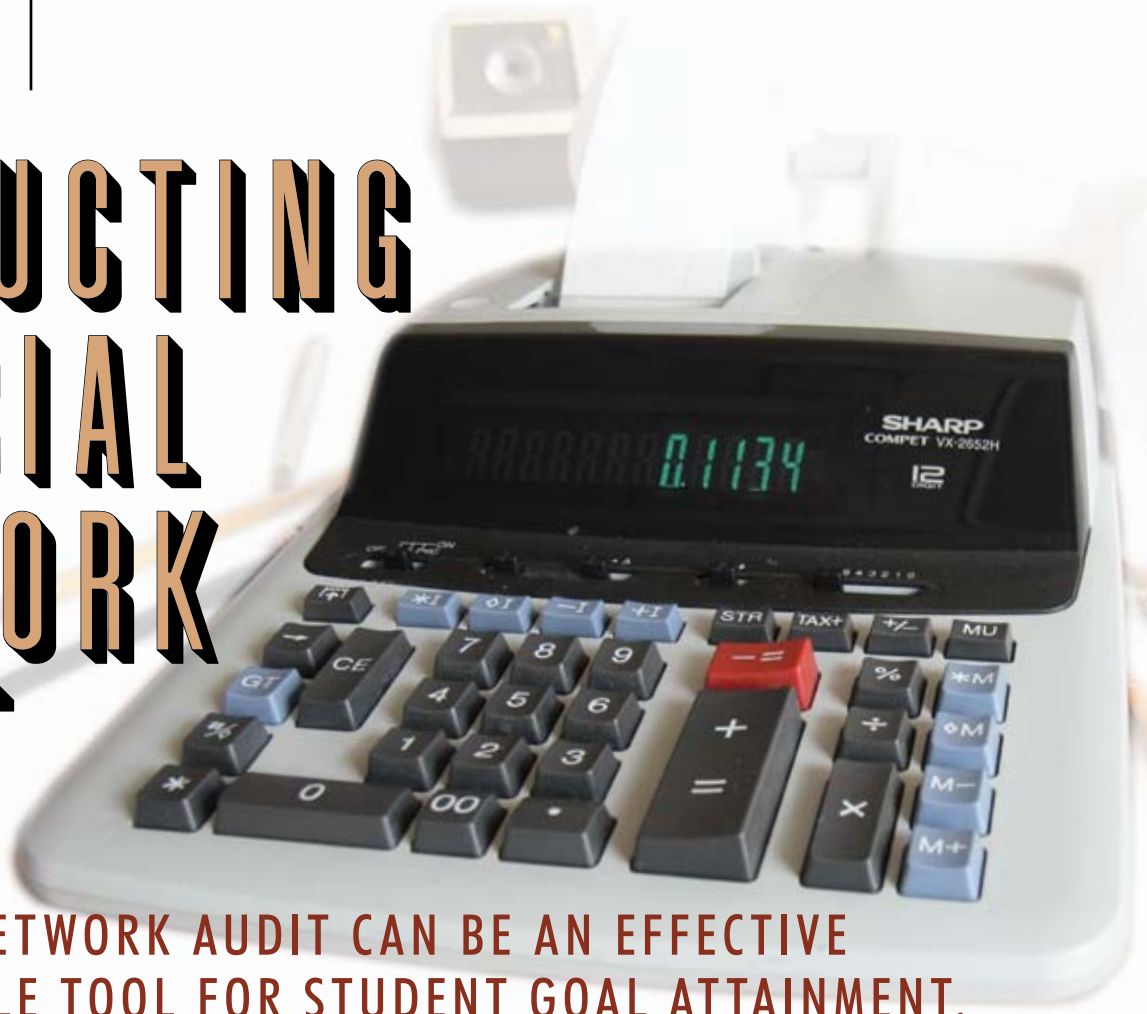# CONDUCTING A SOCIAL NETWORK AUDIT

THE SOCIAL NETWORK AUDIT CAN BE AN EFFECTIVE AND TEACHABLE TOOL FOR STUDENT GOAL ATTAINMENT.

By Jim Gumm and John-Paul Hatala

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Current research makes it abundantly clear that career and technical educators in North America know how to give students the technical skills they need to be competitive in the 21st century marketplace. However, there may be a gap in many educators' toolboxes. Consider the following questions:

- How many educators know what to do about the fact that the average human resource manager spends less than 30 seconds examining a particular resume?
- How many educators know how to answer a student's complaint that he or she did not get a single interview from more than 100 resumes mailed out?
- What does a teacher do with the latest trend, which indicates that the majority of available jobs are filled from the "hidden" job market?

In the past, the answers to these questions typically centered around the concept of networking. Students would often hear, "You have to network to get the job you want," or, "It's important to develop a 30-second commercial so you can quickly sell yourself to anyone you come across who might have a job for you," and other platitudes that, though well intentioned, were not very instructive and ultimately of little value to the student trying to get his or her first job, especially if the student was not a natural networker.

