



Five ways to become a super-connector and drive growth

Renowned psychoanalyst Carl Jung once remarked, “The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances: if there is any reaction, both are transformed.” In business, relationships are essential to success. A longitudinal study conducted by Hans-Georg Wolff and Klaus Moser of the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg revealed that individuals who are more proficient at networking earn higher salaries, experience higher salary growth rates over time, and experience higher levels of career satisfaction.

At Affinity, we recognize that strong relationships and networks are essential to our users’ success. We want to empower you to be a more proficient networker and improve the quality of your relationships. We’ve carefully studied and evaluated how top performing individuals and companies form relationships and compiled a few of their tips and tricks to help you do the same.

In this guide

What is an open network? →

**Why open networks are important →
for super-connectors**

How do open networks drive sales success? →

What is a super-connector? →

How do you become a super-connector? →

Recognize the value of quality relationships

Understand that some relationships are asymmetrical

Maintain a holistic view of your team's network

Build and nurture trust long-term

Continuously maintain and improve your emotional intelligence

Become a super-connector with Affinity →

What is an open network?

According to Ronald Burt, one of the world's top network scientists, the single most reliable predictor of one's career success is an open network. An open network is a network where members are connected to different clusters of people who don't know each other. In contrast, a closed network is a network where members are primarily connected to people they tend to know well.

An open network is a network where members are connected to different clusters of people who don't know each other.

Why open networks are important for super-connectors

Open networks are extremely valuable. Oftentimes, the most lucrative business opportunities happen in the most unexpected places. Individuals with open networks are able to take advantage of the potential of what Mark Granovetter refers to as "weak ties" in his paper, "[The Strength of Weak Ties](#)". Weak ties are relationships that individuals don't interact with on a daily basis but make an effort to stay in contact with on an ongoing basis. These are still valuable because they form bridges and bring diverse circles of networks together. They expose us to new opportunities that aren't obvious and often go unnoticed.

Cornell professors, David Easley and Jon Kleinberg explain in their book, [*Networks, Crowds, and Markets: Reasoning About a Highly Connected World*](#), that "The closely-knit groups and closed networks that you belong to, though they are filled with people eager to help, are also filled with people who know roughly the same things that you do." Going off of this we can take a look at another interesting fact in Granovetter's paper. His research reveals that the most lucrative leads for job opportunities are more likely to transpire via second or higher degree relationships than via first degree relationships.

How do open networks drive sales success?

Weak ties are especially important in the context of referrals and warm introductions. With customers increasingly shying away from aggressive sales tactics, it's becoming more and more difficult to reach customers. Personal referrals are the most effective means of driving new customer acquisition.

According to research by Nielsen, people are four times more likely to make a purchase when referred by a friend. What's more, according to research by Heinz Marketing, 87% of frontline sales reps, 82% of sales leaders, and 78% of marketers agree that referrals represent the highest quality leads.

Not only are referrals more likely to convert (three to five times more likely than non-referrals, according to research by Annex Cloud), they're also more likely to stay with a brand for longer. Customers are more likely to become brand promoters over time, and those that are referred to a company have a 37% higher retention rate compared to non-referrals, according to research by Deloitte.

Now that we've taken a closer look at some of the data that highlights the importance of opening up your network, let's dive into how you can make changes in your networking strategy and leverage your expanded network.

People are

4x

more likely to buy
when referred by a friend

Referrals are

3-5x

more likely to convert
compared to non-referrals

Referrals garner

37%

higher retention rates
compared to non-referrals

87%

of Sales Reps

82%

of Sales Leaders

78%

of Marketers

Agree that referrals represent the highest quality leads

What is a super-connector?

Some individuals appear to exhibit a natural talent for networking. We call these individuals “super-connectors”. They seem able to get in touch with almost anyone, and as a result unlock countless opportunities.

How do you become a super-connector?

While we tend to think of super-connectors as social climbing extroverts with hordes of social media followers, this doesn't have to be the case for everyone. This idea fails to recognize how strong networks materialize.

It turns out that super-connectors don't have any innate talent or social superpowers, and anyone can become one if they want to. In order to become a super-connector, you have to leverage the science of social networks to create powerful and scalable networks. Through carefully studying some of the world's most connected leaders, we've found five key actions they took to become super-connectors.

