

The Capability Many Rarely Use

by Mike Hawkins

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Do you have capabilities you don't use? Or know about? Bob did. As obvious as it was to an outsider, he didn't see it. Instead of using his capabilities, he lowered his sales forecast. So did Becky. Rather than use her capabilities, she incurred significant expenses that could have been avoided. What do Bob, Becky, and many people have in common? They don't leverage their external resources.

When you have a need, do you ask people in your network for help? When you have a problem, do you seek wise counsel? When you need more sales

prospects, new recruits, extra hands, strategic partners, reliable suppliers, or creative ideas, do you reach out to people you know? Many people don't. They don't ask for referrals. They don't leverage their suppliers. They simply don't ask for help.

Some people think asking for help is a sign of weakness. Some don't want to bother other people. Some don't think about it. Some don't have a network to rely upon. As a result, many people squander time, money, and energy. They make mistakes and, in some cases, fail rather than ask for help. They play the equivalent of tug-of-war as a one-person team. They engage in life with a decided disadvantage.

Coworkers, industry colleagues, partners, suppliers, friends, and even family are often available, but not called upon. It's not uncommon for people to become separated from their spouses without their friends having any advance warning. People often never know that their friends or family are dealing with mental disorders, even thoughts of suicide, until after something atrocious happens. The reaction is always the same: "why didn't they ask for help?" Of course, there are less extreme examples, such as people trying to fix things on their own or working long hours on tasks that could be done better or more quickly by others. People regularly confront situations and endure difficult circumstances that could be resolved if only they asked for help.

Reflect for a moment about working or living in an environment where you have access to every resource you need. You have the equivalent of a big-box home-improvement store in your own garage. A world-class consulting company in your office. A mechanic, handy-man, chef, concierge, fitness trainer, recruiter, coach, and assistant sitting outside your office waiting to help you. Consider yourself surrounded by an ecosystem of skilled resources ready to assist you in all areas of your life. It is a reality for some people. People who have developed their external network can pick up the phone and summon virtually any resource they need. They have a personal and professional network ready to help and, by the way, to whom they offer reciprocal help.



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How well developed is your network? Have you cultivated relationships with people whom you help and are willing to help you? Here are a few ideas to consider in building your network:

- **Create a collaborative mindset.** Develop the spirit of collaboration. Rather than think asking for help is a sign of weakness, consider it a sign of wisdom. Rather than think being self-sufficient is a strength, consider it a sign that you are probably trying to do too much on your own.
- **Identify your strengths.** Inventory the skills, abilities, and resources you possess or have access to that could help others. Be aware of what you do well and can do for others. Think about how you can help others both personally and professionally.
- **Identify your needs.** Evaluate your needs and think about what others might help you with. Consider what others might do better, faster, or less expensive than you. List the obstacles you are facing and the issues you are dealing with. Identify the resources with whom you need to establish or nurture relationships.
- **Get out.** If you're not meeting with and talking to people, you are not building your network. You might be building contacts, but you are not building relationships. Say "yes" to opportunities to meet people, go places, and try new experiences. Call people when you cannot see them in person.
- **Help out.** Look for opportunities to help others. Say "yes" when people ask for help. Donate your time, money, resources, and skills at every opportunity. Look for opportunities to give first. Earn people's trust by showing that you care about and want to help them.
- **Align.** Share interests, needs, visions, goals, and plans. Understand what others need and where they are going. Likewise, share your needs and where you are going. Understand each other's capabilities. Look for opportunities to help as well as collaborate.
- **Ask.** Ask for help when you have a need. Let people whom you trust know what you are dealing with and solicit their assistance. Ask for ideas. Ask for resources. Ask for referrals, other contacts, or whatever you need that might be feasible and reasonable.
- **Maintain.** Keep in touch. Don't become a pest, but don't be nonexistent either. Send an occasional email, text, or card. Share thoughts and experiences on social media. Call or meet as schedules and interests coincide. Have lunch. Host an annual party or informal gathering.

Don't play tug-of-war on your own. Make your life easier, more productive, and more enjoyable by establishing and leveraging your external resources.

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