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THE EDGE



## Who are Your Advocates and Endorsers?

### *The Importance of Cultivating Your Base of Support*

When's the last time you deliberately worked on expanding your base of advocates? If your answer to this question is that you've done nothing lately, it may be time to re-evaluate your professional relationships and deliberately strengthen them. Based on our 25+ years of working with C-Suite leaders, we found a common denominator of high potential leaders is that they deliberately build a network of key advocates. These people actively work at initiating and cultivating cross-functional relationships and in turn, their mentors, colleagues, managers and executive sponsors often become their most significant advocates. Most professionals do not give this any thought, but instead allow these relationships to happen by chance.

***"...a common denominator of high potential leaders is that they deliberately build a network of key advocates."***

### *How Strong is Your Advocate Base?*

If you were to identify your top 10 advocates/supporters within your organization, who would they be? Would they speak highly of you in different circles? Would they be willing to endorse you? Would they stand up and take a courageous stance to support you, even if it was unpopular? Most professionals struggle with their answers to these questions because it forces them to look in the mirror and re-evaluate the quality of their relationships. Jill is a leader we coached for a period of time. While the name has been changed to protect her



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**“When we help our peers get ahead... we are sparking an action with an impact that reaches beyond just ourselves. ... We are expanding our sphere of influence.” – Jennifer Guo**

confidentiality, her story is very similar to the ones we often hear. After 10+ years working for her organization, she realized that she no longer had a base of strong advocates. Many of them had been promoted to other parts of the business, left the company or were still in their roles but simply lost touch. Regardless of the reasons, she came to realize she had not consciously maintained her relationships nor did she deliberately build new ones. She had become vulnerable as there were so few people who could attest to her performance or give unwavering support when needed.

She was asked "What deliberate efforts, if any, have you made to build relationships?" Jill quickly responded by saying she simply didn't have the time. She had a strong base of support years ago given a few high profile projects she had worked on, but had let those relationships lapse. Years passed and over time, the players changed, the organizational structure shifted, some people fell out of favor or left and suddenly she

found herself quite vulnerable. Perhaps it is time for you to deliberately expand and/or strengthen your cross-functional relationships and enlarge your base of advocates. If your manager is the sole person who knows what you are capable of, you may have done yourself a disservice. Consider taking this challenge:

1. **Identify Your Top 10 Advocates.** You are confident that these people would speak highly of you when you are not in the room.
2. **Assess How Many of These People Would be Willing to Endorse You.** Upon further examination, how many of the people you listed would be willing to endorse you? In other words, how many of these people would be willing to put their name on the line to vouch for you? If you are like most of the leaders we work with, the average is around 3-5 endorsers. If you have many more than five endorsers named, you may want to ask yourself if you are 100% confident in their willingness to step up and go out

on a limb for you. Most people have a very different standard for those they will endorse versus those they will speak positively about. It is a direct function of the quality of the relationship and the extent to which you've exceeded their expectations as well.

*“The wider the breadth of relationships up, down and across the organization, the healthier the base of supporters.”*

3. **Determine Who Should Be on Your List of Advocates.** Now, ask yourself who should be on list of my top 10 advocates? Some of the names may appear on both lists. There may be some people who you currently have no relationship with or a limited relationship. Some of these people will influence your career and yet, you have had limited or no exposure to them. Who should you have a relationship with inside and outside your function? What levels do they represent? Are they concentrated at one level of the



organization or do they represent all different pockets of the organization? The wider the breadth of relationships up, down and across the organization, the healthier the base of supporters.

4. **Examine the Quality of Each of Your Relationships and be Honest with Yourself.** What indicators do you have that point to a strong and healthy relationship? What indicators do you have that cause you to believe there is room for improvement? Do they tend to leave you out of meetings or are you the first person they want on their cross-functional teams? Do they seek out your counsel or do they avoid you? Have they invited you to present to their teams or do you hardly know their teams? Obviously, perceptions are formed over time and require deliberate work. It may be time for you to pick up the phone or reach out to a colleague or officer to launch a new relationship or cultivate a relationship that has gone dormant.

5. **Identify the Specific People You**

**Want to Strengthen the Relationship with This Year.** What will you do to engage them? There are many different ways to cultivate new relationships or improve existing ones. Let's explore some options to jumpstart your efforts.

#### **Summary**

Periodic reflection of the quality of your network is a healthy process for any leader. The ability to develop and maintain great relationships is at the heart of any successful business. Some things never change.



#### **Key Takeaways**

- You need to know how strong your advocate base is
- Identify your top 10 advocates
- Assess how many of your advocates would be willing to endorse you.
- Determine who should be on your list of advocates
- Honestly examine the quality of each of your relationships
- Identify the people you want to strengthen the relationship with this year