Recognize the value of quality relationships

It's easy to fall into the trap of seeing networking as a numbers game. In the sales world, this is easily represented in typical CRMs and productivity tools. These tools focus on evaluating based on metrics like:

- Number of accounts
- Number of opportunities
- Total of closed deals

Rather than focusing on amassing a large quantity of contacts, super-connectors pay attention to the quality or strength of relationships and need tools that measure that quality.

Super-connectors don't let emails or other forms of communication slip through the cracks and prevent communication lags at all costs. Whenever possible, they opt for in-person interactions over virtual ones. A [2017 study](#) published in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* found that an in-person request is 34 times more successful than email.

In a more personal sphere we see a similar issue. Several decades ago, psychologist Robin Dunbar discovered that the human brain is only capable of maintaining a certain number of relationships. Specifically, he found that the human brain is calibrated to be able to handle around 150 relationships. This became known as Dunbar's Number.

With the rise of social media and the internet the volume of our social networks have grown exponentially. Of the 26.3% of the world that uses Facebook, [users have an average of 338 friends](#), and the [average LinkedIn user has about 400 connections](#).

More recently, [in a subsequent study](#), Dunbar revealed that, despite the rise of social media, our brain is still unable to handle more than 150 and 180 relationships. As it turns out, only about 28% of our Facebook friends can be considered “genuine.” Dunbar explained, “People do not seem to use social media to increase the size of their social circles.” While social media can help to slow down the natural rate of decay in relationship quality, some level of face-to-face interaction is essential.

We can’t interact and form relationships with an infinite number of people. We have to select who we want to spend time with. Super-connectors identify the most valuable individuals in their network and they focus on forging stronger relationships with them. By prioritizing nurturing important relationships over constantly building new ones you can give important connections the attention they need.

Understand that some relationships are asymmetrical

Super-connectors recognize and appreciate that relationships are asymmetrical, and that it’s impossible to build genuine relationships with everyone. Not every node in a network is created equal. Super-connectors are focused on learning about those in their network and determining which people in that network help them to improve, grow, or reach their goals. Rather than focusing on vanity metrics when it comes to relationships, super-connectors focus on nurturing relationships with the right people.

It’s not surprising that 85% of professionals say they build stronger and more meaningful business relationships during in-person business meetings and conferences as compared to remote ones. All in all, super-connectors optimize their sphere of influence: the cluster of people in their network with whom their opinion holds weight and value.

If you continue to build facets of your network that are not meaningful or valuable, your LinkedIn connections might continue to climb, but you won’t see many more deals in your pipeline.

Maintain a holistic view of your team’s network

The most effective super-connectors not only have a holistic view of their own individual network, they also have a great understanding of their team’s network. Being a super-connector means knowing who is connected to whom and which individuals are providing the most value to the entire network. You also must be well-attuned to when relationships require attention and be proactive in maintaining consistent lines of communication. Armed with an understanding of your team’s network, as a super-connector you are able to effectively aggregate isolated internal knowledge and leverage it to unlock new opportunities.

Affinity’s Alliances is the most effective way to expand your team’s collective network.

Because of the exponential value added by joining team networks together, super-connectors are strong proponents of open networks. They bring people into their networks not necessarily because they see an opportunity to do business with them, but because they see a chance to expand existing networks for their teams as a whole. As a super-connector, you have to look beyond your first degree connections and find new people in your team’s open network. These higher degree connections provide added value to other relationships in your immediate network that you’re already nurturing.

Let's look at an example of this in action

A super-connector at a VC firm that is actively investing in autonomous vehicle startups. Our super-connector forges a strong relationship with an autonomous vehicle specialist as a means of adding value to its prospective and current portfolio companies. By joining the network, the specialist immediately adds exponential value. Not only does the full network benefit from the specialist's presence, it also benefits from the addition of the specialist's hundreds or thousands of first and higher degree connections, many of whom are also likely to have expertise in the autonomous vehicle space.

Build and nurture trust long-term

Great relationships are not made overnight. It can take years for trust to be established and genuine relationships to be built. Michael Hyatt, CEO of Thomas Nelson Publishers, explains,

"[T]rust is not something you can take for granted. It takes months—sometimes years—to build. Unfortunately, you can lose it overnight."

