenced by individuals who often sacrifice physical and financial comfort and even their own safety to achieve emotional satisfaction and avoid change.

Individuals experience anxiety because of a loss of self-esteem, and anything that negatively impacts self-concept risks depleting self-esteem. You can make SCT work for you or allow it to work against you. Most importantly, SCT is within each individual's control. Some people accept this; some people reject it. If you accept it, you exercise internal locus of control and are ready to make the choices to control your own life.

Some people (not necessarily just the sheep) believe life is full of unexpected randomness and troubles that will continually pop up, negating any preparations or plans we make. These people believe the best we can do is manage these problems and obstacles and live with those outcomes.

By this point in your life, you have probably dealt with a wide range of issues—and you might still be struggling with them, perhaps overcoming obstacles and problems with school and work; dealing with your fears, loneliness, and career aspirations; coping with concerns about job search issues; worrying about how to meet people; managing your

fear of public speaking, making new friends, and joining groups; and navigating many, many other life issues.

You don't have to face most of these issues and problems alone. In fact, you *shouldn't* face them alone. Superman, Batman, and plenty of other superheroes had sidekicks to help them—what makes any one of us think we can handle life alone? *Don't be afraid or egotistical enough to think that you don't need the help of other people.* You do. Only a fool believes he or she can succeed alone.

The thing is, you might not currently know the people who can best help you, or hire you, or move you forward. You need to reach out to them. That's where networking comes in. Networking is the most successful technique and tool used by the most successful individuals in all walks of life, regardless of gender, religion, industry or profession, level of intelligence and education, age, social situation, and geographic area. This isn't the tool of a secret society. Just about everybody has the opportunity to learn the techniques and tools of networking for success. Whether you reach out and grasp this opportunity is up to you. But—and this is the important thing—you have as good an opportunity as anyone!

Defining Networking

Does the word *networking* scare you or make you cringe? Are you fearful of what it might imply? Does the word imply that you have to meet strange or different people, or introduce yourself to people who might reject you? Or do you feel that networking is just some form of glad-handing or "sucking up," and that people who network get ahead because of *who* they know, not *what* they know? And even if the myth "It's who you know, not what you know, that counts" were true, why would you ignore this pathway to success? Do you believe there's something inherently sinister, bad, or unfair about using contacts to help you get ahead?

Networking pioneer and guru George Fraser is known as the "King of Networking." He proposed effective networking to the black community in 1994 in his book *Success Runs in Our Race*. Fraser defined effective networking as follows: "[E]ffective networking is the identification,

building and developing of relationships for the purposes of sharing information and resources." Fraser said that networking is consistent with garnering information and equated it with a source of power: "[A]ny information flows to anyone willing to receive it. It is not racist, or elitist, or exclusive. That is what makes networking so effective."

Networking is one of the most overused and misunderstood words in common vocabulary today. When you hear the word, what comes to your mind?

- Getting something from someone else

- Using others

- Coercion

- Manipulation

- Getting something without using your real abilities

- Having a "godfather" or mentor who will smooth the way for you even if you're not capable or qualified

- Making hundreds of daily short digital contacts on social network sites

Or, do the following descriptions come to mind?

- Enrichment

- Empowerment

- The chance to learn something new

- The opportunity to meet interesting people

- The best method to achieve a professional or personal goal

- The real world—the way most jobs are filled, far more than any other method of job searching

Perhaps you've heard the statistics and seen the evidence, or you've seen your friends' networking turn into opportunity after opportunity for them. Maybe you'd like to network but feel that your chances of networking aren't as great as others' because you're a black person, or maybe you feel that you don't have the experience, skills, or abilities to network properly.

You might even play host to one of those ornery critters who appears every once in a while to sit on your shoulder (invisible, of course, to everyone but you) and criticize you unmercifully, trying to convince you of how unworthy you are because you're a black person. That character will try to dissuade you from ever trying to network because you're not worthy. Now is the perfect time to put your fears and uneasiness to rest, bury your concerns, change your beliefs, and ban that critter—that is, if you really want the greatest opportunities for success in life.

If you want the greatest chances for success in getting the jobs you desire and deserve; meeting the people who are ready and willing to assist you in your aspirations; being considered for the career opportunities you dream about; positioning yourself for the best promotions; being asked to serve on exciting committees; and working with the most prestigious, influential, important people in the fields, industries, professions, and communities of *your* choice—if you want to have control of these choices, then it's in your hands. It's your choice.

As a black individual, you might have faced—and continue to face—many challenges on a daily basis that are not overtly racial. You might feel sure that many silent or behind-the-scenes obstacles prevent you from obtaining certain positions or committee spots.

However, you will learn that networking is a crucial component in career advancement. First, you need to learn the networking game and its rules via observation. It pays to watch the players before entering the game. While watching, develop yourself professionally by obtaining the necessary skill set, certifications, and degrees to be a competitor on the team. No one wants a handout—being qualified gets you in the game. Second, after watching the game, you need exposure. Seek out the invitation to play in the game by attending meetings, seminars, workshops, and work-related functions—after all, you can't get in the game if you're not attending opportunities for networking. Lastly, begin building relationships, and perhaps seek out a mentor to help you navigate the process.

