

## **IV. The Modern Seller is Social**

## Chapter 10

### The 3 R's and Turning Points

There are three things that we take with us no matter where we go in life: our results, our reputation, and our relationships. They're completely transferrable from one situation or experience to the next, and they build on one another. Every relationship experience helps us learn and gives us a new perspective. This, in turn, helps us better connect in the next relationship.

I can trace nearly anything significant that has happened in my life to the power of strategic relationships—their connectivity, and their give and take. There have been two turning points in my sales career that drive home the value of strategic relationships and the social skillset.

As I mentioned in the introduction, the opportunity to build my career at IBM started with a strategic relationship. It began with my very first inside sales role and continues to this day. The backstory is that I'd taken a career detour from that inside sales role, jumping into a very different opportunity I thought I would love. An IT consulting firm came calling and I became a consultant, working onsite at clients designing and developing custom database applications. I quickly realized that the role didn't fit me. At. All. The work wasn't inspiring, and I was living in a cubicle all day without much client contact.

After about six months, I knew my heart wasn't in it and I needed to course correct. In looking back, I know I would've eventually been fired from that job had this strategic relationship not intervened.

A connection I made while in that first inside sales role worked for IBM. There was an opening he thought I might be interested in, and he let me know about it. This checked all my boxes: it was an opportunity to get back into sales in a client-facing role, and a chance to grow my career at one of the best companies in the world.

This connection became a strategic relationship because not only did he get my resume to right people, he introduced me to the hiring manager (his boss) and coached me on interviewing. He gave me advice on how to successfully land the role. This went way beyond what I was expecting, and in the end, I got the job. It was one of those experiences I can look back on and say changed my life.

The other turning point was when I left the relative safety of my sales role, stepping out to become an entrepreneur.

This was a big pivot, moving into a different industry—the training space. As an employee turned entrepreneur, there was a light-bulb moment where I realized I

had a big problem: I had one project to start this fledging company. Apart from that, as well as a couple of connections in this new industry, I knew almost no one else. More importantly, no one knew me.

I remember the panic setting in. Maybe I'd made a huge mistake, and the best thing to do would be to turn back and return to what I knew. Until that point, my relationship ecosystems had been primarily within my sales territory and the four walls of the company where I worked. There was no longer a neat little box to fit into, with defined relationships and a defined sales identity. The challenge ahead would be building entirely new relationships and, as I would learn, building them much broader, deeper, and higher than I've ever done. I was also going to learn how to translate those initial relationships into closing sales and leading a successful business.

I'm happy to say I didn't give in to the panic or turn back. Instead, I decided I would rather try to build a business, even one that failed, then to look back in 10 years and say "shoulda, woulda, coulda." Rather, I would become of a student of building relationships. Now, they have become the fuel for my selling success, and the fuel for reaching back and helping others succeed. Along the way, there are numerous strategies I've learned, created, failed at until I got it right, and still practice—all of which help me build relationships and sell in the modern world.

So why does the social skillset matter in modern selling? It comes down to four basic principles:

1. **Buying decisions are increasingly being made by committee and consensus.** I wouldn't go so far as to say the single decision-maker scenario is dead because I've still experienced it, even in complex sales. It's just becoming less common. A growing reality is that more decisions require consensus building, whether overtly or behind the scenes. In RFP (request-for-proposal) situations, decisions are made by committees which represent multiple business units and stakeholders across the client.

In research conducted by CEB, the average number of decision makers in any given deal is 6.8, and the variety of those decision-making roles is becoming more complex across job function and geography. This means there's a good chance of a buying role (and potential decision maker) where the relationship is weak. Sellers now must go wider and deeper in their relationship-building efforts, expanding beyond the usual departments in which they do business and stretching further into the organization.

- 2. You can make fewer cold calls.** Someone recently asked me if selling has become tougher or easier in the last 10 years. In many ways, it's tougher (consensus decision making, as an example, or any of the other challenges I mentioned in earlier sections), but there's one key way it has become easier: Today's social platforms provide more access than ever before to reach people. We're just a connection or two away from decision makers or other influencers.

But, that means a lot of other people are as well. And, because we're all so connected through technology, those of us that build and maintain strong networks have the advantage. With strong networks, we can rise above the noise. Our ability to connect broadly and deeply can mean fewer cold calls. With fewer cold connections, you can gain access more quickly and with more support, because the beginning of a relationship has already been established through your network.

- 3. Selling is still about connecting to other human beings in a way that's genuine and adds value.** In an age of artificial intelligence, machine learning, and predictive analytics, you still need to know how to connect with others at an emotional level.

