

Why You Need an Entourage

Create a master plan for building long-lasting business connections.

By Leslie Grossman

All great leaders have an entourage. After all, no one can do anything of significance alone. Today's business leaders have a new kind of entourage—a mutually collaborative one.

The true test of whether someone will be a long-term member of your entourage is whether he or she encourages you to achieve your vision and have a fulfilled life and successful business. Members of your entourage make introductions, give advice based on their own experiences and offer support—and you do the same for them.

Thomas Edison did just that when he encouraged his employee Henry Ford, then an engineer at Edison's Illuminating Co., to build his self-propelled vehicle on weekends. Until Ford received financing for his "automobile," he was a loyal and devoted employee at Edison's company. Edison introduced Ford to all kinds of businesspeople, including Harvey Firestone of tire and rubber company fame. All contributed to the development of the automobile. The Ford-Edison-Firestone alliance is legendary.

Once you get started, your entourage will not only support you but also connect you with new people who will come to believe in you, as well. Together, they will help you thrive. It's important to realize that an entourage is not just about you. In fact, the first step in building an entourage is to ask other people about their vision and goals, and then share yours.

Second, look for ways to help the members of your entourage. The more generous we are in helping others, the more they trust us and the more willing they are to help us. An entourage is a collaborative relationship.

These are strategies I share in my

book, *Link Out: How to Turn Your Network into a Chain of Lasting Connections* (Wiley, 2013), which provides a master plan for building long-lasting connections with people who will support you, while you simultaneously support them. When you link out, you literally get out—away from your desk, computer and smartphone—and build

trusted associates to you, just as you will do for them. They will willingly link out to their connections on your behalf. This is how your entourage grows—not only in number but also in influence.

Here are five things to think about as you link out to build an entourage:

1. Silicon Valley entrepreneurs who



face-to-face relationships. When nurtured, these relationships can last a lifetime. An entourage is different from a network in that it is built on trusted relationships among people who can count on one another to lend advice, support and introductions on a long-term basis. A network is made up of people we meet, but not necessarily people we can rely on to help us.

Once trust is built through in-person communication, members of your entourage will bring their chain of

create social media connect with one another and with investors in person at breakfast meetings, association gatherings and events. That's how they build powerful relationships that open doors to their newest startups, products and collaborations. Surprisingly, they don't make these valuable connections through social media.

2. Customers buy products and services from people they trust or from referrals they get from people they trust. Trust is gained only through

face-to-face relationships. An entourage can serve as a good referral source for business.

3. People who invest time in being active in nonprofit causes and business associations build strong relationships with people who open doors and make intro-

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ductions in new circles of influence. Too often, women don't see this as a priority to expand their business or advance their career; they spend too much time executing work instead of exiting their work to connect with people.

4. With Skype, FaceTime and Google Hangouts, we can have face-to-face

communication no matter where we are. I have regular conversations on

Skype with a friend and entourage member. I would almost swear she is in the same room with me, yet she is in Iceland.

5. Whether you are a new business owner, in your first job or transitioning later in life, it's never too soon or too late to launch or grow your entourage. Once you start, your connections and relationships will flow. In fact, consider evaluating your current business relationships—are they collaborative or a one-way street? It may be time to make a shift to a new entourage.

If it sounds to you as if there's some work involved here, you're right. You may even wonder if it's worth the effort to link out. If you like people, linking out will be easy and fun. Of course, it might be a bit more difficult if you're more introverted. If you are a loner, it might make you a little uncomfortable at first, and you may have to push yourself.

Linking out is not a competition. To me, it's a mystery why so many people feel that building supportive relationships is akin to conspiring with the enemy. The truth is that we can all be

victorious when we work together.

When we form partnerships, we realize that the person or business we initially perceived as competition can become a valued ally. This is true for individuals as well as for companies.

As President Franklin D. Roosevelt said,

“Competition has been shown to be useful up to a certain point and no further, but cooperation, which is the thing we must strive for today, begins where competition leaves off.”

In other words, the sooner you stop looking at your colleagues as competitors and start seeing them as collaborators and potential partners, the quicker you will be on your way to achieving your definition of success.

The *Link Out* strategy delivers an entourage of people who are willing and eager to make introductions, connections and referrals. Why go it alone? An entourage could propel your business to the top. [LH](#)

Leslie Grossman is a leadership and career development expert and author of *Link Out: How to Turn Your Network into a Chain of Lasting Connections* (Wiley, 2013).



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