

## **Tools Used From 150 Things You Can Do to Build Social Capital**

### **1. Organize a social gathering to welcome a new neighbor**

- a. In the second week in January, a new little girl started school in my daughter's classroom. I learned that the family had just moved from Orange County, California for the father's job. The mother was not yet working in Pittsburgh, had a 5-month-old and a 4-year-old, and knew no one in Pittsburgh. I invited the mother, Samantha, and her two girls, Patricia and Savannah, over for play date with about 6 other mothers with children the same ages. The kids had a great time playing and after that, Patty wasn't "new" anymore. The moms drank coffee and wine and filled in Samantha about local pediatricians, schools, camps, and good to know things in Pittsburgh.

### **2. Register to vote and vote**

- a. I live in City Council District 8 in the City of Pittsburgh. In March, there was a special election for a City Council seat vacated by Dan Gilman who became Mayor Peduto's new chief of staff. I half considered running myself, but between the EdD program, work, and family obligations, now is not the time. The race became heated between the Democratic party backed newcomer, Sonja Finn, who is a local entrepreneur with a strong social justice streak, and Erika Strassberger who did not get the Democratic party nomination but was Dan Gilman's former chief of staff. I donated to and supported Finn, but my husband supported Strassberger so we didn't put signage in our yard. Strassberger won, but I did run into a few neighbors at our polling place. Sadly, I voted at 3 in the afternoon, and only about 150 people had voted before me.

### **3. Support local merchants**

- a. We live on the border between Squirrel Hill and Shadyside, so supporting local merchants is easy for me. Notably, I am a regular shopper at KidzNCompany in Squirrel Hill and have developed a great relationship with the owner, Paul. I also started going exclusively to Aey Nail Bar in Shadyside because unlike a lot of other manicure places, Aey is committed to paying her staff a living wage, is working towards a health care package, and has given them financial incentives for further education in skin services and massage. She is slightly more expensive, but I find her commitment to the young women, many of whom are from minoritized backgrounds, who work for her to be admirable.

### **4. Plan a vacation with friends or family**

- a. I am the lead planner on a friends' trip to Charleston over Memorial Day. Three other couples who live in Rochester, Minnesota; Kanas City, Missouri; and Bettendorf, Iowa and their children will all go with my family. We met eleven years ago when we were 22 and living in Pittsburgh. My husband was in the Pittsburgh Health Corps division of AmeriCorps with the wives in each of these families. We have stayed close friends, despite distance, and our children think of each other as cousins and us as aunts and uncles. Luckily for me, all of the other

adults are physicians, some from disadvantaged backgrounds, and they are willing to give me insight on my PoP.

**5. Go to home parties when invited**

- a. My neighbors are very social, so this was an easy one. We attended Easter Brunch with our friends who are Mormon and learned about some of their family traditions. We went to a friend's house for the AFC Finals to cheer on the Patriots with other displaced Bostonians. My family also hosted a fundraising party at our house for Down Syndrome Diagnosis Network which is a charity very close to our hearts. We raised several hundred dollars and had a great open house on a Friday evening.

**6. Get involved with Girl Scouts**

- a. There are 10 girls on my street between the ages of 4 and 6. They will all go to different schools because of religious requirements and parental education philosophies. My friend, Dr. Alison Levine, mentioned how she hopes that the girls stay friends even as school pressure ramps up. Another friend jumped in that she would love to do Girl Scouts. Ali and I put our heads together, called Girl Scouts of Western Pennsylvania, and the two of us are about halfway through the clearances and training. The Bellerock Street Daisy Troop will officially convene this summer with an emphasis on community service and science exploration.

**7. Volunteer in your child's classroom**

- a. I am on the Board of Trustees of Shadyside Presbyterian Church Nursery School. The night before our March class, we hosted our annual Potluck and Raffle for Scholarship Funding. In the month prior, I had to solicit local businesses for donations, reach out to our families for donations, and ask teachers what they would like to see done differently at this year's event. The eight other women and I who planned this spent hours organizing a successful event that will pay for three children to attend nursery school next year.

**8. Have family dinners and read to your children**

- a. We do this every night. I make a point to teach my four-year-old good manners, to be open minded eaters, and engage in the conversation. Louisa and I have been reading a lot about girls from different periods in history. I am also trying to read her books about children from different cultures and life experiences. Right now, we are reading the *All of a Kind Family* series which were written in the 1950s but about a Jewish family in a tenement on the Lower East side in 1912. We also love *The Matchbox Diary* which is about a family of Italian immigrants to Pittsburgh in the 1920s.