In complex sales, technology isn't going to win or expand the business—you are, as a modern seller. To move up the value chain with your clients, relationship building isn't something you can delegate. You can leverage AI and machine learning technologies to accelerate pattern-finding and decision-making. Your relationship-building efforts become strategic and produce the best results.

- 4. It expands your network ecosystems, which increases your reach and influence.** I was first introduced to the concept of "ecosystems" by entrepreneur and author Judy Robinett in her book *How to Be a Power Connector*. My earlier story about stepping into entrepreneurship underscores Robinett's points, as my reach and influence were limited to my immediate world. At the time, my network ecosystem was small. By becoming an entrepreneur, I faced having to expand—not just the number of relationships, but also the level at which I was operating. I had to exercise my "growth mindset," to borrow a phrase from researcher Carol Dweck. I needed to build relationships with those who also valued their networks, could open doors for me, and I could do the same for them. This

would allow me to amplify my own reach and influence. You're likely facing this too, especially if you're starting up a territory or market segment, moving into a new sales or sales leadership role, or you're realizing that to reach your quota objectives you must expand your reach and influence.

## What It Looks Like

Here are a few examples of what social looks like in modern selling:

- **Board service for a non-profit or industry organization.** This experience can connect us to peers, industry leaders, strategic partnerships, and potential decision makers. I recently served on board with an executive who worked for one of my key clients, but in a different business unit. I was doing business within one area of the company, and she offered to introduce me to a leader and potential decision maker within another business unit. Without our common connection through board service, I likely wouldn't have had that opportunity for a trusted and direct introduction.
- **The seller who can fluidly evolve a relationship from virtual to voice, from voice to in-person—and create value each time.** This seller can also connect these interactions along the way. One of my biggest client relationships had its beginnings in LinkedIn. In my case, it was a series of InMail messages via LinkedIn which led to an introductory phone call. How I structured that introductory phone call created the initial trust that eventually led to in-person conversations. The in-person conversations and further trust-building ultimately led to opportunities to bid on a single project. The delivery of that single project built even more trust and led to more projects, and then referrals to other clients in that decision maker's network. Everything connects.
- **The account leader with a target client, but no direct access.** He has decided to take a mixed prospecting approach to get some momentum. The mix includes leveraging his network first, by finding at least three to five potential decision makers or influencers on LinkedIn. Next, he'll research his network for any intersection points and identify where these connections could be warmed up with either more information or an introduction. There's also an upcoming event his company is sponsoring; he's partnering with his marketing team to send out targeted whitepapers and event

invitations. By doing this, he'll know through his sales enablement platform if those have emails achieved successful open rates. The account leader can then follow up with phone calls.

## Chapter 11

### The Social Framework: Strategies to Build Social Selling Capital

To develop the social skillset, it helps to have a little background on social capital. Social capital has its roots in sociology, but has made its way into business environments over the past few decades. At its core, social capital is the collective value of our relationships and what is created through those relationships. These include the relationships closest to us, as well as those amplified beyond that—second, third, and fourth-degree relationships. The wider and deeper we invest in building relationships, the more social capital we create. The more social capital we create, the more we can reach valuable goals for everyone involved.

A byproduct of all this is momentum. Modern sellers get this. They have momentum because they're constantly focused on creating and leveraging their social capital. This momentum creates more qualified and valuable opportunities, and it puts them in a completely different room. Decision makers and other influencers look at them and interact with them differently because they know it's a relationship of deeper value.

Another way to think of social capital in everyday terms is like a bank account. Any healthy bank account has deposits and debits. We need them both equally, as one creates value and the other extracts value for something we need. Over time, the value of the account should grow.

What are examples of these deposits or debits? I've heard them best described as the four T's: time, talent, treasure, and ties. They're assets we either have or we can develop to create value for ourselves and others.

**Time:** Our most precious non-renewable resource. Where, on what, and with whom we decide to invest our time creates the sum total of our success. *(More on that in the holistic skillset)*

**Talent:** Our unique knowledge, skills, and experience that can be applied to create forward progress on an idea or problem, or within an entire organization.

**Treasure:** Leveraging financial means to invest and accelerate growth in ourselves, in others, and in organizations.

**Ties:** The depth and breadth of our networks used to create connections among people, resources, and opportunities.

If time, talent, treasure, and ties are our assets, what's the currency on which those assets are traded? They are trust, generosity, and leverage. Combined, they open more doors, create more opportunities, and ultimately generate higher overall lifetime value in any relationships we create.

