

Build Your Network Like a Roman: Now...Before You Need It

By [LawVision](#) on May 6, 2016

During the early days of the Roman Empire, the Romans lost a war. They lost because they couldn't support and resupply their armies out in the marshlands between Rome and their allies in Capua. Thirty years later, hostilities erupted against the same enemy. This time, the Romans built a road to Capua. With it, the Romans could support and supply their armies, and they conquered their opponents. From that point on, Romans became big believers in roads. In fact, before the end of the Roman Empire they built over 50,000 miles of roads. They built new highways to link captured cities to Rome to ensure that their military could move faster and outmaneuver Rome's enemies. These roads allowed soldiers to move as quickly as 20 miles per day to respond to uprisings so Rome could quickly supply or reinforce key groups without having to outfit expensive outposts remotely. Because the Romans knew the roads were critical to their success, as soon as they conquered a new country, they began building networks of roadways far before they were needed. They knew eventually the roads would be necessary for future military movements and commercial transportation.

Andrew Sobel and Jerold Panas draw a comparison between Roman road building and business development networks in their recent book [Power Relationships](#). They say, "Build it before you need it, and all sorts of unexpected opportunities will come your way."

I agree. The best time to ask for help, to reach out in need, or to ask for an introduction or an audience, is after you've laid the groundwork and built trust and solid relationships over many years. Asking for a meeting cold when no relationship exists is always more difficult. Think ahead. Be like the Romans. Build your roadways and connections now.

Sobel and Panas lay out a method to develop a network, and their approach is so similar to the method I teach my clients that it caught my eye.

Here is a summary of my approach:



1) Gather – gather names of critical contacts from your databases (Outlook, LinkedIn, firm CRM databases, etc.), and supplement those names with names from the following categories: clients, past clients, targets and referral sources (which includes related professionals, friends, firm alumni, school alumni, lawyers at your firm and outside your firm, and other relevant and social and family contacts).

2) Prioritize – let the most important people bubble to the top – "Important" for business development purposes means those who can bring you closest to your target market the fastest. This is determined by a combination of strength of influence and strength of the relationship.

3) Divide – Divide the list into two parts – those you will pursue actively this year for specific work (pipeline) and those that are important to your network and need regular communication but won't be part of an engagement you are actively pursuing this year (touch-list).

Sobel and Panas would take this latter group and divide it into three groups: “The Critical Few,” “The Middle Few,” and “The Many.”

They suggest you talk to your “Critical Few” group two to three times a year, stay in close touch, and invest in them to understand their needs. Talk to your “Middle Few” group periodically (at least once a year), and use personalized communications like cards, letters, personal emails, and phone calls). For “The Many” group, they suggest “one-to-many” type communications like article mailings, blogs, and newsletters.

More important than the exact way you gather and structure your list is that you do it and, like the Romans, that you do it now. Having that network of relationships in place will pay off later, whether you need to conquer the next country or just get in the next door.