

# Three Strategies for Avoiding Career Isolation

By Dean DeGroot

Do you ever feel like you're cut off from the information you need to advance your career? That you're completely alone in your career quest or job search? What you're experiencing is career isolation, and if you don't guard against it, it can keep you permanently on the other side of success.

Fortunately, you do not have to face the career search alone. There are many ways to connect with others that can lead to new friendships and new career possibilities. Three proven ways are expanding your network, finding a mentor, and forming a success team or advisory committee.

## **Expand your Network**

Reaching out to others through networking is a proven way to expand your horizons and avoid career isolation. When you think about networking, don't just think about your job search. Think about all aspects of your life—career, friendships, learning, spiritual growth, recreation, family, and community. This is your “circle of connection.”

Now, think about ways you can start to connect in these areas of your life, and write them down. As you do this, you will find that there is some overlap. For example, you may decide you want to make new contacts in your field and also gain some key skills to revitalize your career. Joining a professional association can meet both these needs, and also result in new friendships.

Perhaps the best networking resource I've seen in recent years is the book *The 20-Minute Networking Meeting*. Marcia Ballinger with Nathan Perez provide a compact, step-by-step process for not only being a more effective meeting manager but someone able to turn their network contacts into great advocates or “evangelists” for your campaign.

## **Find a Mentor**

When you're in career transition, a good mentor can smooth the way by helping you identify your strengths, point out opportunities you may have overlooked, and help you strategize your next steps. A mentor can also help you distinguish “pie in the sky” from reality—invaluable information when you're on the outside looking in.

The keys to finding the right mentor are communication and trust. You should be able to discuss career issues openly and honestly. So, start with a discussion about what the two of you need, and expect to get, from the relationship. While you may have different personal styles, it's important that you have common interests and are comfortable working together.

Many professional organizations create mentoring-protégé opportunities. Today, it's all about development and quickly gaining real-world experience. A mentor may give you this kind of boost.

## **Form a Success Team**

Another valuable strategy is forming a success team or advisory committee. In their book *Teamworks!*, Barbara Sher and Annie Gottlieb describe the process of setting up a group of peers who can help each other with brainstorming and problem-solving on career and other life issues.

Success teams are not only a way to get out and meet others, they are also an excellent opportunity to develop your own leadership and mentoring abilities. In success teams, everyone benefits, because many heads are put together to solve problems and offer solutions. Such teams are the ultimate antidote to career isolation. They can also be “the family you wish you had,” providing support and comfort when you’re discouraged or under stress.

Don’t let career isolation keep you from success when help is readily available. Use one or all of the above strategies to reach out to others, and both your career prospects, and your life in general, will benefit.

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