**9. Host a block party of holiday open house**

- a. I, along with my co-conspirator Alison Levine, have coordinated several events for this summer including the Bellerock Street Progressive Dinner Party on June 2 (adults only, couples will range from age 28 to age 75), The Second Annual Camp Bellerock (everyone who wants to sponsors a 30 minute activity and the kids travel from house to house doing crafts, playing sports, orienteering, and other camp activities) on June 10, Bellerock at the Bucs (we all go to the Pirates game) on August 4, and The End of Summer Bonfire on August 26<sup>th</sup>.

**10. Go to church**

- a. My family are members of Shadyside Presbyterian Church. We attend about 3 out of 5 Sundays, try to get to the Wednesday night Vespers service twice per month, and I volunteer to teach Sunday school. I joined a social justice themed Bible study for older women, which allowed me to connect with church members that I didn't previously know this semester. We meet every other Thursday.

#### **11. Volunteer to deliver Meals-on-Wheels**

- a. My friend, Shannon, has one of the worst weeks of her life. Her four-year-old daughter, Haley, broke her arm and required repeat surgeries at the same time that her 18-month-old with Downs syndrome was very sick. To top it off, her husband was out of the country on a mandatory work trip and she has no local family. I organized a Meal Train online so that Shannon didn't have to worry about groceries and dinner during this time.

#### **12. Hire young people for odd jobs**

- a. I am in the middle of hiring Pitt undergrads for summer babysitters.

#### **13. Design your own: share your ethnic heritage**

- a. I didn't originally think of this as a social networking thing, but it is. Last year, my husband's assistant chief fellow, Ahmed, invited our family to his house for dinner. Ahmed and his wife Layal are from Jordan and they made a delicious Jordanian meal. My husband and I are both half-Italian half-WASP, although we both had the good fortune of being taught how to cook great Italian food from scratch. Mike and I realized that we had never reciprocated our dinner and decided to invite Ahmed and his family and this year's chief and assistant chief cardiology fellow for an Italian meal at our house on April 15<sup>th</sup>. The assistant chief is an immigrant from Thailand and the chief is from a Pittsburgh Greek family.

### **Reflection**

Community doesn't just happen. It develops because people put in the time and the effort to make it happen. I have always been good about getting involved, but going through these exercises and making me think more intentionally about growing my network.

In completing the social networking exercises, I had a strong revelation about the extra importance for a social network among professional women. This is particularly true for women who don't live near family. In addition to being a doctoral student and a business owner, I am essentially a stay-at-home parent to my daughters because of my husband's insane work schedule. My nearest family members are in Philadelphia. When something goes wrong, or our part-time nanny cancels, or I have to be in two places at once, I am out of luck. One of the strongest realizations that I had last semester was that I am often crippled by my hungers as defined by Heifetz, et. al. Specifically, because of my family and culture of origin, and what I believe is expected of professional women, I try really hard not to let people see me sweat and don't ask for help (Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, 2009, p. 192). Really engaging with my social network made me understand the depth of the connections I have made in Pittsburgh even though I have only lived here for three years, and that asking for help might allow me to actually be more effective with my time.

Another aspect of building my social network that surprised me was the crossover between professional and personal benefit. I have always carried my business cards on me, been

forthright about my work with new people, and volunteered to speak to my friends' mom and school groups, but getting more involved in social networking has led to a lot of surprising work leads. By joining the Bible study that is primarily for retired women, I actually gained some new client leads through the participants' grandchildren. Going to an Easter party at a friend's house introduced me to a woman who has recently relocated to Pittsburgh, has a creative writing background, an impressive educational pedigree, and a desire to work part time from home. I thought I'd be hunting for Easter Eggs with my daughter, but instead, I found my first employee, I think. Ultimately, it was a good reminder of the power of talking to people and learning about their needs.

Finally, I learned that I have a lot of capacity to get stuff done. I thought that this year, with the addition of a new baby, I would try to take things easy and say no to more. Instead, this project made me say yes to more opportunities, and I don't think anything suffered. There were times when I was up late or a little overwhelmed, but it was nothing that an organized to do list couldn't help me sort out. On the one hand, I need to ask for help, but on the other, realizing that many of these things that need to be done in my community and that I benefit from do not actually take that much time is an empowering feeling. It did make me think seriously about a future City Council run or big project undertaking.

Heifetz, R., Grashow, A., & Linsky, M. (2009). *The practice of adaptive leadership: tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world*. Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business Press.