The latest research findings indicate that the majority of people have a difficult time connecting with others, especially individuals with whom they are not familiar. Simple verbal instructions through traditional networking activities have had limited impact on these individuals' behavior, nor do they encourage individuals to explore the resources that exist within the network itself or even within themselves.

In addition, other researchers have found that due to the rapidly increasing interconnectedness of modern society, this skill set is becoming critical to success in the labor market. Although traditional ways of teaching networking have provided some support, a more systematic approach is needed, particularly in the area of spe-

cific goal setting and linking these goals to specific network resources.

So What Is a Career and Technical Educator To Do?

One answer is Social Exploration©, the next-generation, researched-based, internationally proven system that takes the nebulous concept of networking and systematizes it into a teachable, accountable and repeatable process. The Social Exploration© concept is a multiphase system that has successfully been applied in both the for-profit and the nonprofit sector. It has been used to capitalize on the potential that exists within an organization's social network or "informal power structure" to improve both individual and organizational performance, reduce turnover and increase profitability.

In other words, teach individuals to tap into the resources that exist within their networks to help accomplish the goals they set—regardless of whether they are personal, academic or career related. This system has now been modified to meet the unique demands of high school students who wish to transition directly into the labor market from the classroom or go on to higher education, technical training or some other endeavor.

Asking the following questions and taking the following steps can help guide you and your students through the process of conducting a social network audit.

A Social Network Lesson

When thinking of your career goals, do you automatically think of individuals in your network who can help you accomplish them? If the answer is yes, you have a good idea of the type of information your network can provide and are most likely tapping into resources that will help you become successful. If not, you might be missing out on pieces of information that may help you achieve your career goals. A social network audit is an activity that will help you determine if you are presently accessing information from your network that will help you achieve those goals.

The process involves listing your career goals and linking contacts within your network to them to determine if you are utilizing the information that exists within the network. The importance of having a large network is not necessarily an advantage until you have been able to maximize on the information inherent to it. This requires that you know what your goals are in order to access the *right* contacts who can provide the *right* information. This can only be accomplished by knowing who is in your network and what type of information the contact can provide toward achieving a specific goal.

The following steps will walk you through a social network audit to help you determine if you are maximizing on the information inherent to it. Keep in mind that networking is a two-way street. If you're seeking information from your network to help you reach your career goals, you have to be willing to provide information back to your network. If this is not done, you will quickly start to see that the valuable information within your network will start to dry up.

Seven Steps to Conducting the Social Network Audit

Step 1: The first thing you want to do is identify and list your career goals. If you haven't done so already, now is the time to start thinking about what you want to do once you've completed your educational program. If you're not quite sure at this

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Goals

List your main goal and the subgoals necessary to accomplish that goal, as well as qualifying descriptions of each goal and the date to accomplish the goals

Name of goal: (1) Main Goal—Find a job
Description: Find a job in my field
Target date: February 15, 2008

Name of goal: (2) Subgoal—Resume
Description: Write a functional resume
Target date: September 12, 2007

Name of goal: (2) Subgoal—Information interviews
Description: Contact employers in my field for an informational interview
Target Date: October 22, 2007

Network

Once you have listed the goals, start to make an assessment of your network and how you will use it.

John Smith	directly	every day
Barbara Young	thru Jerry Ward	every six months
Jerry Ward	directly	every month

WHEN THINKING OF YOUR CAREER GOALS, DO YOU AUTOMATICALLY THINK OF INDIVIDUALS IN YOUR NETWORK WHO CAN HELP YOU ACCOMPLISH THEM? IF NOT, YOU MIGHT BE MISSING OUT ON PIECES OF INFORMATION THAT MAY HELP YOU ACHIEVE YOUR CAREER GOALS.

point what you want to do for the rest of your life, list instead what you think you want to do upon completion of your program. At least this way you will be able to determine who in your network may be able to provide information that can help you determine if that is the career path you want to take.

The best way to organize your goals is to label them (1) main goal and (2) subgoal. See the right-hand column in the chart at the left for an example.

Take a piece of paper and start to list your goals on the left-hand side. For each main goal, you want to list all the supporting goals that will help you achieve that goal. This will make the task of achieving goals more manageable.

Step 2: Once you have listed your goals, you want to start to think about your network and those contacts who can help you achieve each specific goal. You want to think about the different types of contacts that presently exist within your network. For example, a family member, friend, work contact, school contact or neighbors. who may help you achieve that particular goal.

Now take the same piece of paper on which you listed your career goals and attach names from your network to each goal. In a column beside each name, indicate how you know the individual. If you know them directly, write "directly;" if you know them through someone else, indicate the individual's name. It should look something like the green and red columns in the chart at the left.

In addition to adding contacts who you feel will help you with each goal, you also want to indicate the frequency of contact you have with each individual. For example, if you see "John Smith" every day and "Barbara Young" every six months, it's possible that the information Barbara will share with you will be new information and not necessarily known to the rest of your network. This is important to remember when auditing your network, as it will help you identify whether the type of information you are accessing is more likely to be redundant, because the people that you are in the most contact with are the individuals who are providing you with most of your information.

