



By Joe Byerly

Recently on Business Insider’s website, writer Drake Baer posted an interesting article titled [Who You Know is Even More Important than you Realize](#). He highlights that “research shows that success isn’t just a matter of hard work, talent, and success- it also depends on your relationships...In addition to helping you find jobs, a network shapes your happiness, health, and ideas.”

While many members of the military understand the importance of “who you know” in the context of career progression, I don’t think many think about it from a developmental standpoint. Our networks can have a significant influence on how we grow within the [Self-Development Domain](#). They can challenge us intellectually. They can broaden our perspectives. They can keep our egos in check. They can also influence our professional reading habits. For example, the Squadron Executive Officer in a unit I once served in, taught me about assessing the professional value of a book based on the author, publishing company, as well as some other key indicators. To others, this may seem like a no-brainer,

but at the time I didn't know any better. This connection with my XO shaped how I've approached self-study ever since-and I'm better for it. Additionally, others in my network have had similar influences on my development, which is one of the reasons I've taken to writing articles for my blog, [Small Wars Journal](#), [Armor Magazine](#), and other professional journals.

These important relationships that I've formed over the course of my career are what make up my Personal Learning Network (PLN). In their 2011 book, [Personal Learning Networks: Using the Power of Connections to Transform Education](#), Will Richardson and Rob Mancabelli define a PLN as "a set of connections to people and resources both offline and online who enrich our learning -at a moment's notice." PLNs are great for aiding us in the self-development domain, because they provide us with access to a networked group of people (some much more experienced than us) who supply us with information, offer discussion and feedback, and in some cases motivation, thus enhancing our own journey of professional growth.

Connecting with others in the same unit may be ideal for professional debate and discussion. The reality however, is that there are those who serve in units where leaders are either too busy or don't see the benefits of personal study, thereby making self-learning an individual effort - and may even discourage those with the initial motivation. If you find yourself in a unit where self-study is neither encouraged or rewarded, you may find value in establishing an online personal learning network.

Many already do this by connecting with others via social media platforms like Twitter or Facebook. Social media offers numerous opportunities to connect with others and stay informed. For example, many leaders follow [Doctrine Man](#), and it is through this connection they receive a daily stream of links to articles of interest (always with Doctrine Man's witty commentary). All of the professional journals have social media accounts they use to announce publication of new issues or highlight important articles. Users may also connect

with numerous experts in fields such as leadership, ethics, strategy, foreign policy, history, etc. Additionally, it's through Twitter that I've also connected with motivated and intelligent military professionals (from all the services) who continue to positively influence my development. For those interested in developing an online personal learning network, [Jonathan Silk](#), a Major in the U.S. Army, provides us with a great tutorial on navigating Twitter and creating online networks in a blog post titled: [Hashtag\(#\) Leader Development](#).

I encourage everyone to think about their Personal Learning Network, and how they can strengthen it. Whether it's online or offline, it doesn't matter. What matters is connecting with others and building networks of professionals who positively influence our growth as individual leaders.

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