



# Book Well Connected

## An Unconventional Approach to Building Genuine, Effective Business Relationships

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### Recommendation

As social networking is burgeoning, the art of building authentic, mutually beneficial relationships is dwindling. Gordon Curtis solves this dilemma with his “Right Person – Right Approach” method of networking. Identify “critical enablers” who are in a position to help you, use your contacts to get a referral and then offer something of value to entice them to your side. Curtis guarantees that his approach will enable you to achieve your business goals, whether you are looking for a job, seeking investment capital or trying to boost your sales. He cites clients’ case histories as do and don’t examples; they all enjoy life-changing success. Although *BooksInShort* is skeptical about Curtis’s 100% success guarantee, the book provides solid networking fundamentals for anyone attempting to become “well connected.”

### Take-Aways

- Having a big social media network does not guarantee better results.
- The “Right Person – Right Approach” method is a focused networking process.
- The Right Person is “knowledgeable, inclined, available, like-minded, obligated, motivated and able.”
- Evaluate the effectiveness of your online and email communications and current networking practices.
- Define your “macro objective,” a broad statement about what you want to accomplish.
- Break down your macro objective into smaller elements or “micro objectives.”
- Identify targets – the people, sources or organizations you’d like to contact.
- Find a critical enabler, the person who can provide the information you require to wow your target.
- Control the referral process to gain access to your target.
- Use a “gesture of progressive reciprocity,” offering the critical enabler something of value at the onset.

### Summary

#### “The Right Person – Right Approach Method”

To succeed in today’s competitive and demanding work environment, you must develop effective relationships with the people who can help you accomplish your goals. This is essential not only to making a sale or landing a job, but in any business endeavor. You rely on other people who are in the know to learn about the market, generate referrals, raise funds, make the right hires, find the best vendors or pursue a career move.

“The Right Person – Right Approach method is the most efficient way to advance and achieve your career and business objectives, virtually guaranteeing you a 100% success rate.”

Most people waste energy increasing the number of their LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter connections. Such undirected expansion does not produce measurable results. Instead, find the one right person who can enable you to achieve a specific objective. This is the crux of the “Right Person – Right Approach” style of networking. The right person is a “critical enabler,” someone who makes connections, and such a catalytic person exists for every possible business goal. The Right Person – Right Approach method will help you:

- Exactly define the goals you want to achieve.
- Discover the person who can help you achieve them.
- Enlist that person in assisting you.

## Getting Started

You may feel you are doing a fine job of networking until you face a difficult situation that needs an immediate response. Your impetus to ramp up your networking efforts might be looking for a new job, taking on additional responsibilities or seeking funding. If your current networking approach is not producing the desired results, examine your process to see where it falls short. Taking steps to revise and reinvigorate your networking methods will give you confidence and enable you to reach your goals. A large network that doesn't help you further your agenda is not useful. Achieving your goals is the endgame, but building your network is not. Are you posting and sending out articles, links or emails to online friends and contacts? Impersonal and unsolicited communications hurt you more than they can help you. People find such communications irritants that they either erase or ignore.

## Self-Assessment

As part of your networking self-assessment, consider how you behave at networking events such as professional association gatherings, conferences and the like. Are you generating bona fide leads, or simply filling your pockets with business cards? If you're networking in a haphazard way and contaminating your contact list with unwanted communications, you're wasting your time and minimizing your chance of success.

“If you can define what you want clearly enough, it makes it much easier to see who could help you get it.”

Once you've examined your current networking method, take a look at how you communicate. Review several emails you've sent that had a specific aim, such as asking for information, soliciting help with a job search, seeking a referral or requesting a recommendation. Unlike a blast email, effective communications are personal and targeted to the recipient. They identify what you need, and consider what the recipient needs as well. If you are vague about what you want, you won't get it. Explain why you are making the request and give the reader a reason to respond.

## The Route Less Traveled

Approaching the decision maker too early is counterproductive. Do the research, lay the groundwork and perfect your proposal or resume. In the Right Person – Right Approach method, this circuitous yet focused route is most effective. Your interim goal is to find the critical enabler. But before that, you need to clarify your request and perfect your pitch. Your first step is to seek feedback and input from your “trusted advisors.” Run ideas past people you know, respect and trust to give you an honest critique.

“The amount of time I see people wasting – as they network like crazy with little or nothing to show for it – is staggering.”

Clearly define your objectives. Don't worry that being too specific will cause you to miss opportunities. Casting too wide a net catches the wrong fish. Narrowing your search identifies “intersections,” the sweet spot where your specific needs intersect with those of the people who have the expertise you seek. Being focused also will help you find potential customers or employers.

“Selectively engage the right people, making sure you're not simply connected to them, but well connected.”

Define your “macro objective,” a general statement about what you want to accomplish. Use this to bring focus or “extreme clarity” to the process. Break your macro objective down into smaller elements or “micro objectives.” The Internet helped George, who provides a worthy example. His macro objective was to build his business. The first micro objective was to obtain capital, so he conducted a Google search for the keyword “investors.” This brought up thousands of options, so he narrowed his search, adding the words “New England,” “home products,” and “scale a small business.” Each word or phrase represented a micro objective. Through this kind of pointed search, he found a company that invested in his type of small business.

“Increasing the number of contacts in a virtual network tends to come at the expense of building mutually beneficial relationships with specific people.”

