



## [Rainmaker Story #8: Joan's Brain Trust, an Example of Fast-Track Networking](#)

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About a dozen years ago, an old friend, Joan Jorgenson, hung out her shingle as a retained search recruiter. Within a year she was winning the choicest searches in her niche, most coming through referrals from her network. She built this network from a core of people into the best in the niche within a year.

I have never seen anyone build such a productive referral network in so short a time. Being interested in such things, I asked her how she had done it, to which she responded with a steely determination, "One person at a time."

That is how networks grow. You meet someone. You get to know what interests them, so that you can stay in front of them. You make judgments, about personal fit and your ability to help each other to pick the keepers. And you stay in front of them some more.

Recruiters have advantages over other professionals, because sourcing and interviewing candidates and checking references give them more reasons to stay in front of their contacts than most of us have. At least, they have these advantages once they get hired to conduct some searches. A sole practitioner, Joan couldn't rely on searches sold by others in the firm to stay in front of people. She had to come up with something else, until she won enough searches for the contacting-through-searches to kick in.

Because recruiters need larger networks than most of us, this meant she had to come up with numerous reasons for calling her contacts. The reason for these calls had to be plausible and offer her a chance to provide value to her contacts. The approach she developed did all of this and made her a better-informed recruiter into the bargain.

The industry that she recruits for was undergoing a massive change. Strategies that worked for three quarters of a century were losing their effectiveness. People in the industry across the country were struggling to find new ways to meet their objectives. The new paths were more diverse than in the past, there was little literature on many of them and what literature there was dated quickly.

To recruit effectively, Joan needed to know about these new approaches. She found herself developing lists of people at the cutting edge of their development. Calling them to learn about their approaches, she discovered that each was interested in what she had learned from the others. In this market, it was acceptable to pass such information on. The more she did this, the more she learned and passed on and the more valuable she became both as a contact and a recruiter.

She began to refer to the people she called as her "brain trust" and the term stuck. Members had a rough idea of who the other members were. Outsiders who learned of it aspired to membership and would reach out to bring her information. When someone was needed to recruit cutting edge talent, she became the obvious choice. This process and the brain trust at its center have been the foundation of her search practice.

I know of other professionals who have developed networks comparable to Joan's brain trust. A German strategy consultant, for example, created such a group from firm alumni now working within the industry he specializes in. This group actually meets several times a year. "I can find out anything I want to know about what is happening in the industry through this group," he has said. One thing that those who create brain trusts have all noted: When you ask someone to be a part of your brain trust, they seldom say no.

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