

5 Tricks from a LinkedIn Jedi

The man who wrote the book on LinkedIn shares his secrets to becoming an expert social networker.

By Eric Markowitz | @EricMarkowitz | Jan 4, 2012



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5 Tricks from a LinkedIn Jedi

David Gowel has made many career transitions: from civilian to military, from military to academic, and finally from academic to entrepreneurship. Along the way, Gowel used LinkedIn to achieve each step; an experience, he says, that has made him into an expert on how to use LinkedIn to become a master networker.

He even wrote a book to prove it. [*The Power in a Link: Open Doors, Close Deals, and Change the way you Do Business Using LinkedIn*](#), (Wiley, December 2011) is a 159-page opus on becoming a master social networker. Gowel, a West Point graduate who served as a platoon leader in Iraq and has taught leadership classes at MIT, says CEOs and entrepreneurs are generally pretty bad at using LinkedIn. He says they use it as a business card or résumé service when they really should be using it to mine for new clients, new connections, and new employees.

"LinkedIn has very slowly evolved into an incredible force for social business intelligence that is readily available if you know how to use it," says Gowel, who was once described as a LinkedIn Jedi. "That's why we don't think [entrepreneurs] are generally using it as well as they could. When used properly, LinkedIn is very much disrupting other ways we've done [networking]. You can reduce the time you spend in those other activities and be much more focused on making connections if you are high-quality and ethical."

In January 2010, Gowel and his co-founder Mark Rockefeller started [RockTech](#), a Boston-based software company that has built online tools for CEOs, entrepreneurs, sales professionals and job seekers to help leverage their LinkedIn accounts. Their main product, TAP for LinkedIn (\$29/year) ties directly into a LinkedIn profile and guides its user through the recommended settings and strategies. According to Gowel, it's easier than reading a book, and cheaper than online tutorials.

Inc.com decided to tap Gowel's LinkedIn expertise and his new book for some of its networking inspiration. Here's five key takeaways:

1) Don't be a "Johnny Milker"

One of the first mistakes LinkedIn users make, says Gowel, is milking introductions from the start. "People generally know when someone else has used or is using them," he writes. "Treat people like the friends, contacts, and respected employees they are while you network, and not like the tools that you're trying to manipulate."

2) Update, update, and update again.

Status Updates, much like Twitter, allow you to post succinct messages to your LinkedIn feed. Gowel believes it's an underused feature that can get you in the spotlight and keep you in the forefront of people's minds.

"Using status updates is a much more personal way to keep from being forgotten and can potentially differentiate you from the crowd," he writes. Plus, he adds, if your status updates are fresh, the people in your network are more likely to believe the content on your profile is fresh.

3) Don't run through walls to make connections.

It's all about the recommendations and introductions. Gowel says that entrepreneurs often see what they want, or someone they want to know, and will run through walls to get to them directly. But that's not always the best approach. Gowel says it's almost always more effective to enlist the help of current connections—even if it's 2nd degree—to get in touch with the people you're trying to do business with.

4) Don't accept any old schmo.

To accept or to reject? Perhaps breaking some conventional wisdom, Gowel says it's better not to just accept any random request you receive from someone you barely know, or someone you don't know at all.

"Remember that if you accept someone whom you don't know into your network, you also give him access to your e-mail addresses," he writes. "Ignoring someone is equivalent to giving him a cold shoulder: the request stays in his sent messages, and he may believe you just haven't come across his invitation yet."

5) Search is the best tool on the Internet.

"Here's a bold statement for you," Gowel writes. "LinkedIn's search capabilities are going to be more valuable than Google's search capabilities." Gowel asserts that because LinkedIn's search offer access to "self-updating relationship information" while Google is essentially data agnostic, the value of a LinkedIn search is becoming more valuable for business owners constantly looking for specific, personal connections.

By using "relationship searches," "CEO searches," or "industry searches," savvy entrepreneurs can leverage current and potential connections to expand business and create deals.



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