How close do you think you are to a former US President, an American ambassador or one of the world’s leading entrepreneurs?

And do you have the courage and passion to pick up the phone and make direct contact with a VIP to ask for something that, on the face of it, sounds outrageous?

Today, thanks to our super-connected world, things like these that once seemed out of reach are suddenly not only possible but highly achievable.

In the past, we used to talk about “six degrees of separation,” meaning that on average, we were connected to just about everyone else in the world via a unique chain of just six people-who-know-other people.

Today, social networks have reduced that to just four degrees, says Porter Gale. In the case of people with common interests, it might be just three. And in a couple of the cases cited in the book, it turned out to be just one.

All of this makes networks immensely more powerful and valuable than ever. That’s why it’s critical to invest time in developing and nurturing them.

In this, her first book, Gale aims to shift perceptions of networking from a stuffy, schmoozy, glad-handing game into a transformational process that lies at the core of present-day business success.

Ultimately, she suggests, wealth is not so much about how much we have in the bank, as about the richness of our relationships and the investments we make in them.

Gale is a former VP of marketing for the airline Virgin America. In fact, she says that the many mid-air conversations she had, which led to all sorts of serendipitous encounters and experiences, were a key source of inspiration for her ideas and this book.

Previously a senior figure in the advertising industry and a documentary film maker, she is a holder of the Changing the Game Award from Advertising Women of New York and has been named a Digital Passionata by Huffington Post.

Developing a Transformational Attitude

Before you can build a network that’s right for you, one that adds to your “social capital,” you
need to get to know yourself better. That means understanding what drives you and fuels your passions, and what prevents or slows down your ability to make connections. Armed with this knowledge, you should be able to confront and overcome your barriers and focus on building connections that relate to the things that are most important to you.

So the first part of the book is not so much about building your network as getting your internal house in order and setting yourself up for successful networking, a process the author refers to as “developing a transformational attitude.”

Removing Barriers

For a start, we all have obstacles and personal hang-ups that prevent us from establishing new relationships. This could be something as simple as shyness, or it could be a more sinister barrier like a hidden addiction to alcohol or drugs.

Gale wants us to identify negative behaviors, routines and attitudes that create our barriers and write them down so we can confront them. She doesn't provide a formula for dealing with them, but she does make it clear that acknowledging and facing them is the first step in removing them.

Identifying Passions and Purpose

Second, you must be clear on what you really care about - only then can you develop an authentic network that you can contribute to and that will, in turn, support you. Networking is not about collecting business cards as though they were hunting trophies; it's about developing meaningful relationships.

Gale employs a simple technique for this clarifying process, in which you identify three core passions and then look for an area where they overlap, which she calls the **sweet spot**. Occupying yourself with business or personal pursuits in the sweet spot is your goal.

Next, determine a single word to capture the essence of your persona - like “ambitious,” “easygoing,” or “eccentric.” This is your **tone**.

Finally, using the outcome of these deliberations, and in 20 words or less, express a purpose **statement** - what you want to accomplish in life. This will be your guide and your litmus test for future behavior.

For example, the author identifies her core passions as “storytelling,” “technology” and “health”; her tone as “inspirational”; and her purpose as: “To inspire others to live productive and happy lives by breaking down barriers and connecting with others.”

This can be arranged graphically into what she calls a **funnel test**:
Activating Your Purpose

Third, having defined your purpose, you need to fuel it with what Gale calls **positive productivity** - making a conscious effort to use your time efficiently and wisely.

Ways to do this include:

- Creating an **action list** or **purpose plan** where you break down a project connected with your purpose into smaller tasks. (What do you need to do to make it happen?)

- Avoiding time-wasting activities. Review your routines and behaviors for unproductive activities, like Internet surfing and TV watching. The aim is to free up time so you can focus on your passions and your purpose.

- Collaborating with like-minded individuals. explains: “One of the most productive groups I belong to is a Facebook group who share values and interests. I often turn to the group to get advice or recommendations or simply to share thoughts. Finding groups to connect with is a great way to increase your positive productivity.”

- Using **pivot points** - junctures, like losing your job or moving to a new location - to transition to activities more closely allied to your purpose.

Developing a Giving Mindset

Fourth, adjust your attitude towards networking. Try to put more in than you take out. Gale adopts the phrase **Give Give Get** to emphasize the importance of this rule.

And you don’t give to receive. That just happens. You give because it is fulfilling to do so, because you are making a contribution to the well-being of others.

Think: What can I do each day to help someone out?

“A focus on giving can transform your emotional state, improve your relationships, build your happiness quotient, and teach you the importance of gratitude,” she says.

Shaking Up Your Routine

Finally, try looking in a new direction. Often we overlook or completely miss purpose-related opportunities and network connections through complacency. We follow routines and rarely step outside of our comfort zone.

By changing your routine - from taking a different route to work or visiting a different coffee shop to photographing your favorite building or starting a new hobby - you’re more likely to encounter new opportunities for personal growth.

As an exercise, Gale suggests finding “Shake It Up” activities that support your passions. Go online or look in your community paper for listings, classes or other activities that might help you explore those passions.