Super-connectors recognize that the relationships they establish today may not reap rewards for years. In his book, *Give and Take*, Adam Grant illustrates that there are three fundamental types of people:

- Givers who prefer to give more to others than they receive.
- Takers who are self-serving and consistently exploit others in order to advance their own agendas.
- Matchers who fall between the two extremes.

Grant discovered that the most effective leaders are Givers. They adopt a long-term mentality and

focus on how they can help others. By putting others' interests first, they earn high levels of trust and respect from their team members and other professional contacts. Because of this, the members of a Giver's network are more motivated to engage in a free flow of knowledge and information, thereby opening up new channels and paths to lucrative opportunities.

Adding credence to Grant's research, [a study published in the *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*](#) spearheaded by Charlie Hardy and Mark Van Vugt found that acts of altruism increase one's status within a group. Hyatt explains:

"You have to be willing to share your knowledge, your contacts, and your compassion—without expecting anything in return. The more you take the initiative to give, the more it builds trust. Giving lets others know that you know it's not all about you...[L]ike being transparent, you have to be careful how you give. Otherwise, it will be perceived as manipulation. You have to make sure your motives are pure. You can't expect something in return."

So how long does it take to establish trust? Research conducted by SDL found that it takes two years for a customer to trust a brand. Even finding inroads to start building brand trust can be challenging: people regard brands as inherently untrustworthy. What's more, it takes five years before customers reach the "revenue tipping point", the point at which they begin spending more on a brand than competing brands. While some may see five years as an eternity, super-connectors see it as an essential step in an ongoing journey. Starting that journey can begin with you and developing a single, key relationship that can nurture and grow.

Continuously maintain and improve your emotional intelligence

The most effective super-connectors exhibit high levels of emotional intelligence (EI), defined as one's ability to manage their own emotions, as well as the emotions of others. According to Travis Bradberry, author of the bestselling book *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*, EI is comprised of four skills:

Self-awareness: one's ability to accurately perceive their own emotions and stay aware of them

Self-management: one's ability to use awareness of one's emotions to positively control one's behavior

Social awareness: one's ability to perceive others' emotions and understand what's really going on

Relationship management: one's ability to use awareness of others' emotions to manage interactions.

EI is a prerequisite for success. Research by TalentSmart found that EI is the strongest predictor of one's workplace performance, explaining more than half (58%) of success. High levels of EI empower super-connectors to forge stronger relationships with members of their network.

Armed with high levels of EI, super-connectors are able to accurately assess the emotional states of their peers and determine how to most effectively develop rapport, acquire high levels of trust, and, ultimately, assert influence. Individuals with high levels of EI are able to discern the subtle emotional responses of their peers and gauge how well their interactions are received.

According to a study published in *The Journal of Social Psychology*, there is a strong positive relationship between emotional intelligence and interpersonal relationship strength. Individuals who scored higher for EI also boasted higher scores for social skills, cooperativeness, empathic perspective taking, and self-monitoring in social situations—all essential prerequisites to strong relationships. Not surprisingly, individuals with higher scores for emotional intelligence had higher scores for close and affectionate relationships. The results are transformative.

What's more, it takes five years before customers reach the "revenue tipping point."

Historically, in order to sustain a competitive advantage, super-connectors needed to recruit teams of individuals to help them collect and collate their information and data. It wasn't uncommon for the world's most effective super-connectors to employ hundreds of individuals to help them manage and grow their networks.

This type of large-scale army is not feasible for the average person, but improving on your own emotional intelligence can help you grow into a masterful super-connector! This can take the form of personal reflection, seeking external feedback, and taking the time to frequently educate yourself.

Become a super-connector with Affinity

When you sit down to evaluate you and your team's network, you have to hope that all of the data you have lives in one place. As a growing super-connector your best path forward is to have your entire network easily managed and even more easily visualized.

You and your team are sitting on thousands of open connections with opportunities buried in each of them. With Affinity, all of that information is at your fingertips. When it comes to supporting your ever-expanding network, we want to empower you to

focus on quality over quantity. We can manage the numbers through automated data entry by creating contacts and entries straight from your inbox so you can focus your time on your next meeting.

Your network will continue to expand and evolve within Affinity as communication silos dissolve, and you can tap into the expanded networks across your organization. Super-connection has never been easier with our relationship management system.

Visit affinity.co to learn more
or email sales@affinity.co to request a demo