

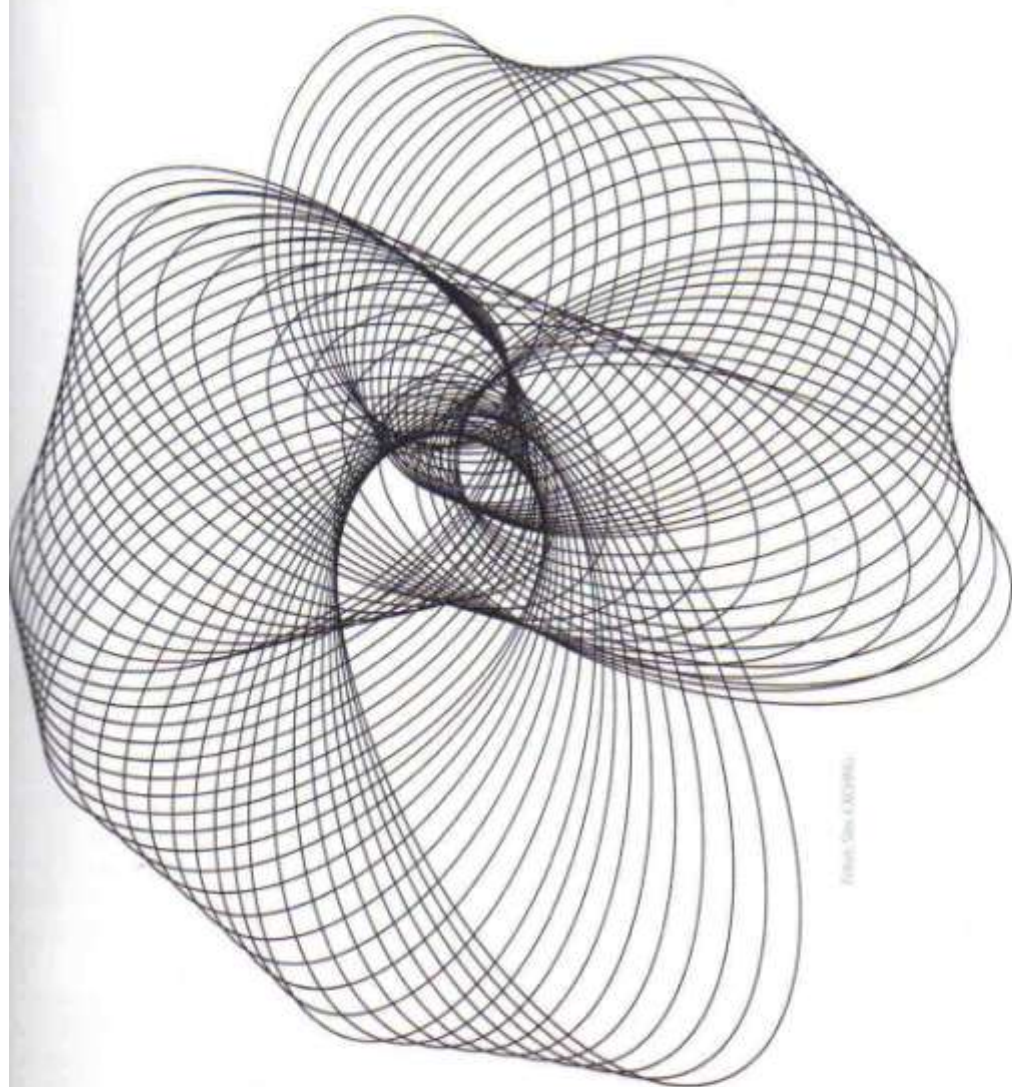
SOCIAL NETWORKS

EVERYBODY KNOWS THAT A QUALITY SCHOOL IS A KEY FACTOR FOR GOOD SOCIAL AND PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE. A SOLID EDUCATIONAL BASE, WITH RESPECT AND INCENTIVES FOR POTENTIALITIES, THE SPECIALISTS SAY, FURTHERS THE POSSIBILITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF BEING SUCCESSFUL, OF ACCOMPLISHING ONE'S GOALS IN LIFE. YET, IN THIS EQUATION, THE SCHOOL IS NOT ALONE

By Micheline Verunschik
Photo: Sérgio Zacchi

Research on what brings about professional success points to factors that range from passion to motivation for what you do, to emotional intelligence and family diligence, among other things. According to a study conducted at Nebraska-Lincoln University (US) in which hundreds of high school students were interviewed about their aims and perspectives for the future, what individuals accomplish outside the school doors can be responsible for the route they will take in their professional and social lives, also steering them towards a specific choice for their major at university.

According to sociologist Eduardo Marques, a professor in the Political Science department at Universidade de São Paulo (USP) and researcher of Centro de Estudos da Metrópole (CEM), the secret lies in social networks. For a moment, forget about Facebook, Twitter and everything we have come to know as "social networks" these days. In this particular case, we are talking about the deeper social threads, those that each person builds around them throughout their life. "The networks that everyone builds in their daily lives are important not just today, but have always been a part



Edvard Munch (1893)



of the fabric of society. What has changed since the 20th century is the structure of these networks. My research indicates the presence of an association between certain kinds of networks and better social conditions," says Marques.

