

PODCAST MINISERIES BY: RTC AND TDR GLOBAL LAC
**Mentoring as a Tool for Professional Development and Strengthening
Health Research Networks**

**EPISODE 5: STRATEGIC NETWORKS AND RELATIONSHIPS TO FOSTER
PROFESSIONAL GROWTH**

Karen Linares (KL): Welcome to a new episode of our podcast, *"Mentoring as a Tool for Professional Development and Strengthening Health Research Networks"*. Today, we will discuss collaborative networks and strategic relationships, as well as their impact on professional growth. We will emphasize the role of mentoring in expanding these networks and boosting career development in scientific research.

As we mentioned in previous episodes, mentoring is based on effective communication and collaborative work. A mentee benefits by learning new skills and interacting with others. In scientific research, especially in health, major advances are often the result of collaboration between institutions, disciplines, and even countries. Knowledge is acquired and built collectively.

Strong collaborative networks offer greater access to international funding opportunities and shared resources such as databases, laboratories, technology, and specialized equipment. Also, it is important to share and learn from different experiences, approaches, and methods because they make the research process better. Taking a multi-angle approach to a problem generates more complete and applicable solutions.

Another benefit is the increase in scientific visibility. This is because working with researchers at different levels of experience and trajectory can open doors to new audiences and higher impact publications.

A mentor can help a mentee gain access to scientific networks through their experience, background, and contacts. However, it is the mentee's responsibility to build, nurture, and maintain these strategic connections. Antoinette Oglethorpe, our guest expert, talks about how we can foster valuable strategic relationships that contribute to professional development.

Antoinette Oglethorpe (AO): Yeah, so **network** is another of those words that people get scared by and networking is another one, so they imagine it's all about cocktail parties and giving out business cards and actually it's not, it's about building strategic relationships. And actually, most people like building relationships but it's about building relationships outside of the ones you have in your current work circle, because career development is all about influencing other people and getting and taking opportunities.

So, to develop your career you need to not just take advantage of everything that is available to you in your work circle, but also outside of your work circle. Where else can you know has the opportunities you're looking for? Where else can you connect with somebody that you can learn from?

In our work we talk about the concept of the **Personal Boardroom**, and this is like having a group of mentors, having a group of people that all play different roles for you. Some people might be the champions of the people you serve so you can learn from them, you know, what it is that you should be offering to the community that you serve.

Some people might be challengers who are going to question you and push back against you. Others are going to be door openers, they're going to be people that say: "oh, right, you know, I know a project that's going on and they need somebody that's really passionate about this and really skilled in that area, Karen, you'd be great, let me introduce you to this person..." and so that's how people get their professional development, but also their opportunities.

So, actually thinking of it as building those relationships is more important than thinking that you're just kind of adding numbers to your LinkedIn connections. **It's about quality, not quantity**, and that quality being quite strategic so, you know, if you know or somebody knows that they want to get an opportunity I don't know... well, if I wanted to get an opportunity in South America, for example, then you know all the people I work with here in the UK they're not going to be much help, they can't guide me on what it's like to work in South America, they can't introduce me to anyone that's going to give me opportunities, but I might go, oh, hey, I know Karen. And I know Alejandra and I know Andres, and well, maybe they can guide me a little bit.

KL: Why are networks important for managing your career? Here are three reasons:

1. High performers cultivate high-quality relationships that span physical boundaries and hierarchical levels.
2. It is the composition and quality of a set of relationships that account for long-term career outcomes.
3. High performers benefit from a constellation of high-quality relationships.

Antoinette recommends the use of **Personal Boardroom**, a tool created by Zella King and Amanda Scott that helps people get the maximum impact from their personal collaboration network.

In the transcript of this episode, you will find two links to access the digital version of the book *"Who Is in Your Personal Boardroom?: How to choose people, assign roles and have conversations with purpose"*.