## **Trust**

Trust is transparency and creates a sense of safety and vulnerability. Trust is openly sharing goals and values and finding alignment. It's sharing successes and struggles. It's knowing that intentions are true and commitments matter.

For example, I have a coach who is a fellow entrepreneur and selling expert who really lives by this concept. By our second conversation, he very openly shared what he values most personally and professionally. And as someone who has built and sold several multi-million-dollar businesses, it wasn't the accolades he mentioned. Instead, he shared his struggles, shining a light on the stuff which doesn't get written about when you're receiving an award.

That got my barriers down and my trust up. I became way more willing to do the same. It paved the way to a meaningful relationship and accelerated my ability to solve what I had hired him to help with.

In a world of instant anything, trust is still something to be earned and continually earned for the life of the relationship. But what if you could accelerate how quickly you're able to earn and keep trust?

## **Generosity**

I first heard this from Keith Ferrazzi, author of *Never Eat Alone*. He calls generosity the fuel of our networks. Generosity means when we've decided to invest in a relationship, we give of our time, talent, treasure, and ties with no strings attached. We give from a place of genuinely wanting to create something better for those we're building strategic relationships with. Without generosity, relationships become more about keeping score because we have an expectation of getting something in return. This prevents us from investing more deeply into them. But, when we build relationships with others who also live from a place of generosity—centers of influence, prospects, current clients—the returns somehow just arrive. This provides the opportunity to earn more business while also creating longer-term value.



## **Leverage**

Simply put, it's the ask. Leverage is a willingness to ask for what's needed to move something forward. It's also offering something to someone in your strategic network—usually one the four Ts. This could be a micro-commitment (typically something of lower value given early in a relationship to continue to build trust) or a macro-commitment (something of larger value, generally in a more established relationship with a longer history of trust).

In the context of modern selling, leverage is also what helps us to close business. We often make closing business much more complicated and awkward than it needs to be. Instead, approach the sales process as a way to provide value and deliver on commitments at every step along the way, while also asking for various micro- and macro-commitments of our prospects. This is a natural and genuine way of using leverage.

Going back to the bank account analogy, an essential element of this is the balance: the balance of the overall account and the give and take of the relationship. If the give and take gets out of balance, that usually means one person is investing more in the relationship than the other. That's why the credits and debits are equally important. For a strategic relationship to be successful, everyone involved needs a sense of giving (deposits) and receiving (debits).

## **The Social Framework**

Everything in my work and in selling comes down to my strategic network—the relationships I build, how I add value to those relationships, and how those relationships when leveraged in the right way, create even more collective value. I'm still a work in progress, a student. And, as any good student would do, I'm always looking for strategies I could use or steps that I could take to help me get better.

From this, my own framework started to emerge; one to help me with all the components of relationship building. There are four elements to the Social Framework: Mindset, Goals, Network Ecosystem, and Habits. This framework will help you build your own overall network and identify strategic relationships you will need to invest in to reach your goals.

## **Mindset**

Having the mindset of a strategic relationship builder is the foundational element of the framework. Without this, it's challenging to make the other elements of the framework work. You must truly believe—and internalize—that you are a strategic relationship builder and tap into the 4 Ts you currently have. Depending on where you are in your career, you'll have more of some than others. The first step toward success is recognizing that you have everything within you to build powerful relationships with peers, internal leaders, centers of influence, prospects, C-level decision makers, and industry thought leaders. It all comes down to your decision to choose to see yourself in that way, and treat relationship building as one of the most important things you do every day.

The lightbulb moment for me was understanding that I needed to work on the other elements of the framework *while* building the mindset component. When we're learning new things the mindset typically isn't there yet. The decision to take uncomfortable action comes first and implementing the rest of the framework continues to build the mindset and motivation.

There are five key elements of mindset which separate the most influential relationship builders from everyone else. We covered two of them a little earlier, trust and generosity. Here are the other three:

**Leadership Identity:** When leading programs on social capital, one of the first exercises I take attendees through is on leadership identity. I ask people to identify an influential leader in their life and write down specifically what that person did to build a relationship with them. Many people cite parents, teachers, coaches, work leaders, or even a peer in the room. Answers include:

- That person challenged my thinking
- They showed interest in my perspectives
- They gave effective and kind feedback
- They shared their knowledge and resources
- They created opportunities for me
- They helped me solve my biggest challenges

I'll then ask them to describe the overall relationship by completing the sentence: "It is/was a relationship that inspired \_\_\_\_\_." Answers to this usually include:

- Trust
- Psychological safety
- Challenge
- Growth
- Continuous learning
- Engagement

Wouldn't we love our prospects and clients to say these things about us? Wouldn't it be great if they identified you as an influential leader who helped them? Leadership, social capital, and selling are intertwined. Effective sellers are leaders who understand the value of social capital and the importance of developing relationships. The quality of our leadership influences the quality of our relationships and results. This holds true in modern selling relationships as well. Every challenge our decision makers grapple with require sellers to show up as leaders.

