

Social Support Evaluation

It will take some time for you to evaluate your support system. You may prefer to take several days to do so, adding over time people you interact with and may have forgotten.

1. Put yourself in the middle of a blank piece of paper. Place around you the initials of people you consider part of your support system. People who are “strong ties” (those whose behaviors or decisions have a major effect on you) should be placed relatively close to you, and “weaker ties” (those with less effect) would be correspondingly further away. Make this list as complete as possible.
2. When the diagram is complete, do the following analyses of your support system:
 - List the kinds of support down one side of another piece of paper (emotional, appraisal, informational, and instrumental). Put the initials of people on your first diagram in the category that indicates the kind of support you get from them. Some may be in all four categories, some in one and some may not fit in any category.
 - How adequate do you feel your support system is? (This is a report of feeling, not logic.)
 - How adequate do you feel your support is in each category? How much does that adequacy or inadequacy contribute to your perception of your total support system? (If you need to check accuracy, you may wish to keep a record for a week of supportive interactions, by type.)
 - Evaluate as objectively as possible the source of any sense of inadequacy. Is it a question of unrealistic expectations of those people? Is it a question of reciprocity? The source makes all the difference in how you choose to approach the issue.
3. What do you need to do to create a support system more functional for you? (For example, find a support group, connect with individuals, examine your expectations, determine what you have to offer to others, etc.)
4. Develop a behavioral plan that will implement number 3. Make it concrete, realistic and based on a series of small wins.
5. Implement your plan, frequently evaluation and revising your approach for effectiveness.

Points to Consider When Building a Network

- Identify all the people on whom you depend to accomplish your agenda. These ought to be the starting point of your network. Don't ignore support staff.
- Watch organizational communications for new people you may not know about.
- Realize that people often like to share what they know. One successful businessman makes a habit of taking people to lunch and picking their brains about their expertise.
- Establish and maintain contact. Don't respond to people only when you need something.
- Don't eat lunch at your desk.
- Give people credit who have helped with what you are accomplishing.
- Give yourself credit for what you have accomplished. Use your network to spread the word.
- Recognize that the small moments of time people take are not interruptions but part of your work, part of what you do and are invaluable as networking.
- Understand that it takes time to nurture relationships. The less time you have, the more important it is to understand what your needs are and to focus on those that are most important.