



The Art of Networking

When you envision your professional network, what does it look like? Is it a flat and one-sided? An interactive sculpture that invites viewers to participate? An interweaving dance in which everyone engages equally?

Most of us don't spend a great deal of time contemplating the design of our peer networks. Yet a major career event can rapidly transform them into a safety net, forcing us to test their strength and integrity.

Seemingly a world away from the whirlwind generated by Michael Lynn's now-infamous

Cisco IOS presentation, I joined a group of women leaders at the recent Black Hat conference in Las Vegas to discuss professional networks and their importance in career development. Joyce Brocaglia, CEO of Alta Associates and founder of the Executive Women's Forum, opened the session with a quick background on the EWF, whose membership has grown to nearly 300 senior executives in information security and privacy since its launch in 2003.

The women on our panel came to information security from diverse backgrounds. Merck CSO Pamela Fusco was formerly a military cryptologist; Lynn Terwoerds, senior security strategist at Microsoft, taught classics and conversational German before getting into security full time 15 years ago; and Rhonda MacLean, former CISO at Bank of America, worked her way up the corporate ranks over 20 years and is now testing her network's strength as she launches her own consulting business.

What became clear from our discussion is that there is no one way infosec leaders emerge. It is a scatter graph of pure opportunistic chaos. However, my fellow panelists and I do have one thing in common: We know how to network and have invested significant time and energy in building a strong and enduring professional support system.

In an industry often defined by technology, emerging infosec leaders need to look beyond the bits and bytes to the human element and figure out ways to cultivate relationships with colleagues across organizations. "Not only has networking benefited my career, [but] it has been a personal success as well," says Merck's Fusco. "Having a trusted resource by which we can obtain ideas, learn from past mistakes and gain insight into potential future endeavors is unsurpassable."

But for all that it promises, especially if you should find yourself facing a layoff or lawsuit, developing a network de-

mands fighting that inner battle against rejection, particularly for the more introverted among us. Exchanging business cards and niceties is just a starting point. Pick up the phone and ask to schedule a meeting. It takes "face time" to build relationships. Once you get together, make sure to spend some time learning about your colleague's life outside of work. We are all far more than a job title.

"Trust your gut feelings," Fusco says. "Networking is suc-

Emerging infosec leaders must figure out ways to cultivate relationships.

cessful only when everyone in the arena wants to be in the arena. Those who are participating for personal gains sour the mix. It's a shared experience. Sometimes you give and sometimes you get. The nucleus of the networking relationship contains elements from all trusted participants."

The best way I have found to get beyond the fear is to participate fully in a conversation. I take care not to hide myself behind vague chitchat. I openly share important details about my life and challenges. By sharing my humanness, I find that my colleagues are willing to do the same.

Careers are made and broken by their networks. If you haven't invested time and energy into growing deep relationships, you may find yourself out-manuevered when your career hits that inevitable bump—downsizing, a layoff or, ahem, a lawsuit. Networking ultimately requires an investment in relationships, which means dedicated time and energy. It also means that you, the real you, needs to show up to the dance. ■

E. Kelly Hansen is CEO of Neohapsis, an information security consultancy and enterprise IT product-testing lab. Write to her at khansen@neohapsis.com.