I'd encourage you to do this exercise for yourself or with your sales teams. Leadership identity isn't usually something we consciously think about. But the best sellers are leaders who do just that. They decide how they want to show up in the world. They choose their leadership identity. And they know to achieve meaningful goals they need to step into strategic relationships and build social capital from a leadership perspective.

**Intent:** The best relationship builders are intentional. They're purposeful in choosing the relationships they build, and in discerning which relationships get more of their valuable time and attention. They're able to be intentional because they take the time upfront to understand the other person's goals and values. When they know these important pieces of information, they can add the right level of value at the right time and continue to cultivate the relationship.

Hand in hand with intent, great relationship builders approach strategic relationships as team-building exercises. Rather than look at it as "what's in it for me," or "what's in it for you," the relationships become "what's in it for us and what can we create together?" Great relationship builders want to continuously learn how to improve the value they bring as part of the overall relationship. This can only happen when there is a trust that together we are creating a result or outcome. This team-building intent works for any relationship or situation: prospects who don't know you well yet, big

complex RFP situations, or existing clients where you're looking to expand the relationship.

**Lifetime Value:** When I ask the question, "What holds you back from building strategic relationships?" the answers are usually universal, regardless of the audience (even sales audiences). They include:

- No time—falls off the priority list when urgent things come up
- Not comfortable
- Feels like I'm taking advantage of others
- Not sure exactly how—I need a process
- I don't want to be responsible for the outcomes; I don't want to look bad

The antidote to these triggers is a lifetime value approach to relationships. In modern selling, our approach to relationships and decisions can't be defined by that first deal or the opportunity that's right in front of us. It can't be defined by "what can you do for me right now." When we think only about the present moment rather than the long tail of the relationship, we get stuck in a "me only" mentality. This type of thinking sucks us into the mental barriers that keep us from building important strategic relationships. It also puts us at risk of losing focus on our intent and damaging the trust in that relationship.

But this is easily fixed. To take a lifetime value lens for every relationship, whether it's with a center of influence, a prospect, an RFP decision committee, or an existing client, ask yourself:

- Am I making the right level of effort?
- Have I added more value than what I'm asking for?
- Is this action today something which will positively continue to build the relationship for the long term?

## Goal Setting

The second part of the Social Framework is goal setting. In our sales roles, the biggest goal we're usually working toward is our quota goal. It's an external goal set for us by our leadership teams. Our work then becomes creating the opportunities and, ultimately, closing the business which gets us to the goal. But

within the quota attainment goal, modern sellers know the value of setting social goals.

Social goals are accomplished through strategic relationships. By using that lens, goals around selling become less about us and more about being of service, looking for ways to contribute in every selling or client situation. It's the realization that any significant goal requires relationships—and significant goals separate modern sellers from average sellers. Through this approach, modern sellers not only achieve this year's quota, they also create an environment around them where they have even more momentum for the long-term.

As you think about your territory, your business or your role, ask yourself what goals are meaningful. I encourage you to complete the visioning exercise outlined in the Entrepreneurial section of the book. I also encourage reflection on professional goals, selling goals, and personal goals. When we're building a vision or pursuing a goal that stretches us, it doesn't become just about professional success; it's also personal because we change in the process.

When I lead this type of work with sales organizations, I ask them to start by creating their one-to-three-year territory vision. This gets them into the mindset as entrepreneurs and owners of their respective territories. With their vision as their guide, they then decide on the most meaningful goals they need to accomplish the vision. Usually, those goals become much bigger because they start to see how the goals will make the vision happen.

Below are several goals coming from this work, to spark your thinking as you create your vision and individual goals:

- Develop a new vertical market
- Increase my presence within my industry
- Create a community that brings together clients, prospects, and industry leaders
- Expand into a customer set my competition has dominated
- Seek out new partnerships to expand my reach and create new opportunities
- Build a skill needed for a pivot, and create opportunities in the new area
- Launch a new product or service

The most important ingredient I've found to help me with goal setting is to dig into what my motivation is—the why, and significance behind it.