Imagine you are standing in front of a boardroom door, and the discussions inside are about developing your career. Before walking through the door and taking concrete action, reflect on the following points:

1. **What is the purpose of your "Personal Boardroom"?** Consider what you want its members to help you accomplish.
2. **Who should or could be part of your boardroom?** Make a general list, and then carefully select six to twelve members in total.
3. **Assign a role to each member.** According to the "Personal Boardroom" tool, there are three types of roles:
 - a. *Information Roles:* People who provide new knowledge, insights and ideas.
 - b. *Power Roles:* People who have access to resources and decision-making authority beyond your reach and help you get things done.
 - c. *Development roles:* People who provide constructive feedback, new challenges, and the courage to face them, as well as help you balance your professional life with other aspects of your life.
4. **Conduct conversations that are focused on achieving your specific objective or goal**, while considering the individual roles of each person in your boardroom. Roles determine who you talk to and how.
5. **Offer to help others.** This adds value to your collaborative network. Plus, the best way to repay someone for their help is to support them!

Mentoring is a powerful tool that opens doors, strengthens professional networks, and builds strategic relationships. Before we conclude, here are some strategies for fostering networking within mentoring:

- Establish networking as part of the mentoring objectives.
- Identify common interests between the mentee and the mentor's network.
- Involve the mentee in meetings, symposiums, and other networking opportunities.
- Train the mentee in developing skills such as preparing an elevator pitch, writing presentation emails, and managing professional digital platforms such as LinkedIn, Academia, or ResearchGate.
- Evaluate strategic collaboration opportunities aligned with the mentee's interests and goals.

We would like to express our gratitude to all our listeners and readers. We hope that the material shared will be of significant benefit to you in your professional pursuits and contribute to the promotion of mentoring in our Latin American and Caribbean region. Please consult the additional resources at the end of the transcription document. We have added academic articles exploring the impact of networking on the development of scientific or academic careers in health.

Don't miss the next episode, in which we will explore the Health Research Mentorship in Low- and Middle-Income Countries (HERMES) Guide! Developed by TDR, this guide is intended for institutional leaders, funders, and others interested in institutionalizing research mentoring in settings with limited resources. We look forward to seeing you!

Additional resources

E-Book: *Who is in Your Personal Boardroom?: How to choose people, assign roles and have conversations with purpose.* Authors: Zella King and Amanda Scott

Amazon Kindle (Free): <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Who-your-Personal-Boardroom-conversations-ebook/dp/B00OQHNOP6>

Google Books (Preview):

<https://books.google.com.co/books?id=EYOQDwAAQBAJ&lpg=PP1&hl=es&pg=PP1#v=onepage&q&f=false>

TDR Global Community: Connecting members in the continued sharing of knowledge

TDR Global is a worldwide community of passionate scientists and experts who have been working with TDR on research on infectious diseases of poverty. Each individual brings unique knowledge, and together they make up a vibrant scientific community, called TDR Global.

TDR Global is committed to driving and encouraging mentoring of young scientists and fostering research collaborations.

Looking for an expert? Need a multidisciplinary team? Want to share your knowledge with the next generation? Requiring some additional exposure for your work?

Visit the [TDR Global Discovery Platform](#), a public database of people who have received funding, served as experts on committees, and who have been involved in TDR partnerships over the last 40 years.

For more information, please visit: <https://tdr.who.int/activities/tdr-global>

Don't miss out on opportunities for collaborating and mentoring. Let's grow this community together and continue fostering valuable connections!

Academic articles on networking and mentoring:

- Intellectual synthesis in mentorship determines success in academic careers
<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-018-07034-y>
- Connecting for Success: The Role of Networking in Medical Education
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11682727/>
- The power of networking in science and academia
<https://doi.org/10.1111/imcb.12832>
- Mentoring Networks in Academic Medicine: A Longitudinal Exploration
<https://doi.org/10.62935/fz1866>
- Community voices: the importance of diverse networks in academic mentoring
<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-022-28667-0>