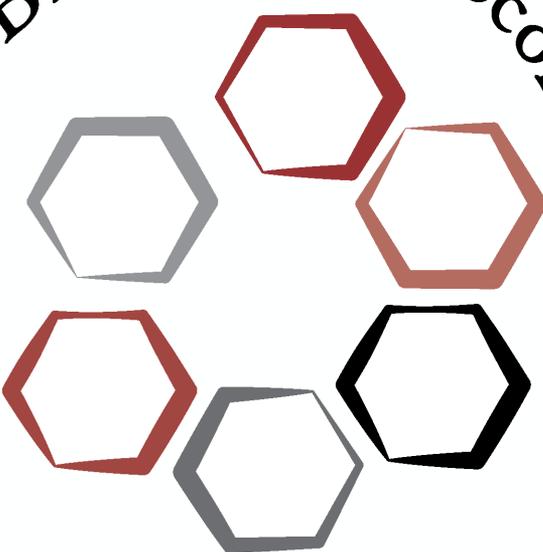


Trusted Broker Protocol

A circular arrangement of six hexagons, each with a thick outline. The hexagons are arranged in a ring around a central white space. The colors of the hexagons are: a gray one at the top-left, a red one at the top, a reddish-brown one at the top-right, a black one at the bottom-right, a gray one at the bottom, and a red one at the bottom-left.

...“just in time” information-sharing across ministries,
enabling rapid collaboration in kingdom expansion,
through a new model of relational networking

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Introduction to A Vision

Last week my boss asked me about San Diego. She said, “We just got a new contact who wants to work with Afghans, but our database says that we’ve got nothing going on in southern California. What can you tell me about what’s already happening? Who else is there that we can work with?”

I already personally knew of a couple friends in San Diego who could help, but they would never have been in our database, because one is working freelance and the other is affiliated with another organization. It took a couple of days, but I learned who else was working with this people group, and was able to set up a video conference for this morning to introduce the Davis, Watson, and Schnelz families, and our contact, Lisa Bertram. In the course of the call they identified an unserved Afghan neighborhood. They’ll all meet next week to put together a plan. Lisa and the Watsons were already independently preparing to move to Afghanistan in the next year when we connected them. Who knows? Maybe they’ll form a team together.

I should call my friend, Bruce, and find out if he knows of any Afghans who are moving south from San Francisco. He’s got such a great pulse on the community around him, and he’s always grateful to be able to refer those who are moving away to new friends in the cities they’re moving to.

It constantly amazes me how I wind up being able to connect different people to each other, whom I have met, even when they each live in a city that I’ve never even been in. Last month, I connected two refugee settlement workers in Berlin who had never heard of each other - from my remote farm country home office!

The preceding story is an illustration describing people’s ability to harness social power to revolutionize how the body of Christ works to expand the kingdom of God. This booklet aims to introduce you to a cultural protocol that produces a fresh way of interacting with people, information, and resources, called the Trusted Broker Network. As part of the body of Christ, we Followers of Jesus don’t have to worry about “the competition” in the work before us. We only compete against our true enemies: The world, the flesh, and the devil. Our available resources and spheres of influence have been artificially reduced for too long, and these limitations need to be overcome with new thinking.

What is a Trusted Broker?

Phil Butler has enriched the Christian community by expressing helpful definitions for networks and partnerships in his book, *Well Connected*. Let’s take a look at those for comparison.

Network

Any group of individuals or organizations, sharing a common interest, who regularly communicate with each other to enhance *their individual purposes*.

Partnership

Any group of individuals or organizations, sharing a common interest, who regularly communicate, plan, and work together *to achieve a common vision beyond the capacity of any one of the individual partners.*

Notice that Butler's terms talk about people getting together to share information or to work together for a common purpose. The difference between networking and partnership could be expressed in the amount of interest they may or may not have in expanding their cooperative activity beyond their own interests. They refer to levels of scope of vision - of their individual capacities to accomplish what they have in mind.

The *Trusted Broker Protocol* language is much more than simply semantic tweaking of *partnerships* or *networking* concepts. We suggest a significant difference is produced in relational ties between a specific breed of information-rich people. These additional qualities are reflected in the name. Trusted implies strong relationships. A broker has something significant to trade.

In the following Trusted Broker definitions, look for additional qualitative verbiage that focuses on social giftedness in the specific people who are working together, and the unusually concentrated scope of information to which they have access.

Trusted Broker

A key people networker, who has earned relational connections within a specialized sphere of influence that provides unique access to a disproportionately large amount of valuable and potentially sensitive information related to that group's activities.

An example of a Trusted Broker might be Woody, a Diaspora Peoples Ministry Director for Africa Inland Mission, working in North America. He is aware of all the activities of his organization on the ground, and acts as the conduit for communication between those workers and with the rest of his organization, under the authority of a higher leader.

Trusted Broker Network

A relatively small group of diversely affiliated Trusted Brokers, with margin and incentive to interact at a sustained level to advance a specific cause by confidentially pooling their knowledge through the trusted relationships they have built with each other, while simultaneously guarding the security concerns of their constituents.

Imagine Woody, from the above example, is joined by Ardythe, the Coordinator of follow-up community building for an organization that prepares people for ministry to new international arrivals. Then they discover Andy, who is organizing Somali outreach communities in Seattle, Minneapolis, and Columbus. All

three of them decide to attend the Refugee Highway Partnership Roundtable in North America, and meet, Hilario, who is striving to mobilize hispanics in the COMHINA network to work with Muslims in Mexico and the US. Think of the strategic implications if just those four became friends, and were authorized by their leaders to pursue ideas.