Without an internal motivation or why, it's easy to get lost. I've set plenty of goals I've fallen short on or decided to quit because my motivation and why weren't strong enough to help me keep going. In sales environments, motivation can often default to external performance metrics. As sellers, we're recognized and rewarded for achieving quota and for winning. Becoming a modern seller doesn't mean that goes away, but it does mean integrating and balancing the short and long term. Social goals can help us deliver on performance goals with integrity and help us keep our focus on building our business or territory for the long term.

Here are some questions to consider while building out your goals:

- Why is this goal significant to me, my clients, and my organization?
- Does this goal support the vision I set out for my business or territory?
- Do I want this goal with my head (does it make sense to pursue), and with my heart (am I passionate about it)?
- Is this a short-term goal (within this year), or a long-term goal (12-plus months)? How does this affect my decision to pursue the goal?
- How will this goal change my business or territory?
- How do I see myself evolving as a modern seller and leader because of pursuing this goal?
- What resources do I need to begin creating movement toward this goal?
- What would happen if this goal isn't realized? What might get in the way of making this goal happen?

Here's an example of this goal-setting approach from my sales life:

**Goal:** One of my aspirational goals is to expand keynote speaking within my existing business, as a mainstage keynoter on sales and leadership. It becomes a revenue stream of its own and a lead generator for the sales and leadership development programs my company offers.

**Significance:** This goal matters because it will give me the opportunity to connect with and share my message with larger audiences. It's a larger platform for the work I'm passionate about, which is developing modern sellers and leaders. It's significant to my organization because it will create new revenue streams, new employee opportunities, and new opportunities for high-value client work.

Here's an example from another modern seller:

**Goal:** One of my goals is to help the company grow into an entirely new business segment. We've been a key player in our existing segments and we've maxed out on our growth opportunities; this new segment is untapped (also untapped by our competitors) with lots of room for growth. My vision is to be the leading expert in this new market. So, the goals are to build the market and get initial growth going. From there, I'd like to potentially build and lead the sales teams that will continue to grow it from there.

**Significance:** This goal matters to my company because it will create opportunity for our employees, and it will create opportunities to grow beyond our current constraints. It represents a legacy for our current CEO, and for me it's a new challenge. I especially like the possibility of building and leading teams; that's something new for me as well.

Use these ideas to create goals that matter to you. Social goals involve building and leveraging relationships, in the service of our visions as business leaders.

### **Network Ecosystems and the Social Relationship Formula**

Your Network Ecosystem is where your relationships live. It's your most valuable asset in modern selling. Your network ecosystem helps you identify the relationships you'll need to create, sustain, and leverage, evaluate their current strength, and map an action plan to help you systematize your efforts.

Before we get into the network ecosystem, let's cover the Social Relationship Formula. I created the formula because I needed a way to think tactically about the how of building and maintaining a relationship. It helps me to more easily evaluate the overall status of a relationship and how it fits into my network ecosystem.

$$(Create + Sustain)^2 - Leverage$$

To break down the elements of this formula:

**Create:** This is the early stage of a relationship. It may also be a relationship that isn't yet built. Examples of this are research on new contacts, an introduction at a networking event, or the touchpoints you're planning for a prospect. This could also be a relationship re-connection—think of relationships in your network which may have gone dormant and that you may need to rekindle based on your goals.

The common thread among these scenarios is they're all early stage, where the primary goals are to establish a connection. After that, you can continue to learn about the relationship—what the other person values and what their goals are—and use that information to align with your goals and values. This is where you build some initial trust. And, in certain scenarios where that trust is built more quickly, you're also able to conduct some high-level, low-risk value exchanges.

How long does this phase take? It depends on how quickly you can figure out how their goals and values align with yours, and how fast you're able to build trust. I can identify relationships where within one conversation I knew I wanted to take the relationship to the next level—Sustain. In those cases, it was easy to achieve initial value exchanges—ideas, sending an article, or even making an introduction. In other early-stage relationships where the trust never materialized, the relationship didn't make it out of this stage.

**Sustain:** This is where a decision is made to go deeper into developing the relationship. Early-stage trust is strong, and each person is willing to make more investment into growing it. If you noticed the squared part of the formula, it's a reminder to put twice as much effort into creating and sustaining relationships as we do into leveraging them.