The four steps to defining your business goals are:

1. Make a note of at least one important career aim.
2. Create keywords that signify at least five “micro objectives.”
3. Perform a web search.
4. Hone your web targets and “refine your search.”

“Someone out there has already done this before; you just have to find them.”

The targets found by your Internet search are people, sources or organizations that you'd like to contact. Again, you don't want to get in touch with these people directly until you've done your homework. Instead, identify the critical enabler who can provide you with the information you require to wow your target. This is the “right person” in the “Right Person – Right Approach” method. He or she can supply a referral, provide information and insights, and help you stand out from the crowd.

“Surprise your decision makers by showing how well you understand their needs, interests and objectives, and how well you can help them solve their problems.”

Decide what information you need to impress your target. Identify who has this knowledge. For example, Alyssa sold customer relationship management software to financial services businesses. Her targets were companies that were losing customers. She identified a consulting firm operating in her territory that would be privy to

this information. Then she reviewed her contacts to see if she knew someone who could provide her with an introduction. Getting a referral from someone who knows your prospect is a pivotal step.

## Elusive Referrals

Traditional referrals have several drawbacks. The referral writer may be reluctant to provide an endorsement, thus qualifying and diluting the referral. The referring party may do too much or too little, such as passing along your resume or proposal without providing enough support. To retain control of referrals take these steps:

- Reassure the referrer that you want a referral only, not an endorsement. You’re simply seeking permission to use his or her name.
- Use the referring party as a source for information about your target.
- Contact your target personally rather than asking the referrer to do it for you.

“It’s not what you do that creates a negative outcome, but rather what you don’t do.”

Tony wanted to join a hedge fund after earning his master’s degree in finance. His professor, a perfect critical enabler, had a reputation for being reluctant to give students entrée to his business contacts. Tony asked his adviser if he could use her name in an email asking the professor for a meeting. At that meeting, Tony described a spreadsheet he developed to help hedge funds conduct quantitative analysis. This impressed the professor, who offered to introduce Tony to his hedge fund contacts. Tony asked if he could use the professor’s name in a letter instead, retaining control of whom to approach and when to approach them.

## Willing and Able

A referral can provide access to a critical enabler. Getting that person to help you is the next step, so use a “gesture of progressive reciprocity.” Offer something of value to the critical enabler before he or she gives you help. Your quest is to ascertain the critical enabler’s needs. Explore the web, check social networking sites and question people in your network to uncover opportunities. Don’t limit your search to the work environment. Often, opportunities lie in areas outside of work, such as volunteer involvement, hobbies or particular expertise. Now, catalog your “reciprocity currency” – that is, review your resources, talents and contacts to ensure that what you have to offer fulfills the enabler’s needs. Ask the following questions to refine your quest.

- What do you know that could help your prospect?
- How can your prospect find new clients or business?
- What new “markets or territories” does your client seek to penetrate?
- What charities or volunteer endeavors does your client support?
- “What can you do personally, based on your own background or professional experience, that would be of value to your prospect?”

“In human affairs, the straight road is often the longest distance between two points, not the shortest.”

For example, Judith identified the CEO of a company in a related field as a critical enabler. When she conducted a Google search of the company, she observed that it didn’t appear until the third or fourth page of the results. Judith had just implemented some search engine optimization techniques for her own company, and offered to share them with the CEO. He was pleased Judith had a solution to a problem that he didn’t have time to address and happily met with her.

“Avoid falling into the trap of investing too much time cultivating relationships with people just because they have knowledge and relationships you’d like to tap into.”

Aaron, who was trying to build a leadership consulting firm, was having difficulty finding something he could offer his critical enabler. When the enabler gave Aaron’s initial offer a lukewarm reception, Aaron decided to ask a few questions to see where the conversation led. The enabler mentioned that he and his wife were planning a riverboat cruise on the Seine. Aaron had taken a similar trip and was able to recommend an excellent captain for the boat charter. Learning about your enablers on a personal level will help you craft an authentic, valuable offer.

## Right Person Characteristics

You’ve identified a critical enabler who has the knowledge or connections you desire. You’ve obtained a referral and offered something of value. To develop a fruitful connection, your enabler also must be “inclined, available and like-minded.” Purposefully look for people who have good communication skills, are good connectors and enjoy bringing people together. Some people network on a daily basis and may be more willing to offer assistance. People working for small companies or running their own businesses are often more likely to give you a hand.

“You can control the process of achieving a career or business objective in a win-win way [that] gives you a level of confidence that is otherwise virtually unattainable.”

Critical enablers might not have the time to make your request a priority. People who are unresponsive and hard to pin down, or who cancel or reschedule meetings, probably are not going to help you. Enablers who are available will:

- Answer your calls immediately.
- Return emails or voice messages within 48 hours.
- Answer your request with a firm date and time to meet.
- Give you a rough “time frame” for a later meeting if it’s not possible to hold one with you right away.

“Never take a relationship for granted.”

When you feel an instant connection with people, it’s usually because they’re like-minded. They may share a similar background, be close in age, enjoy the same sports

or hobbies, have a comparable education or possess personality traits that mesh with yours. Nurture and value these relationships. It's nice to find a kindred spirit.

## About the Author

**Gordon S. Curtis** is a principal of Curtis Consulting and a popular speaker.

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