

Finding the Connection: How to Create and Use a Personal Network

LEADER'S GUIDE

This lesson will provide group members with an overview of the value of personal networking as a method of finding new ways to obtain help or resources and of developing the ability to accomplish goals.

OBJECTIVES

Following the lesson, participants will be able to:

- understand the benefits of networking, to themselves and to others.
- recognize different types of networks.
- describe ways to develop or expand their own networks.
- establish a tracking system to manage their lists of contacts.
- plan to use networking skills for a project or activity.

PLANNING THE LESSON

As you plan to teach this lesson, think about your audience, the time schedule and key concepts. Remember that most adults like practical information and an opportunity to participate and to share their experiences.

- Review this teaching guide and the fact sheet carefully as you begin planning your presentation.
- Order enough copies of fact sheet MF-2349 for everyone in your group.
- Make copies of the evaluation form for each group member.
- Select an introductory or warm-up activity. Obtain 3- x 5-inch cards and yarn, if needed.
- Decide what you are going to say – and practice saying it. We recommend that you use the “Finding the Connection” activity rather than just talking or reading.
- Arrange to obtain the display “Finding the Connection” from the K-State Research and Extension Area Office, if you wish to use it. Ask your county extension agent to assist you.

A POSSIBLE TIME SCHEDULE:

5 minutes: Warm-up activity.

5 minutes: Presentation of key concepts (see below) in your own words.

Distribute the fact sheet now or at the close of the lesson.

15 minutes: Conduct “Making Connections” activity, and discuss the results.

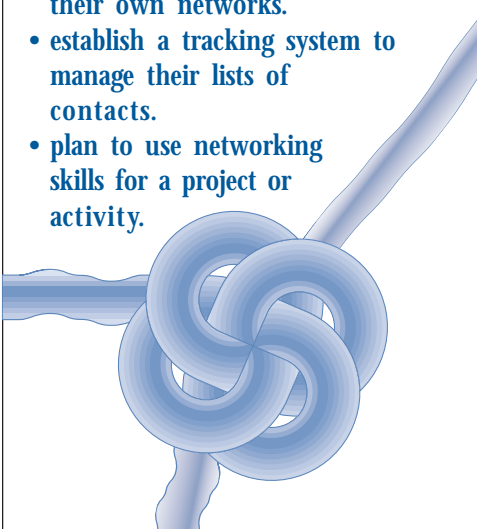
5 minutes: Ask each person to share one idea they have learned or reviewed. If your group is large, divide them into small groups (four to six persons) to share. Then, call on three or four participants to share with the whole group.

5 minutes: Complete the program evaluation.

Additional time will be needed if you are going to discuss a community service activity.

KEY CONCEPTS

- The ability to create and use networks – to make connections – is an important strategy for personal success – on the job, in professional organizations, in volunteer work and for political action.
- Networking helps us gain information, ideas, skills, and the capacity to accomplish goals.
- Most personal networks are informal and useful. They help people both give and receive help.
- Informal networks are developed on a one-by-one basis.
- You can enhance your networking skills in many different ways.
- Contacts are the basis of a network. It's important to develop a system for keeping track of your contacts and to review your list regularly.



FINDING THE CONNECTION

WARM-UP ACTIVITY

Select one of these activities. If time is short or it is difficult for group members to stand, Small Talk may be more appropriate than Balls of Yarn.

■ BALLS OF YARN

Preparation. Obtain two or more yarn balls of different colors.

Procedure. Have participants stand in a large circle, facing one another. Give the balls of yarn to people who are far apart, and ask them to hold the yarn until you say, "Go!"

Explain that the group will be making a network with the yarn. The people with the yarn balls hold the end of the string and gently throw the balls across to someone else, calling out that person's name. Then, those people hold the string and throw the balls to a third person, and so on, until the balls have been unwound.

Discussion. When the yarn net is complete, ask group members to pull back very slightly. What happens? (Net gets tighter. The network has been "activated." The yarn represents connections.) Now, ask one person to drop out. What happens? (Others must pick up the slack. There are fewer potential contacts.) How does the person who withdrew feel? Note that it is important for a group to be able to count on all its members. Point out that connections (the strands of yarn) connect different people in different ways, just as networks do. Some individuals serve as nodes, connecting many different people or networks.

■ SMALL TALK

Procedure. Divide group members into groups of three to six. Appoint someone recorder. Participants brainstorm uses of small, common items. Items for consideration include paper clip, pencil, coffee mug, shoelace. Record responses, and then compare lists among groups.

Discussion. The purpose of brainstorming is to gather a large number of ideas. In this activity, we thought about ways to use small objects. In networking, we can brainstorm about different types of information or resources we need or that we can offer to others.

