

EQUIPPD · FREE RESOURCE

Build Your Personal Board of Directors

Networking, reframed as something you can actually stomach.

Six roles to fill, what to ask each one,
and templates for the messages that are hard to write.

Built for the Equippd community · equippd.io
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Why “networking” feels bad

Most people hate networking because they have been taught a transactional version of it: collect contacts, ask for things, follow up until someone caves. That version *is* unpleasant, and it also does not work particularly well.

Here is a more useful frame. Companies have boards of directors — a small group of people with different expertise who the company consults on hard decisions. You should have one too. Not a contact list. A handful of specific people you have real relationships with, each of whom is good at something different.

The reframe

You are not collecting contacts. You are assembling a small group of people whose judgment you trust, and making yourself useful enough to them that they are glad to hear from you. That is a relationship, and it is a fundamentally different activity from “networking.”

Build in four directions

Direction	Who they are	What they give you
Up	People senior to you who want you to win	Sponsorship, context you cannot see yet, doors
Across	Peers at your level, inside and outside your org	Honest comparison, emotional reality, referrals
Out	People in other companies and industries	Market information, your next move, perspective
Down	People earlier in the path than you	Clarity from teaching, reputation, loyalty over time

*Almost everyone over-invests in **Up** and neglects **Across** and **Down**. Your peers will be the ones hiring and referring in ten years, and mentoring someone junior is the fastest way to discover what you actually know.*

The six seats to fill

You do not need six separate people — one person can hold two seats. But you should be able to name a specific human for each of these.

Seat	What they do	What to ask them
The Truth-teller	Tells you what others will not	"What am I not seeing about how I come across?"
The Connector	Knows everybody, enjoys introductions	"Who should I be talking to about this?"
The Insider	Deep in the industry or company you want	"What actually gets rewarded there?"
The Navigator	Has walked the path a few years ahead of you	"What would you do differently at my stage?"
The Sponsor	Advocates for you when you are not in the room	"What would I need to show to be ready for X?"
The Anchor	Knows you outside of work and keeps you honest	"Does this still sound like me?"

Mentor vs. sponsor — know the difference

A mentor talks *to* you. A sponsor talks *about* you when you are not there. Mentorship is helpful; sponsorship is what actually moves careers. You earn sponsorship by doing visible, reliable work — and by making sure the right person knows you did it.

Fill in your board

- ☐ **Truth-teller:** _____
- ☐ **Connector:** _____
- ☐ **Insider:** _____
- ☐ **Navigator:** _____
- ☐ **Sponsor:** _____
- ☐ **Anchor:** _____

Empty seats are not a failure — they are your list of what to work on this quarter. Pick the one that would help most right now and fill it.

The messages nobody wants to write

Cold outreach to someone in a role you want

Hi [Name] — I'm [your name], [one line: student at X / working in Y]. I came across your work on [something specific and real] and it lined up with what I've been trying to figure out about [topic].

I'm not looking for a referral. I'd just like to hear how you got into [field] and what you'd pay attention to at my stage. Would fifteen minutes in the next couple of weeks be possible?

Either way, thanks for the [post/talk/project] — the part about [specific detail] was genuinely useful.

Why this works: it is specific, it is short, it explicitly asks for something small, and it removes the fear that you are about to ask for a job. Never send this without the specific detail filled in — that is the entire credibility of the message.

Re-opening a relationship you let go cold

Hi [Name] — it's been a while. I still think about [specific thing they said or did], and it turned out to be right when [what happened].

Quick update on me: [two sentences].

No ask here, just wanted to say it stuck with me. Hope [specific thing about them] is going well.

Send this one with no request attached. A message that arrives only when you need something teaches people what your messages mean. Reconnect first; ask later.

After the conversation

Thanks for the time today. The part about [specific thing] changed how I'm thinking about [topic] — I'm going to [concrete action you will actually take].

I'll let you know how it goes.

Then actually follow up in a few weeks and tell them how it went. Almost nobody does this, and it is the single strongest thing you can do to make someone want to help you again.

Maintenance — the part everyone skips

Relationships decay silently. A board you built two years ago and never contacted is not a board. Keep it alive with a cadence you can actually sustain:

Cadence	Do this
Monthly	Reach out to two people with no ask — an article, a congratulations, an update
Quarterly	One real conversation with someone on your board
Twice a year	Review your six seats. Who has gone quiet? Which seat is empty?
Ongoing	Send opportunities to others before you ever need one yourself

Give first, and keep a longer ledger than feels natural

The most reliable way to build a network you can draw on is to be visibly useful to people long before you need anything. Forward the job posting. Make the introduction. Share the resource. People remember who helped them when there was nothing in it — and that memory lasts years.

If this feels uncomfortable

- Start with **Across**, not **Up**. Peers are far less intimidating and just as valuable.
- Ask for advice, not favors. People enjoy giving advice and resent being asked for favors.
- Fifteen minutes is a small ask. An hour is not. Ask for fifteen.
- Being specific is what makes you memorable. Vague admiration reads as mass-sent.
- You will be ignored sometimes. It is not personal and it is not about you.
- You have more to offer than you think — you are closer to the problems junior people have than any senior person is.