Because it takes consistent commitment over time to keep trust high, the Sustain stage is also where you determine how much long-term effort to invest in the relationship. You begin to sense the balance of the relationship, and how the other person views its overall value: Are each of you putting in about the same amount of effort, or is something lopsided?

When the effort is balanced, there are equal exchanges of value, trust remains high, and there's a shared desire to keep the relationship's momentum. If one person is over-contributing and the other under-contributing, the account balance becomes out sync, trust can drop, and it can stall any progress of working toward a common goal. Not all



relationships require—nor should they get—your valuable time, energy, and attention.

**Leverage:** Simply put, to leverage a relationship is to master the ask. The level of the ask depends on a few factors, such as the degree of trust in the relationship, whether it's the right person or situation, and whether the value is there.

Some valuable lessons I've learned along the way when it comes to leverage:

- **Others want to offer value.** Asks allow the other person the opportunity to be of service. When trust and sustainability are high, it's a natural progression.
- **It's just as important to proactively offer my help as it is to ask.** When I see something that may help someone in my network I offer it up. When I take this extra step, it does two things: it further solidifies the relationship and builds my confidence in making asks.
- **The level of risk is in the eye of the beholder.** Don't pre-judge the ask. What may be a big ask to you may not be a big ask to someone else.

As I was writing this book, I made a list of the endorsements I wanted to include. There was a very well-known author and thought leader in the sales world on that list. We had built a strong relationship over the years, sharing ideas and information. I had introduced her to one of my clients several years ago, which resulted in business for both of us. The Create and Sustain parts of the relationship were all there.

Even with that, I was still nervous about the ask. I happened to be in her hometown for a conference and scheduled a breakfast with her to reconnect. I wanted to make sure I didn't leave that meeting without making the ask. I had built it up in my mind as something big, something she would need to think about.

But an interesting thing happened when I made the ask: The entire exchange took about 30 seconds. I received an immediate “yes.” She was flattered (and surprised) I would make the effort to see her in person to make the ask.

Using one of your own goals and the Social Relationship Formula, you can build out your network ecosystem map. Do this in any format that works best for your learning style—paper or digital, lists or visual mind maps. When it’s in a format you can systematize and use weekly, it can become a habit. If you have a CRM capable of accommodating it, all the better because it can then be used in conjunction with other selling activities and tracking methods. To create your network ecosystem map:

**Brainstorm the relationship roles you think you’ll need to accomplish the goal.** Right now, you don’t need names next to those roles, just the roles themselves. Using my goal of building a keynote speaking revenue stream, my list might look like this:

- Skill coaches
- Corporate meeting planners
- Speaker bureaus
- Current clients
- New clients and prospects
- Peers in sales roles and sales leadership roles
- Industry associations, like the National Speakers Association
- Peer speakers at my current level
- Speakers who have done this successfully
- Industry associations as clients
- Vendor relationships—including graphic designers, audio/visual, website

**Put some names to these roles.** Begin filling in names for these roles you’ve identified. I find it valuable to get help from trusted advisors to help me brainstorm. It increases the creativity and quality of potential relationships I can build. You’ll want to add as much information as you have, such as contact information, context on the relationship, or other data helpful to you. Later you’ll narrow the list down based on relationship strength.

**Note whether the people are internal or external.** Label the relationship as internal or external to your organization. You'll need both types of relationships to achieve your social goals. This exercise is valuable because you can quickly see where you might have internal or external gaps. In our example of the sales professional who is building a new market segment, chances are good he will need to build just as many—if not more—internal relationships as external client-facing or partner relationships.

**Determine the relationship type.** In their *Harvard Business Review* article “How Leaders Create and Use Networks,” authors Herminia Ibarra and Mark Lee Hunter describe three types of relationships our network ecosystems need: Operational, Personal, and Strategic. These are the relationship types a modern seller needs to pursue bigger goals. Categorizing them in this way provides insight as to the *level* at which you're operating:

- An Operational relationship is one related to your role and likely has functional expertise. It brings depth in terms of the working relationship. In my example, peer speakers and my vendor relationships could fall into this category.
- A Personal relationship is one which helps you enhance your development. It provides breadth because it is often external and connected to other network ecosystems where you may not have access. My executive coach, speaking coach, and professional associations fill this role for me.
- A Strategic relationship is one which will help you with business direction and big-picture thinking. It may even include stakeholders in your goal. These relationships bring leverage because they have internal and external connections and may be able to connect you upwards. In my example, speaker bureaus, centers of influence, and current clients are strategic relationships to help me reach my goal.

