



# Leveraging Your Networks

by Meshach Rhoades, 2011 Fellow

## 1. Build relationships first.

It is critical to have multiple networks; they often overlap, but sometimes they do not. For instance, I have a group of peers that act as sponsors, and advocates who keep me accountable. I also use my networks to generate ideas and gather information.

It is often my goal to build deeper relationships with those with whom I network so that we can move into a more substantive relationship. As you build a deeper relationship, it will allow you to get to know the skills and strengths of those in your network, and to provide more value to them as contacts and potential clients.

## 2. Ask how you can help, and listen to the answer.

I look for ways to help others in my network and I am cognizant of giving first, before asking. With clients and prospective clients, I proactively think of ways to help with a problem before they have to ask. Often I can provide a solution or support, but when I cannot, I try to give feedback or a referral that will put them in a better position — leveraging who I know to fill in the gaps.

## 3. Follow up meaningfully.

Take the time to understand and put yourself in the shoes of those with whom you are networking, and make certain to follow up in a way that is meaningful for that person.

I recently had dinner with a friend who is a general counsel of a major hospital. She was talking about her dream to give a TED-like talk for women about leadership. Her daughter just won a national soccer championship and we thought it would be fun to put together a presentation titled, “How to Raise a Champion” that would allow her to talk about leadership with her daughter and her company. We are launching the presentation in October, after first talking about the concept in late July. It will be a great way to hear her incredible perspective on leadership and get together a (hopefully) large group of women to talk about leadership in business.

#### **4. Be deliberate.**

As lawyers, we have limited time, so I routinely strategize my time, developing short- and long-term goals based on availability, and always circle back on those goals weekly, monthly, and every year. I take time to invest in myself and am deliberate with my networking goals.

#### **5. Be authentic.**

Understand yourself and how you communicate best, and work with your skills to learn about others, particularly when meeting people might be outside your comfort zone.

#### **6. Merge your passion with your network to give back.**

I started the Latinas First Foundation, which provides a critical network and support for Latinas to reach their highest potential through non-traditional scholarships. Colorado has incredible Latina leaders, and the Foundation recognizes what these Latina leaders have accomplished and builds a community for other women to thrive.

This past year, we awarded eight scholarships and recognized four “trailblazers” and four “unsung heroines.” We also welcomed over 650 people to our annual banquet, hosted two career networking events for college students, and held a career relationship-building event. It did not feel like networking because it was fun — and we created opportunities for lots of women to continue their education and build their networks.

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