

People power

Over half of *Efficacy* alumni say that learning to improve relationships helped them manage unique workplace challenges.

When Barack Obama became president, he asked people in his network from Harvard Law School and the University of Chicago to serve in his Administration (Brown 2008). When illness forced the late Pat Summitt, head coach of a University of Tennessee basketball team from the game, she knew her legacy was secure and she would have support—not just because of her eight NCAA national titles and record-setting 1,098 victories but because of her players' 100% graduation rate and the many young athletes, pros, coaches, and colleagues with whom she had created indelible memories and opportunities (Voepel 2016). Elite leaders know that peers, mentors, and strategic relationships make a huge difference in their paths forward and up. But networking may not be as clear or open for all, alumni of Korn Ferry's multi-day *Efficacy* workshops explain.

Efficacy participants realize that they may lose out on jobs and promotions, despite their technical qualifications, if they do not nurture the relationships that open doors. This realization can be daunting for people who may not have been explicitly taught the power of relationship-building in the professional world, or who might come from different cultures with different norms. When reflecting on this gap, an *Efficacy* program alumna noted, "I was the first professional in my family. My parents were auto workers working on their feet all day for their entire careers..."

In interviews and surveys with 237 *Efficacy* alumni¹, over half of interview respondents spontaneously pointed out that the program helped them improve relationships so they could better manage their unique challenges.

The workshops, respondents said, helped them gain perspective so they better understood how they presented themselves to others and how others perceived them. "I started to reflect on my own style and how it's perceived by others," said one alumna who originally was from China and who focused after the program on "[my] speaking and body language so that I can be received as more decisive."

¹ Between February and April 2016, 42 alumni were interviewed and 195 alumni were surveyed. The surveys were anonymous, and were not linked to interview responses. It is assumed that some alumni participated in both the interview and the survey.

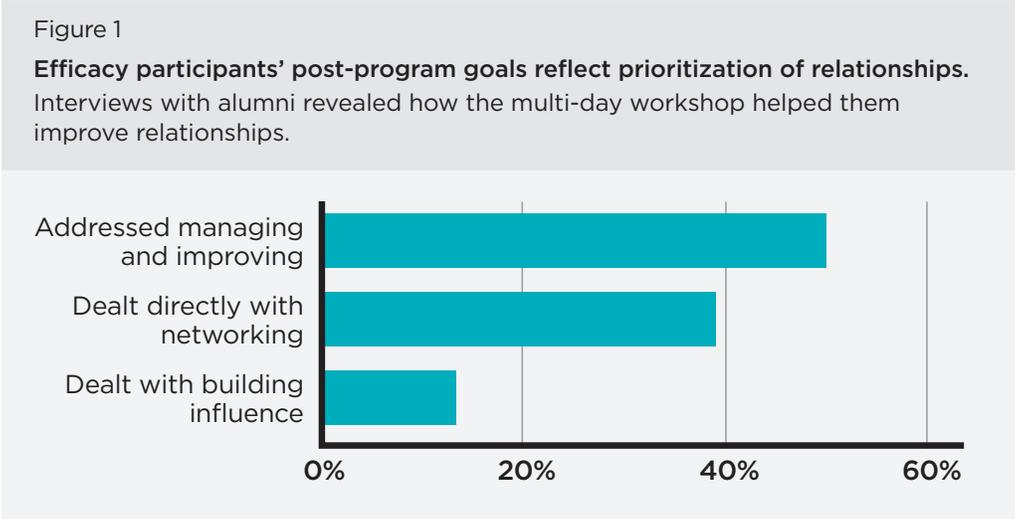
Interviewed and surveyed on average two years after completing Korn Ferry's *Efficacy* programs, alumni said the workshops helped them gain perspective on how they present themselves to others and how others perceive them.



The workshops, respondents said, helped them learn to build influence by seeking out mentors, networking, and becoming more strategic in building relationships. *Efficacy* taught her, one alumna said, to “get on the calendar of influential people in [my] office. Don’t wait for people to mentor you; go grab the mentor.” Before the program, “those were strategies that, in many ways, would have seemed audacious ... but sometimes that’s what it takes.”

Efficacy participants said the program assisted them in becoming more comfortable with diversity by better equipping them to work with colleagues with different beliefs, political affiliations, and backgrounds. One participant stated, the program “helped me navigate relationships outside of this organization with individuals who don’t look like me, think like me, have the same beliefs and political affiliations. It’s made me more comfortable in rooms with those people than I have in the past.”

The participants’ post-program² goals (Figure 1) reflected how deeply they had shifted their relationship priorities: When participants were asked about their goals now, 50% said their addressed managing and improving relationships, 39% dealt directly with networking, and 13% dealt with building influence. Their specifics included building their networks in terms of influence and quality, as well as volunteering and mentoring others. One alumnus spoke of setting up “two networking lunches in the next 60 days,” while another’s aim was to “focus on being deliberate and intentional about my personal brand.”



² After attending an *Efficacy* workshop, 93 participants completed post-program evaluations where were they asked to list two or three goals they intended to work on in the next 60 days.

Efficacy participants also learned the importance of building relationships within affinity groups, which help them to grow through shared experience. The program includes such groups for women, people of color, and LGBTQ individuals. The affinity groups help them to discuss, confront, and affirm specific challenges unique to their backgrounds and experiences and to acknowledge, as one alumnus said, “the feelings you feel and that your experiences are real, and you’re not alone.”

Relationships, and the emotional and social skills to sustain them, are key drivers of performance in the workplace—more so than technical skills (Zes and Landis 2013; Goleman 1998). The role that relationships play in building self-awareness can be critical not only for self-development, but also for company performance (Zes and Landis 2013).

Efficacy alumni will have their whole careers to master the relationship-building and networking skills commonly seen among leaders in business, politics, sports, and other arenas. But by giving participants a boost in confidence, the *Efficacy* program can kick-start the process and create a positive cycle in which alumni build relationships, see affirming results, and become more assured about building networks useful to them and their organizations.

References

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