**Evaluate the relationship strength.** This is where the Social Relationship Formula will help you to evaluate the strength of your relationship. Ask the following questions:

- Are you at the beginning stages or need to renew the connection? If so, you're in Create mode.
- Are you at the beginning stages of Sustain? You may need to add more value depending on what potential ask you could want to make in the future.
- Have you added enough value so you're at a point where you can leverage the relationship? You may be ready to test it out with a smaller-risk ask, or you may know that the relationship has a very strong account balance and feel confident leveraging it. Here's how I classify relationship strength:
  - ++ (Strong Leverage potential)
  - + (Strong Sustain; may need more value for Leverage)
  - O (Neutral; might still be in Create or early Sustain phase)
  - -- (Very early Create or Renewal stage)

**Systematize your notes.** Just like our CRMs have us log our sales activity, you'll want to log your relationship activity. If your CRM becomes your core tracking tool, you should be able to add your notes directly into a contact. Your CRM may also allow you to treat this as a separate opportunity or initiative with relationship tasks; this approach can help you track at a big-picture level and gauge your relationship-building progress against your goal. I've found centralization is important. As relationships grow and more opportunities occur, it has helped me keep my data on any given relationship in one place.

This process of mapping and evaluating relationships, centered around a significant goal, helps us to see patterns. Patterns reveal where we have relationship strengths and opportunities. It can also help better prioritize where to invest time and build social capital.

With your network ecosystem map, you can further analyze it by asking yourself these questions:

- **Where am I strong?** For example, do I have a good mix of operational, personal and strategic relationships? How balanced is my mix of internal and external relationships? Do I have enough relationships where I've added significant value to potentially leverage them for my goal?

- **Where are the relationship gaps?** Either there is no relationship today or there is a relationship where I can and should be providing more value.
- **Where can I stretch?** The stretch often shows up as a relationship gap because we tend to build relationships where we're most comfortable. Modern sellers look to build the relationships that will stretch them because those relationships will accelerate them toward their goals.
- **Where can I pay it forward?** These are relationships where you can be additive, but there's likely not an opportunity for leverage. Examples here might be mentoring or volunteering. They add to your network ecosystem but may not play a direct role in accomplishing your goal.

Name/ Role	Internal/ External  (I/E)	Relationship Type  (Operational, Personal, Strategic)	Relationship Strength  ++ (Leverage) + (Sustain/Leverage) O (Create/Sustain) -- (Create)	Notes  (Examp es: Where can I add value to them? What do I need help with? How will this tie to my goal?)

## Habits

So far, we've covered your social goals and network ecosystem map. The mindset work is your ongoing, underlying foundation. The last piece of the Social Framework are your habits as a modern seller or sales leader.

As important as your other daily selling habits, your social habits are the small actions you're consistent with that further your strategic relationships. For every

goal I've had, I've used the following strategies, all of which have since become habits:

**Connecting with Centers of Influence regularly.** Centers of influence (COIs) are those people in your network who are very well connected, both broadly and deeply. They could be operational, personal, or strategic. They understand the value in sharing their expertise and connections. They can also connect you with other COIs. When you've established who in your network are your COIs, and then those who are most aligned to your goals, those are relationships you'll want to devote your time and give your greatest focus.

**Join the highest profile committee or an organization that ties directly to your goal.** If your network ecosystem contains industry organizations, target two which can most directly impact your goal. With two, choose one to join with the intention of membership only and the other in which you'll make a deeper social capital investment. Begin with the one that will get your greater focus, and then join their highest profile committee. This will help you immediately raise your profile, make connections more quickly, and provide value in a genuine way.

**Connect people weekly.** In every conversation I have with someone in my network, it's my intention to connect them with other people, to ideas, or with resources to help them reach their goals. Each week, I make it a goal to connect at least one person in my network with something of importance to them. With your network ecosystem map, this will provide more focus as you're working with a specific set of relationships and goals.

**Develop strategic alliances.** This one habit has helped me reach my goals more quickly and with greater impact. I've found it works best when you have similar goals, similar target markets, and complementary offerings. As you look at your goal, who in your network ecosystem might have a similar goal? Who might be looking to increase his or her impact at a level similar to you? Who offers products and services that complement you, and serves the same types of markets? Currently, I'm exploring a strategic partnership with a technology company that focuses on sales

enablement. Our sales training offerings complement their technology, and we serve many of the same types of clients. This strategic partnership represents a growth opportunity for both organizations while also creating more value for our joint clients.