Of course, if you don't want any of these opportunities, or if you think that getting them by having people help you would somehow diminish your character, then stop here. Other people will gladly take the help of those who are willing to assist. A great deal of research proves

something you probably know intuitively: Networking works for those who choose to work networking.

By an enormous margin, networking is the single most effective technique for finding jobs (even during economic recessions), building a career, developing personal influence, solidifying leadership roles, strengthening effective management skills, developing personal communication skills, creating and improving organizational skills, learning how to work with individuals with diverse views, developing beliefs and skills, and generally enhancing the quality of your life. Thousands of individuals of every race, culture, and diversity segment can attest to this.

The talent to network is inherent in nearly every individual. Almost anyone can learn how to network. However, only those who have the drive, energy, skills, and knowledge to learn and perfect the network process will be able to use it to their advantage.

Therefore, although most people instinctively know—or can eventually figure out—that networking "works" (which is why we get the myth that it's who you know that counts), only a limited number of devoted individuals manage to reap the huge rewards of successful networking. A study of UCLA graduates found that nearly 75 percent believed it was who you knew that counted. What's interesting about this finding is that three-quarters of the graduates believed they knew the secret to success, yet they couldn't bring themselves to actually do what it took and become networkers.

The U.S. Department of Labor reports that 80 percent of all the newly created jobs in the last decade were never posted or announced anywhere. Furthermore, 70 percent of the replacement jobs were handled in the same manner. These jobs weren't posted on any website, advertised on any classified page, listed with any headhunter or recruiter, or otherwise publicly posted. These jobs were filled by the hiring managers' use of their social networking. The hiring managers first looked at people they knew and trusted, and if that didn't turn up the candidate they wanted, they asked their network—their own contacts, *the people they knew and trusted*. Current research by Professors Michael Faulkner and Bruce Herniter at DeVry University on the impact of networking has found that personal networking and focused, direct contact with

the hiring manager account for more job hunting success by job seekers than all the other methods combined.

The important issue is simply that the overwhelming number of jobs in America are filled through the process of networking. If you don't use networking skills, you surrender many job, life, and other opportunities to other people. You deserve the benefits of networking, but you have to reach out and take them.

People already in the workforce who have learned to take advantage of the skills and benefits of networking will confirm that they get many more opportunities than their peers who do not network. Unfortunately, many African Americans aren't aware of the value of networking and thus don't practice the skills; consequently, they can't take advantage of the benefits, leaving this enormous opportunity untapped.

In just one area, jobs, networking can mean the difference between jump-starting your career and spending years working unsatisfying, unfulfilling dead-end jobs. In April 2011, the U.S. Department of Labor reported that the national unemployment rate was 9 percent—and the unemployment rate for African Americans was 16.1 percent (versus 8 percent for whites). Some evidence by economists indicates that unemployment will be a societal problem in America for years into the future. Networking could mean the difference between being part of the pool of African Americans working in low-level, unsatisfying jobs and moving your career along regardless of the state of economy.

Knowing how the hiring process really works is just half of the benefit of networking. The other half is knowing in advance what hiring managers really want in new hires. In a number of empirical research studies conducted over the past ten years, senior managers of a wide range of businesses were asked about what they were looking for in candidates. The following is what they said they value most, starting with the most frequently cited skills, characteristics, and talents:

- Good communication skills
- Interpersonal skills
- Ability to find and fix problems
- Enthusiasm

- High energy level

- Strength of character

- Self-confidence

- Motivation

- Leadership skills

- Quick adaptability to change and uncertainty

- Good listening skills

- Commitment to lifetime learning

- Commitment to excellence

- Ability to work as a team player

- Willingness to take some risks

- Willingness to face self-assessment

- Ability to lighten up (to not take oneself too seriously)

In a nationwide study conducted in 1999 by a well-known executive search consulting firm, 27 percent of chief information officers reported that strong interpersonal skills were the single most important quality in job candidates (23 percent listed this as the second-most-important skill).[1]

A major research study conducted for an association of colleges and universities found that a significant majority of respondents cited skills learned and perfected in networking as the most important skills employers look for in new hires. Specifically, those skills are teamwork (44 percent), critical thinking (33 percent), and oral/written communications (30 percent).

In a poll conducted in June 2009, Michael asked business managers and supervisors about the most important skills and traits for recent college graduates. A total of 293 respondents provided the answers in Table 1-1.

Table 1-1

Skill/Trait	Percent of Respondents
Potential to learn or be trained	40%
Interpersonal/team skills	23%
Communication skills	13%
Proven achievement/experience	12%
Technical/technology knowledge	9%

Michael Faulkner–LinkedIn, 2009

This poll reaffirms employers' high regard for the soft skills and talents—the ability to learn, the ability to get along, and communication skills.

So if the idea of networking scares you or puts you off, or if for some reason you think that networking isn't for you because you're black, there's something important for you to know:

- First, you're not alone. Believing you're on your own might be a reason you've shied away from the very skill that can help you professionally and personally.