FINDING THE CONNECTIONS ACTIVITY

Give each person a 3- x 5-inch card. Tell participants not to write their names. Instead, tell each to write:

1. Something you like to do for fun.
2. Something you would like to get information or help on, for example, "How to find a walking partner."
3. Some information or skill you have that you could share with others. (Make it fairly general for purposes of this activity. For example, "Computer word processing and printing.")

Ask members to put their cards face down on the center table. Mix them up a bit.

Each person in turn draws a card. If someone gets her own, she should put it back and draw another. If it's the last card, she can pretend it's someone else's.

After drawing cards, the first person reads aloud the first item on the card and tries to guess whose card it is. If the guess is NOT right, let the group try to guess . . . just one or

two tries. If unsuccessful, the person who wrote the item should introduce herself.

Have the next person repeat the process. Continue until all cards are drawn.

Then, say:

"Now, let's put this exercise in the perspective of networking. Please stand up and move around the room, introducing yourself to someone, if you don't know them, and asking whether they can help you with the second item on your card (what you need) or whether they can refer you to someone who could. If you know everyone, just select someone, and ask for help. If the resource person is someone in the room you know, that's great. Go ahead and talk to that person. If not, ask if they know a person outside the group who might help.

"If you're not doing well at connecting, discuss with

someone near you the type of information or expertise you wrote down as the third item (information or skill you could share).”

Then, say:

“The characteristics of this activity are similar to initiating a network. The idea is to create connections in order to give and receive help. Think about who you are, what you can offer, what you want to get.

“Today’s activity may seem too informal, occasionally chaotic – mostly because of this artificial situation and short time frame – and maybe you weren’t successful right away. In the real world, you can take a bit more time to do this.”

Ask for members to share questions or experiences. With most groups, sharing of their own experiences is helpful and fun. Watch the time, and keep the discussion moving to avoid too much repetition. You may want to emphasize the idea of exchange . . . giving as well as receiving.

SUGGESTIONS FOR COMMUNITY SERVICE ACTIVITIES

- Present the information in this lesson to other groups and organizations.
- Interview community leaders, elected officials, or club officers about the ways they develop and use networking to facilitate their projects.
- Prepare a series of newspaper articles or radio spots to share information about the value of sharing connections by networking.
- Prepare a poster or display, targeting the use of networks for specific activities (such as getting information and resources to promote health fairs, fund raising events, or similar work).
- Make a list. When your group is planning to work on a community service project or study an issue, it’s wise to invest some time at a meeting to develop a network list. Share all your ideas about individuals and other groups who might have some interest or connection in linking with your group for information, resource sharing, or strategies to achieve a common goal. Also, make a list of members of your organization who could provide information, services, or access to other groups. You can make this information available to staff people, officials or other policy makers, or to potential sources of funds, who often need information on issues and projects. Let these people know that you have referred others to them. Don’t hesitate to list yourselves – informed citizens or consumers often are hard for decision makers to locate.

S U M M A R Y

Personal networks promote communication among individuals and the many groups, organizations and communities they belong to. Networks have a purpose: getting resources to accomplish your goals and assisting others to meet their goals.

REFERENCES

Mark, Emily and Katey Walker. Presentation to AAFCS Preconference on Public Affairs Education, June 1995.

Walker, Katey. “Networking: How and Why,” Presentation to Kansas Business and Professional Women’s Conference, October 1997.

SUGGESTED EVALUATION FORM

**FINDING THE CONNECTION: HOW TO CREATE AND USE A PERSONAL NETWORK
PROGRAM EVALUATION**

COUNTY: _____

Group Sponsoring Lesson: FCE _____ Other _____

Please take a few minutes to let us know what information you gained from today's program. Check the answer that best describes what you learned.

1. As a result of this program, have you become more aware of the benefits of networking to yourself and others?

Yes No

2. Did you learn to recognize different types of networks?

Yes No

3. Did you learn or review some useful techniques to develop or expand your own networks?

Yes No

4. Do you plan to use at least one technique to manage your list of contacts?

Yes No

5. Do you expect to use making connections or networking in some personal or volunteer project or activity?

Yes No

6. Will you teach or tell other people any of the information you learned from this lesson?

Yes No

If yes, who:?

Family and Community Education Group

Family

Other organization (which?) _____

7. Comments: _____

THANK YOU!

Please return this evaluation form to Dr. Katey Walker, School of Family Studies and Human Services, 343 Justin Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506. Your response is important to your County Extension Council and Kansas State University. It helps show the kind of information county residents learn through our educational programs.

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