Connect with someone new. The author never missed an opportunity to start a conversation
with a fellow airplane passenger. Any “neighbor” who wasn’t wearing headphones was a target, which led her to many new friends and experiences.

She says: “Push your boundaries and challenge yourself; the people you meet could change your life.”

Building a Values-Based Team

In the second part of the book, Gale lays out the tools for creating and growing a network that reflects your own passions and purpose, in particular through the use of social media.

Accelerate Your Connections

“Technology has increased virtual intimacy and reduced the degree of separation between connections,” she says. “New and old networking relationships may be just a tweet, a post, or an email away.”

She confirmed this for herself when she was about to visit Budapest and asked her online contacts if they knew anyone in the city. It turned out one of them knew the US Ambassador who subsequently agreed to meet and introduce her to the Hungarian capital.

Another time, she learned that one of her contacts knew someone who, in turn, knew President Bill Clinton and agreed to put them in touch (though Clinton subsequently declined her interview request).

And then there was the occasion when a social activist and entrepreneurial friend who was mentoring students in Los Angeles asked for help to support a video the teens were making and sending out to key influencers.

Their aim was to solicit support for an award entry. One of the videos, addressed to Sir Richard Branson, landed in Gale’s inbox when she was VP of Marketing at Virgin America. The author had no regular connection with Branson. She was one of 50,000 Virgin employees and had met him just a handful of times but, as she says, “I had never asked him for a favor.”

All she was seeking was his “tweet” of support for their award entry but within 24 hours, Branson called her, saying he was in LA and would meet the students at his hotel that same day to talk about the opportunities and challenges of entrepreneurship.

“I’m sure they had no idea they were just three degrees away from Sir Richard Branson when they put their energy and creativity into their video request,” writes Gale.

How can you make the most of the closer relationships that technology and social networks permit? Here are some of her recommendations:

• Organize your contacts’ information, keeping notes on key individuals - their jobs, their birthdays and their passions.

• Always follow-through on commitments, respect confidentiality and let contacts know how much you value your relationship with them.

• Think before you post. How many people have damaged their status, opportunities and relationships by posting statements they later regret making?
Consider that 45 percent of companies prescreen candidates by checking them out on social media.

- Use social networks to show support for people by reposting their comments, endorsing their skills, or recommending them to other followers.
- Look for and join new online communities of people with similar interests.
- List three people you’d like to meet, as the author did with Clinton, and see if your network can provide the contact, or use email to make a direct connection.

Build Out Your Core Relationships

Your network of connections is most likely made up of two overlapping groups - your core circle, which may include a business partner, a spouse, siblings and close friends.

Outside of this is your network ring of influence, a secondary circle of business and social contacts, other friends, neighbors, mentors.

You should review who’s in these groups. Think about the people you go to for advice, for help when things go wrong, sympathy on a bad day, and people you spend free time with.

Do these core and secondary circles help nurture your passions and purpose? Are they incomplete because of personal barriers that you need to remove?

Look for opportunities to establish and strengthen relationships, ask colleagues and friends whose relationships you value and who know your interests for introductions and mentoring.

The author suggests an exercise to help you in your quest: Overlay your core circle with your passions to determine if you need additional support.

Then, identify and find secondary relationships, individuals, communities, or programs that will add support to your purpose or help remove barriers.

“When thinking about your core and secondary circles,” she says, “remember that they make up your lifelines, your go-tos and the infrastructure that can help you support your actions.”

And don’t forget to let them know how important they are to you. To emphasize this point, she recommends making a list of three to five people that you particularly value and reach out to them to arrange a coffee date or simply send a handwritten note of gratitude to them.

Connect With Power Pockets and Hub Players

There are two circles of influence that can have significant impact on the development of your network.

First, power pockets are events and circumstances that accelerate networking and support your passions or purpose. This includes your environment - the physical space and people that surround you.

You might consider a review of your workspace and the extent to which it adds to or detracts from your ability to network or collaborate.
Many solo workers understand how environment can limit their network. This accounts for the surge of independent co-working spaces where self-employed individuals and small groups work and mix in a shared, rented space.

In their own way, online communities and their real-world manifestations - meet-ups - have replaced the old country clubs and private members clubs that used to be the power pockets, where contacts are made and deals are struck. Even Wi-Fi spots can be a power pocket, a place where people with similar needs and interests hang out.

Speed networking, the professional equivalent of speed dating is another trend. For example, Virtuoso Travel Week provides travel industry professionals with 100 4-minute “pitch” sessions per day (for four days). Virtuoso is a professional association of travel agencies and individual travel advisors. In each 4-minute session, members exchange ideas to build relationships before moving on to the next contact. It crams the maximum number of interactions into the shortest possible time.

Your second key source of influence are hub players - “the people at the center of the social or business sphere. They’re on the move; they excel at connecting themselves and others.”

Socializing is their natural state. Meeting people is a pleasure, not a chore for them.