- Second, you don't have to wait and try to learn the benefits of networking as you mature or advance in your career. The earlier you overcome the fear or obstacle that hinders you, the sooner you will start gaining the benefits of networking. This is the skill that can begin helping you.

Let's deal with the negative and inaccurate impressions of networking right now. In some of the negative impressions we listed, some people express a dark side of networking. It really isn't even networking they're discussing—it's the dark side of human characteristics. Some individuals abuse networking, so it can be easy to confuse that abuse with networking itself. We've said that networking is the most powerful tool individuals can use in their careers and lives. It shouldn't come as any surprise, then, that some people out there aren't benevolent, gracious, nice, friendly, kind, fair, and helpful individuals. Sure, you'll find the occasional malevolent, malicious, spiteful, wicked, nasty, mean, power-hungry, self-centered, egotistical, narcissistic jerk. These bad seeds can

just as easily master the understanding of body language and fake networking techniques to fool some people for a short period of time; those rotten apples can use their genes, money, power (not influence), and even evil to get ahead.

Other people advance solely on the coattails of a godfather or mentor. But they're quickly seen as empty suits and frequently are abandoned or exiled. They eventually fail or wither away in ignominious insignificance. All these examples show how networking gets an inaccurate and even bad name. But these people aren't networking—they're power brokering and using power tactics instead of influence.

Why Networking Works: You Already Have the Resources You Need—You Just Have to Put Them to Work

Scientist John Milgram developed a theory called the small world theory that suggests that everyone in the world is separated from everyone else by just six contacts. Dr. Milgram did a series of famous experiments that proved his theory. More recently, Dr. Nicholas Christakis and Dr. James Fowler wrote a book called *Connections*, in which they thoroughly investigate the small world theory and others on human social connections. They reaffirm the important influence a person's network can have on job searching. If you use the social Internet site LinkedIn, you can see how the six degrees connection is possible by the raw numbers of third-level contacts or what Christakis and Fowler call "friends of friends." For example, in 2010, Michael had 183 LinkedIn contacts. These 183 contacts give him the potential to reach all those contacts' individual network contacts, and all of those contacts/friends give him the opportunity to reach all *their* network contacts (friends, friends of friends). That totals more than 2,530,000 third-level contacts, more than anyone could ever contact in a lifetime. The implication for networking is profound, even if you were to actively network with only a tiny fraction of the potential you're capable of reaching. Each network contact you have is likely already networked, which, given the proper approach, care, and feeding, means your contacts should grow by some multiple.

The key phrase here is "proper approach, care, and feeding." Your network is available for you to enrich your professional and personal life, but in return, you must enrich the lives of others.

Michael and Andrea get very upset when they hear someone say, "It's time to start looking for a job. I'd better start networking." Or they might say, "I only network at certain meetings or events." Unfortunately, a great deal of the research shows that most of the success from networking comes to white workers who are 24 years of age or older and moving into their second or third job. This doesn't mean this is the only group that can successfully network; it simply means that, up to this point, it's the only sample group researchers have chosen to examine.

Networking is a skill—and like any personal skill, it needs to be practiced to be perfected. You can't just sit down at a piano once a month and play Bach concertos like they are supposed to be played—nor can you network properly on demand whenever the need might arise. Networking is a five-step process that's simple to define but involves hard work:

> **Step 1: Meet people.** Some people you know; some you don't at first. You have to mix it up and get to know them. In Chapter 4, "Creating Connections: The People You Will Need in Your Network," we introduce examples of "breaking the ice" phrases that you can use or adapt to your own style.

> **Step 2: Listen and learn.** All people like to talk about themselves and/or their company. When you actively listen, you learn about what's important to other people, who they are, how you could help them, and how they could help you. In Chapter 5, "Characteristics of Great Networkers," we discuss the difference between real empathetic listening (when you engage in active and responsive listening) and listening in which you're just "hearing" what someone said.

> **Step 3: Make connections.** Help people connect with others you know can help them. When you help your contacts get what they want, you can't help but be successful yourself.

Step 4: Follow up. Keep your promises; keep your word. If you promise to do something, do it in a timely manner. In Chapter 8, "Keeping Your Network Alive and Growing," we show you an easy-to-use method for following up with contacts.

Step 5: Stay in touch. After an initial period of contact, if a result doesn't materialize, most people just move on. Here's where your own networking system will make you successful. These folks find ways to stay in touch and continue to build relationships. Why? Because their goal is to build a network of long-lasting, mutually beneficial relationships, not just to get an immediate "result."

This five-step system works because it's based on building long-lasting relationships—not just immediate relationships, but lifelong ones.

Networking is lifelong and beneficial to everyone who participates. It's a win–win proposition. On the other hand, power brokering, by its nature, is a zero-sum political contest in which someone must win and someone must lose. In the long run, an individual who practices power brokering creates a long list of enemies who will do anything they can to bring down that person. Unlike net workers, power brokers have few friends. Real net workers gain the positive benefits listed earlier because they gain the help and assistance of an ever-growing number of people.

Endnote

1. Clifford Gray and Erik Larson, *Project Management: The Managerial Process,* 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Irwin, 2008).

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