

## NANO TOOLS FOR LEADERS®

# THE POWER OF INTENTIONAL NETWORKING

**Nano Tools for Leaders®** are fast, effective leadership tools that you can learn and start using in less than 15 minutes—with the potential to significantly impact your success as a leader and the engagement and productivity of the people you lead.

### THE GOAL

Deliberately shape your current network to unlock its potential.

### NANO TOOL

Are you intentional about building and leveraging your network? If you're not, you're in good company: research shows a solid [majority is reluctant or resistant](#) to even consider working on theirs, considering it an unsavory or too time-consuming element of work life. That means networks tend to be random and unintentional, consisting only of the people we interact with by chance. But our networks have a profound [effect on our success](#), including a direct correlation with pay and promotions, and without some effort, they [shrink over time](#).



The good news is that decades of studies show you don't need to drop everything and head to the water cooler or register for numerous professional networking and industry events. A myopic focus on *network size* is wrong—knowing more people is not the answer. The quality and structure of your social connections is what matters. That means the better you understand that structure, the easier it will be to make the most of it and be able to make changes to suit your needs as they change over time.

### ACTION STEPS

- 1. Identify the type of network you have.** Through the descriptions below, or your results from [www.assessyournetwork.com](http://www.assessyournetwork.com), determine the structure of your current connections from the three categories identified as the most common, understanding that there is no one best or better network and that some people have a mixed style.

**EXPANSIONISTS** have very large networks, are popular and influential, and have an uncanny ability to work a room. They create value by connecting contacts to each other, and they are masters at cultivating and utilizing their weak ties. Expansionists are at risk of generosity burnout as they manage large numbers of contacts.

**BROKERS** have diverse networks, with contacts in many different networks that don't overlap. They create value by ferrying information and identifying opportunities for collaboration between networks, but need to manage misunderstandings that can arise between people with different ideas and beliefs. Brokers are innovative, often follow atypical career paths, and report better work-life balance.

**CONVENERS** have dense, closed networks of interconnected contacts. They often live and/or work at the same location for many years; are adept at taking the perspective of others; show greater resilience; and get trust, emotional support, and buy-in from their networks. Convener networks are at risk of developing echo chambers that validate one widely held viewpoint while discounting those that oppose it. The upside of this network is that conveners are trusted and supported.



- 2. Consider your network in relation to your career stage and current needs.** To make the most of your network, think about the advantages of each type in terms of what your career could benefit from now. In general, it's most valuable in the early stages of your career to build an expansionist network. Broker networks are most beneficial in the middle of your career, while convener networks make sense when you are in more senior roles.
- 3. Combine and oscillate for advantage.** Different moments and challenges require different networks. If your network is a mismatch with your career stage, or you could use the benefits afforded by a different network type, consider combining them. For example, senior leaders who often report a lack of close ties and high rates of loneliness could work to cultivate ties among contacts who know one another, essentially building a more convener-like network. In other words, you can call upon different parts of your network depending on the situation.

## HOW LEADERS USE IT

Cellist Yo-Yo Ma initiated the Silk Road Project in 1998 to promote cross-cultural collaboration among artists and institutions, which would foster cross-cultural understanding, deepen learning, and promote innovation. It has brought together world-class musicians from around the globe, including experts in the Chinese pipa, the Persian kamancheh, and folk vocals from Azerbaijan. The broker network experiment has been nominated for multiple Grammy awards, winning one for the album *Sing Me Home*.

Adam Rifkin, co-founder of three early-stage venture capital-funded startups whose legendary shyness inspired his "panda" nickname, was named the Best Networker in Silicon Valley by *Fortune* magazine. He says "It's who you know, not what, that's responsible for the big things in your professional life." He adds that a secret to maintaining his huge expansionist network is to prioritize "the people you'd most like to be influenced by, and look for special opportunities to reconnect with them regularly — whenever you learn a piece of information, find a job listing, or make a connection that could be relevant to them." Rifkin's approach, which focuses on reconnection, reveals a key message we can all learn from: There is extraordinary untapped value in your existing network.

Editor-in-chief of *Vogue* Anna Wintour is a high-profile dealmaker whose convener network includes people from across all industries (the Obamas, Michael Bloomberg, Diane von Furstenberg, and Roger Federer are friends). She has a remarkable ability to seat the right people next to one another at a dinner party, overseeing mutually beneficial connections that have launched, skyrocketed, and salvaged careers. Her fame and power (and her network) are on full display each year as she decides who will be invited to attend the Met Gala, arguably the most prestigious, exclusive social event in the world that brings together attendees from fashion, business, politics, and the arts. The value in Wintour's network comes from connecting other people in her network, which creates value not only for Wintour, but those around her.

## CONTRIBUTOR TO THIS NANO TOOL

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## ABOUT NANO TOOLS

*Nano Tools for Leaders*® was conceived and developed by Deb Giffen, MCC, director of Custom Programs at Wharton Executive Education. *Nano Tools for Leaders*® is a collaboration between joint sponsors Wharton Executive Education and Wharton's Center for Leadership and Change Management. This collaboration is led by Professors Michael Useem and John Paul MacDuffie.