



Three Reasons to Tout Your Colleagues

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When Lars Sudmann was chief financial officer for Belgium at Procter & Gamble, he saw that team members had many ideas and unnoticed talents he wanted to bring to the forefront.

Sudmann came up with a novel plan, partly inspired by a business school professor's lesson on knowledge management. Each team member would be given the floor for five minutes during a weekly meeting to pitch an improvement idea

"It was a natural way to put people forward into the spotlight and share what others were good at," said Sudmann, who was CFO from 2008 to 2010. He now runs Sudmann & Co, a management consultancy that focuses on leadership development. "We did this for 50 weeks and never got bored. The purpose was not to praise people unnaturally, the goal was to share and reapply," he said.

Sometimes the ideas were practical and focused on the presenter's own thoughts about how to work better. Other times, one person might praise another for little-known skills or contributions. The latter became a conduit for people on the team to seek support from one another on projects. The team wound up feeling empowered to make the most of their own resources, Sudmann said.

Adam Grant, an organisational psychologist, professor and author of *Give and Take*, a book about helping others and success, divides people into three camps: givers, takers and matchers. All three types have different motivations for drawing out others.

The takers are the ones who suck up to others.

"When takers create a buzz for others in public, they may praise up and make it known that they have a connection to somebody important, or they may want to create a positive image of themselves in the eyes of the powerful people they're promoting," Grant said.

Matchers operate on a give-and-take system, ala, you do something for me, I'll do something for you. Matchers create buzz to return a favour, settle a debt or with the hope that someone will spread the word about something they are doing, Grant said.

Finally, givers are those who are more likely to spread the word about people beneath them who can do them no good professionally or otherwise.

Whether a giver, taker or matcher, people have a variety of motivations for promoting others. And experts say it's worthwhile to do it genuinely, because it can bolster your career and make the world a better place.

Showing leadership

Nicolette Pizzitola, an executive coach and motivational speaker in Washington, DC in the US, said promoting people in your network shows that you're a leader who knows how to use resources effectively to get the job done.

"Networking in its greatest form is actually community building. When we use that community in our everyday work, that's resourceful leadership," Pizzitola said.

In practice, that means that creating ways for other people to contribute to that community benefits you in the end because it's "a powerful way to build the community you want to be a part of" at work and elsewhere, Pizzitola said.

What's the best way to make this invitation to contribute? For Pizzitola, it's social media, for starters. On sites such as LinkedIn, she might spread the word about a colleague or a peer through a status update, sharing an article the person has written, congratulating someone on a win or calling attention to an upcoming event featuring the person.

Or, in a Twitter chat, an organized discussion on Twitter about a specific topic, Pizzitola may give examples of other's work, cite people as experts and point to someone as a resource or a good person to follow.

Supporting a cause

Some people sing other's praises as part of their efforts to promote a certain project within the company or to support a cause they feel strongly about, said Robin Athey, a Boston-based principal at Sequoia Change, which works in leadership development, coaching and team effectiveness.

Athey recently promoted a course on emotions that she came across on the internet. Impressed with the way the teacher presented his ideas, , she encouraged people on Facebook to check out the class.

But, said Athey, creating buzz all the time can get annoying or wear you out.

"Buzz gets distracting if it's not congruent with what you want to happen. People sense if the buzz you're creating is aligned to your values and sense of purpose in the world," she said.

For Athey, the people and things someone promotes reflect back on that person. "It's important to be intentional about the messages you send," Athey said.

That means considering in advance who is your audience, Athey said, by asking a series of questions. Is your message relevant and timely for them? Why might they care? What specifically do you want the audience to know? What do you want them to do? What is a next step?

Showing selflessness

The real givers are the ones who help for the common good. **Nohl Martin considers herself to be a "connector," taking pleasure out of putting people together and including words of praise when she does so.**

"For me, it's a lot of strategic connectivity," said Martin, the Santa Barbara-based founder of IgniteBiz Inc. "If you do it because you're expecting something down the line, then you're setting yourself up for disappointment."

Martin said when she connects people she thinks back to her days on the volleyball court playing in the position of setter. "I loved to set the ball up for my hitters. They got the glory. And we won the game."

Betsy Smith, a content and user-education specialist at Google, said it's important colleagues get credit where due — and sometimes sees it as her role to make sure they do.

Recently, a colleague in a cube nearby was introducing herself as an assistant to the head of content strategy. "I chimed in and said, 'Yes, and she also focuses on the quality of Google's content, has analysed it and is helping set guidelines to improve it,'" Smith said.

Her colleague looked a little sheepish when Smith spoke up. But afterwards, she perked up and the door was open for the colleague to speak more deeply about the work she was doing. The man the colleague was talking to changed his body language, too. "At first, he wasn't taking her too seriously," Smith said.

Grant might describe both Martin and Smith as givers who help people without focus on their own gain.

"We need to draw the givers out of the shadows. And the only way we can do that is to do it for them," Grant said. "No giver is going to stand up and wave a flag and say, 'Look how generous I am.' The act of building buzz about another person is one of the small contributions we can make to create a world where more helpful people exist and where more helpful people succeed."