**Develop an expertise you can become known for.** In a world of increasing commoditization, modern sellers stand out with a specific expertise or niche. Does your current goal give you this opportunity? In my own modern selling journey, my goal became to evolve from a seller of hardware technology to an expert in mobile computing for education. If you're in an industry where this is particularly challenging, look at your approach, or *the how* behind what you do. How can you make the experience better? Can you differentiate in how you deliver your product or service? Your expertise or niche can become the *how* instead of the *what*.

**Practice the art of the ask with higher-level relationships.** There are going to be times when you need to make an ask to move a significant goal forward and you'll be lacking the right level of social capital. If your network ecosystem map has gap with strategic relationships or centers of influence, you'll need to add those to your mix. When I've needed to create and then sustain a higher-level relationship where I know I need to build my social capital, I like to ask for advice and perspective. I learn from their expertise and begin to understand what's important to them so I can find ways to add value to the relationship. I'll share my goals, too, and they will often be more than willing to help me brainstorm or make the next right step.

**Cultivate questions that connect.** Questions are powerful. Whenever I connect with someone I have several ready. Much like when you're preparing discovery questions for a sales conversation. While questions for specific selling conversations may look a little different from network ecosystem conversations, I usually find some crossover between them. Below are a few of my questions based on Create, Sustain, and Leverage. These work just as well with your network ecosystem as they do with your sales conversations.

### **Create/Sustain Questions:**

- “What is something you’re working on right now that’s exciting for you?”
- “What are some of the trends you’re seeing in your industry?”
- “What is a goal you’re working toward?”
- “How do you like to stay connected?”
- “What can I do to help you right now?” (This question comes from sales strategist and center of influence, Jen E. Miller. Its simplicity is unexpected, and it gets people thinking.)

### **Leverage Questions:**

- “How would you suggest I go about...?”
- “Would you be willing to...?”
- “What’s a next step I could take with ...?”
- “I appreciate your willingness to help. How can I pay it forward?”

**Create a consistent and positive experience.** Your conversations are your opportunity to create a positive and lasting impression—one which will lead to strong social capital. With bigger goals and higher-level COIs, stakeholders, and decision makers, your attention to these details are expected. If you’re going to set the conversation, prioritize the time to prepare for it and lead it. Know your goals for the conversation, send out a short agenda ahead of time, and have your questions ready. Be prepared to lead the conversation, set any next action steps and follow through. These don’t have to be overdone to be done right; these are the basics that will set you apart.

**Download and analyze your connections quarterly.** With today’s technology, we have connections and data in many places. These include LinkedIn, your CRM, your address books, your other social sites, and probably some spreadsheets—each contains the valuable data which comprises your network ecosystem. Prioritize your top locations where your connections are stored. Mine are LinkedIn, my CRM, and my digital address books. With some of these sources, you may have to request your data be sent to you; it becomes a good practice to request your data on a quarterly basis. I’ll review my data sources, and based on



my current goals, determine which connections I'd like to focus on within my network ecosystem.

## Key Takeaways

- Modern sellers build their social skillset for some key reasons: more decisions today are made by buying committees, which means that relationships must be wider and deeper than ever before. Modern sellers can make fewer cold calls because of their network ecosystem, and they have more reach and influence because of it.
- Our social skillset is even *more valuable* in this age of artificial intelligence (AI). While AI provides valuable insights and can help us make better decisions with data—it's still about human connection.
- Social capital is the collective value of our relationships and what is created through those relationships. The wider and deeper we invest, the more social capital we create. The more social capital we create, the more quickly we can reach goals that are valuable to the collective—including sales goals.
- Time, talent, treasure, and ties increase your social capital and accelerate strategic relationship building.
- The Social Framework is your compass as a modern seller. The framework consists of your mindset, goals, network ecosystem, and habits.
- There are five key elements to mindset: leadership identity, intent, generosity, trust, and lifetime value.
- For modern sellers, social goals go beyond quota attainment and into significance. It begins with your vision for your territory, and then developing one or two significant goals that will help accomplish your vision.
- Your network ecosystem is your most valuable asset. The strength, breadth, and depth of your network ecosystem will determine how quickly and how successfully you accomplish your most significant goals.
- There are several types of relationships in every healthy network ecosystem. Your network ecosystem map can help you to identify those relationships and determine where you have strengths and gaps. The Social Relationship Formula will help you to develop and leverage those relationships in a strategic and genuine way.
- Your habits are your daily actions that cultivate your network ecosystem. Just as you develop your daily sales actions, these are your daily

relationship actions. They'll often have crossover because they directly support one another.