Their value to you is not so much in whom they can connect you with, although hub players are generous and love connecting people together. The true value they provide is learning from the techniques they employ that make them so influential. For example:

- They always remember people’s names and what they do. This shows people they matter to them and they’ve been listening to what they say.
- They're inquisitive and they know how to get conversations going - perhaps by getting individuals to introduce each other, asking probing questions, or getting people to change seats at an event so they sit next to someone they don't know and get to establish a new contact.
- They share and talk about personal interests and they establish groups of like-minded individuals.
- They're good at telling stories. They recount personal experiences - their own and others’ - that convey a lesson or an important message that others are interested in hearing.

Cultivate Fields of Creativity

In the new age of instant communication and fewer degrees of separation, it might seem that, with a powerful network in place, you can achieve almost anything. But success depends on your modus operandi, how you interact with your connections.

Everyone Is A Producer

We’re all capable of producing something, whether it’s a product, a service, online content, or a great meal in the kitchen. And if you harness your producing skills to your passions and purpose, you’ll raise your profile and extend your networking reach.

For example, Shira Lazar, whose core passions are people, storytelling and technology has
the purpose “to create positive change and connect the world via media and broadcasting.” Her online TV show What’s Trending, built up a following of hundreds of thousands of fans and won multiple awards.

She says: “It’s a time of new business models and whoever is hungry and creates good content will be pioneers of the new media age.”

Being regarded as an expert is a valuable way of extending your reach and you don’t need to produce a TV show to do it. You can write articles and blogs, enter yourself for awards, and form alliances with other like-minded individuals to repost each other’s comments.

“No create your own plan of action based on your passions and purpose,” advises Gale, “and always consider if technology can help you increase your reach, spread your message, or help you nurture your network.”

What can you produce, based on your purpose, that will serve others and, in doing so, raise your profile?

Reaching Critical Mass

Another objective of your networking strategy is to identify key figures that can help you connect with people who share your passions and those that can help you realize your purpose.

“Classic brand-building techniques such as creating partnerships, identifying key influencers, combining press and social media, among others, can be used to target your message, network, and build a following,” says Gale.

The same rules apply as in brand building: Know your audience and give them engaging content; be authentic; talk about your passions. These are the lessons applied by a young radio station receptionist who was an early user of social media and went on to become a marketing consultant for musicians.

Today, she hosts an online country music show and has 465,000 Twitter followers.

In another dramatic example, Gale tells the story of leukemia sufferer Amit Gupta who needed a bone marrow transplant and leveraged his social media contacts to beat the odds of 1 in 20,000 of finding a perfect match.

Applying the principle of degrees of separation, his contacts generated 20 million tweets and two perfect matches were found.

Can you identify platforms and potential partnerships, both online and offline, to extend your reach? How about writing, teaching, volunteering, fund raising or using tools like change.org – a platform for social change, empowering anyone, anywhere to start petitions that make a difference?

The Art of the Ask

Building your network and getting past barriers is hard work and often relies on a crucial component that, for some at least, can be extremely difficult: Asking. It can be tough, whether you’re trying to establish a new connection or asking an existing contact for help and support.
The old saying that: “If you don’t ask, you don’t get” was never truer than in this context, and you should never be daunted by the prospect of rejection.

It was this approach that led the author to try to meet Bill Clinton, through someone who knew him. Although she didn’t succeed - she was turned down politely - she told her disappointed contact: “It’s not about the yes or no, it’s about trying.”

Asking, and particularly succeeding in the ask, requires a blend of courage, passion for your work, preparation, innovation and resilience. But if you’ve adopted a Give Give Get mentality and share passions with those whose help you seek, your chances of success are immensely improved.

Gale relates a story from Larry Baer, the CEO of the San Francisco Giants. As an undergraduate, he volunteered at a UC Berkeley radio station and one day picked up the phone and called Charlie O Finley, the eccentric owner of the Oakland Athletics Major League Baseball team.

He told Finley his non-profit station wanted to broadcast Oakland games but couldn’t pay for them. At first Finley dismissed him out of hand but the young Baer persisted, letting his passion for the game and for broadcasting shine through. His determination won the day, with Finley declaring: Send me a dollar to make it a legal contract.

This stupendous achievement turned out to be not only a breakthrough for the station but a platform from which Baer subsequently launched his own career. That’s the power of the ask!

Conclusion

In the final chapter of her book, Gale takes a provocative stance by challenging readers to consider why networking matters to them.

What brings you happiness and success - head, heart or wallet? - she asks.

“If your network is your net worth, what role do the people in your core and secondary circle play in your happiness and success? Do the contents in your wallet make you happy? Is happiness and success driven by what you know? Or who you know? Or both?”

She asked these questions of the many successful networkers featured in her book and none of them put any emphasis on wealth as the primary driver of happiness, though, clearly, most of them have achieved some degree of financial success.

“Time and again, I’ve found that the people and relationships in my life have a direct impact on my feelings of happiness, the experiences I have, and the business opportunities that land in my path…” she declares.

“Surround yourself with a values-based team and creatively focus on living your passions and achieving your purpose.” Definitely words to live by.