According to a study carried out by the sociologist in peripheral communities in São Paulo and Salvador, the more recent and restricted a person's social network, the smaller their income and their chances of social and professional potential. But that is not the whole story. The networks also influence access to goods and services. But it is not enough to be connected; it is also important to manage well one's relationship. "An individual solidly prepared for life and for the world of work is one who possesses the ability to participate and work collectively and sympathetically with others from the same group and who is able to communicate contents and handle differences, among other attributes," concludes Marques.

What research may not show is that often the factors multiply and merge to contribute to this good performance when faced with the permanent challenge of being successful. Extra curricular interests, personal and family investment, a sense of opportunity, flexibility, self control, a solid network of friends, among other things, can be added to school like a brick in construction. This is what the two following stories illustrate.

FROM A SMALL TOWN IN THE NORTHEAST TO CEO OF A MULTINATIONAL

If anybody said that from a big family from a small town in the countryside of Brazil's Northeast would come the first Brazilian president of a great multinational, would you believe it? This is the story of Marcos Antonio Magalhães, the former president of Phillips in Brazil and Latin America, a position he held for eleven years. Son of a teacher and a small businessman, Magalhães is

the fifth of eight children, born in the small town of Sertânia, in the semi-arid region in the state of Pernambuco, some 196 miles from Recife, which currently has a little over 30,000 inhabitants.

His is a story of broadening networks from moving and immigrating several times. Leaving his small town behind, Magalhães, still a boy, moved with his family to a neighboring city that offered better opportunities for study. He stayed there until he finished elementary school and then moved to Recife, since at the time, some fifty years ago, anybody who would want to finish high school would have to go to the state's capital city.

"For me, going to Recife to study greatly widened my network. I had the good fortune of attending Ginásio Pernambucano, a very high quality public school whose student body ranged from the son of a factory owner to the son of a maid. Maybe because I was an excellent student, I was very well received by a part of Recife's society who served as an intellectual, professional, and economic reference. Furthermore, my focus was studying, studying, studying, and practicing sports," says Magalhães, who lived in modest boarding houses in the capital of Pernambuco until he started university.

After being accepted at the Electric Engineering school, he became a teacher and even taught prep courses for university entrance exams. In the beginning of the seventies, he moved to Holland to get his Master's degree. There he was hired by Phillips, and shortly after that, he returned to Brazil. At the company, he did a little bit of everything, from being an assistant to lower management positions, making his way up the corporate ladder. Is the secret merely in swimming against the tide? He himself answers: "There are three elements that can lead people to success or the lack of it. The first is the people themselves. To be successful, you need to have



Manpower™ An individual solidly prepared for life and for the world of work is the one who possesses the ability to participate and work collectively and sympathetically with others from the same group.

a dream and have the perseverance to pursue your objectives. The second essential is access to a good formal education. And the basis for this tripod is family, which needs to be a co-educator. In my case, I was fortunate enough to have all three of them."

Believing in this, Marcos Magalhães is now president of the 'Instituto de Co-responsabilidade pela Educação' (ICE), a private organization that organizes the business segment and other sectors of society to promote and improve the quality of public schools. Based in Recife, their efforts go beyond geographic limits, and one of the ICE's goals is to cast young underprivileged kids in the leading role. "These people, with no opportunity or family structure are born with a disadvantage. Compared to middle class children and teenagers, it is like they are racing with a bike against a Ferrari. You have to identify their starting point and broaden the kids' and teenagers' horizons, including the relationships," concluded the businessman.

I WANTED IT!

"I wanted to study social sciences. I wanted to work with people. I wanted to get into a big company. I wanted to be the Human Resources Director; I never believed in the power of prejudice". These are the words of José Carlos Nascimento, a young black executive who has worked in companies like Varig, IBM and is currently the Human Resources Director at BT for Latin America, a British multinational.

Nascimento says that he went to study social sciences because he wanted to understand the world, society and their policies, and he ended up entering the corporate world precisely due to this profile. "I went to work at Varig at the airport counter and one day there was an opportunity to work with training. Sociology gave me the first push. Next, I went to Lothus, which was later incorporated by IBM. During the selection, there were many white candidates, and many who were older than me, but not even once did

I think I should not be there. I never had to work around prejudice because I never believed it had any power over me or over my choices."

Nascimento has always studied at private schools, but he points out that he was a scholarship student from elementary school all the way to university. As he is extremely communicative, his business has always been connected with other people and maybe that is why he has played the leading role since he was a kid. "I have always been someone who likes to be with others, so at school I would be chosen as class leader. I did not get involved in fights and when they happened to me or between classmates, my part was to conciliate and restore peace. I was also involved in team and voluntary efforts to help people and institutions, and now I see that all those things that were part of my education are what I do today," says Nascimento, who not by chance was the first black executive in Brazil to hold a management position in a multinational.

In order to conciliate the role of sociologist with life inside a corporation, he has a simple recipe: "I always say that I have two hats. One is the human being's; the other is the businessman's. Sometimes I have to take one off and put on the other. Sometimes, and this is the most common situation, I wear both at the same time. At the end of the day, any company is a society made of people," he concludes.

But what is success after all?

In the book *"How They Got There"* (*Como eles chegaram lá*, Campus, 1999), the author José Roberto Whitaker offers an interesting comparison that sums up very well what this much-sought-after success is: a combination of qualities and opportunities that lead someone to do what they like the best way possible. The examples above are proof of that.