It's important to contact individuals within your network with whom you are not frequently in contact in order to identify new information about career possibilities. Your piece of paper should now look like the completed chart to the left.

Once you have attached as many contacts as you know who can help you achieve a specific goal, make a list of all your other contacts who are not attached to a goal.

Step 3: In addition to friends, family and colleagues, think of any agencies, service organizations, support groups, churches or special interest groups that may help you. Add any group to your goals that you feel may help you accomplish each goal.

Step 4: Once you have completed listing your goals and attaching individuals from your network, you want to take another piece of paper and start mapping out your contacts. The process of completing this portion of the audit will allow you to fill in all the other people you know to whom you have not attached a goal.

Simply put your name in the middle of the paper and draw a circle around it.

Network Map

Creating a visual representation of your network will help you to better link goals to individuals.

Bob

Jerry — Barbara

John

You

Suzy

Gail

Keon
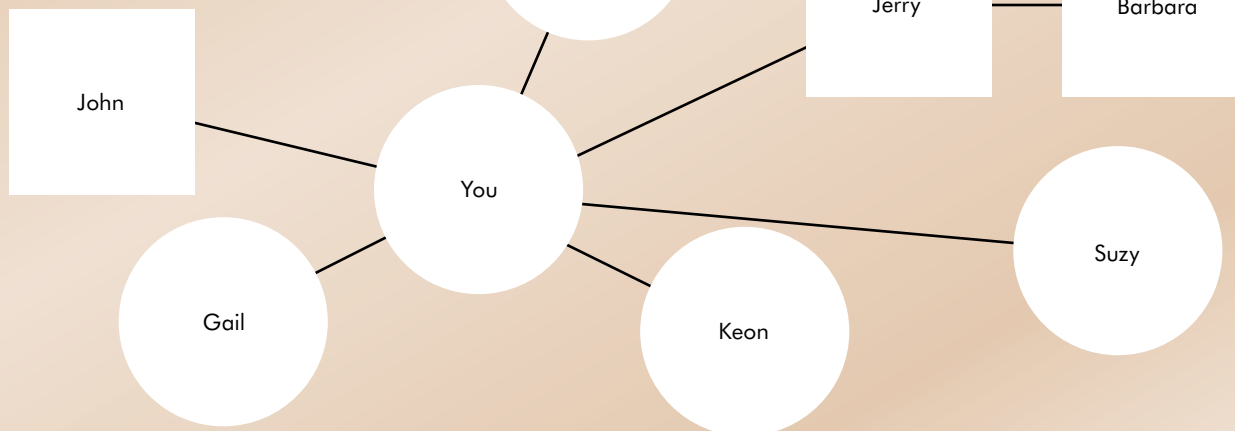
Then draw a line and put a *square* for each individual to whom you have attached a goal. For those individuals in your network who are not attached to a goal, put a *circle* around their names. If the individual is a contact of someone else, draw a line from their circle/square with the name of the individual attached to it.

Your map should look something like the network map on the following page.

Now look over your map to see if there are any contacts that you are missing. Consider why the contacts in squares are not linked to any goals. Do you need to find out more information about them? Do you know the people they associate with? Start to think of the people your contacts know and determine whether they can help you achieve any of your goals. When you have identified new contacts, go back to your goal list and enter their names.

Step 5: Go back over your map and identify contacts you feel can refer you to individuals who can help you reach your goals. Develop a plan of when and how you will contact these individuals.

Step 6: Ask yourself the following questions:

- Are there as many contacts in my network as I thought?
- Are the majority of my contacts "strong ties?" (Strong ties are those individuals with whom you have frequent contact.)
- Do I know many people with whom there is limited frequency of contact? (Weak ties are those individuals you do not have contact with on a frequent basis. They typically are contacts that provide you with new information.)
- How many contacts in my network are directly linked to me?
- How many of my contacts are tied to an organization? (These contacts can link you to individuals in their organizations.)
- How many times have I requested referrals from my contacts?
- How many contacts have actually referred me to a new contact?

Step 7: Continue to add individuals to your network. Don't necessarily worry about linking contacts to goals right away; this will come in time. The goal is to grow your network and identify the type of information your contacts can potentially provide.

Continuing the Networking Process

Congratulations! You've just completed your first social network audit. The process that you just went through is something you need to continue to help you determine whether you're tapping into the information within your network. It's not just about knowing a lot of people; it's about knowing what each person in your network has to offer. At the same time, you have to realize that, in order to get something, you're going to have to give something.

Keep this in mind as you network. As long as you communicate to your contacts and potential contacts that you are willing to return the favor, your networking experience will be a successful one. **T**

THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING A LARGE NETWORK IS NOT NECESSARILY AN ADVANTAGE UNTIL YOU HAVE BEEN ABLE TO MAXIMIZE ON THE INFORMATION INHERENT TO IT.