We live in the high-tech information age. We expect data to be instantly accessible at our fingertips. Hey Siri! Okay Google! Alexa...! We dream of the perfect database for ministry-related resources and activities, and wonder why it hasn't yet been provided by network leaders who claim to want more collaboration. But would you really trust this quintessential database to be accurate if it existed? Would you want to pay a subscription to cover the ongoing cost of keeping it updated? Would you have the time to embrace the learning curve of working the search filters? Would you offer your own information to be added?

Note: Let us be clear that we are not disparaging the usefulness of extensive databases. We're simply pointing out the limitations of depending solely on them to meet all the ministry information needs that exist. The geniuses who manage these databases may actually act as a teammate to provide the source of information that the Trusted Broker accesses in their networking.

We need to put aside the unrealistic expectation that such a globally shared "magic" database will ever exist, or that it would even be worth the effort to create. Instead, let's invest in the unifying strength of the body of Christ, which is found in deep and trusting relationships. Rather than algorithms and programming code, we can shift toward building living databases built through human relationship.

For The Prospective Trusted Broker

Not everybody is cut out for this. For some, it is a skill that may emerge over time after lying dormant until the number of relationships they have collected reaches a critical minimum. The qualities of a Trusted Broker may need to be confirmed by mentors or long-time friends who can judge whether they see these characteristics in you. As you read through the following list, see if it resonates with your self-perception. Perhaps you will find that it describes someone you know.

You might be a Trusted Broker if:

- You frequently take the initiative to introduce leaders you're meeting to other leaders whom you sense would want to work together. You make this assessment quickly, and your accuracy is affirmed by others.
- You have extensive knowledge of people working on the grassroots level in your church or organization, how to get in touch with them, and what they're doing. You're probably not the leader, but you do have access to the leader and his/her confidence.

- You like investing in “hungry” people, and generally consider it a better use of your time than trying to persuade those who are non-responsive in pursuing collaborative action.
- You advocate for a constituency of practitioners, and they would generally trust you to represent them
- You take reputation seriously
- You are a person who naturally connects with people and they trust you
- You may accidentally have 1,000+ Facebook friends
- You think about your purpose in terms of finding missing pieces of a puzzle that fit together
- You are talented in seeing the unique qualities and attributes of each person with which you come in contact
- You have a gift for instinctively seeing how people who are different can work together
- Whenever you meet someone new and begin to hear their story, your mind instantly comes up with 3 people with whom you should introduce them, AND you take the initiative to follow through with those introductions and are able to release the outcomes to them.

If reading through this list has caused your heart to skip a beat - as if someone was describing you in a way that made you feel truly understood for the first time in a long time, if ever - then continue reading. You need to know a few things about what it will take to get you into the position where you can exercise these strengths.

For the Organizational Leader

Malcolm Gladwell refers to three classes of people in his book, *The Tipping Point*, who are mysterious human elements that can spark word-of-mouth epidemics. Two of these curious species are *Connectors* and *Mavens*.

Connectors are the “handful of people with a truly extraordinary knack of making friends and acquaintances.” These folks have mastered what Gladwell calls, “the strength of weak ties.” They don’t have to be best friends with everyone, but they do wind up collecting far more acquaintances than average people can tolerate.

“The word Maven comes from the Yiddish, and it means one who accumulates knowledge... but what sets Mavens apart, is not so much what they know but how they pass it along. The fact that Mavens want to help, for no other reason than because they like to help, turns out to be an awfully effective way of getting someone’s attention. Mavens have the knowledge and the social skills to start word-of-mouth epidemics.”

These social epidemics that Gladwell describes cause a disproportionately huge impact from actions that would otherwise seem inconsequential, except for the

nature of these special people who engage in them. Consider Trusted Brokers as a rare combination of Connector and Maven, who have both unusually extensive connectivity AND highly specialized knowledge. Wouldn't you want to be associated with a small cluster of these folks, who are focusing on the subject upon which your mission statement stands? Wouldn't that be more valuable to you than access to a database?

You might *need* a Trusted Broker if:

- You have operated under the belief that your organization or church is the only one doing what you do
- You want to know how you compare with other organizations, but all those conferences seem like such a waste of time
- You are frustrated because you wish you had access to a database providing all the resources that you might need, but deep down know that you wouldn't have the time to search through it even if it did exist
- You instinctively know that good stewardship demands that the resources you're producing should be shared, but you don't have a venue for offering them to others
- You want to provide grassroots collaborative opportunities for your people with the wider body of Christ, but security concerns eliminate your ability to communicate publicly
- You are tired of feeling isolated and discouraged, and would like to feel the strength of having outside allies with whom you can confer
- You love the idea of working together with others to achieve a common vision beyond the capacity of any one of the individual partners, but the idea of initiating and drafting partnership agreements overwhelms you
- You don't want to know information that was recorded 7 years ago; you need today's news, "just in time," from a reliable source

Has reading through this list resonated with you? Did it expose a craving for effectiveness that you've had, but couldn't figure out how to actualize? Continue reading. You need to know the action steps to create space for a strong Trusted Broker Network to be nurtured.

Before launching into a description of how Trusted Broker Networks work on an organizational level, remember that this amount of structure is not required. Grassroots Trusted Broker Networks can operate between influential individuals who have no affiliation with anything larger than their own social circles. If an individual with Trusted Broker tendencies is encouraged to start a network by reading this booklet, then go ahead and collect your partners - no organizations required.

What critical needs do you have that can ONLY be met through a Trusted Broker Network created around a specific subject?

What one or two words would describe the essence of your specific mission? What other key groups or individuals would also resonate with those words? The right words will help identify those with whom you'd like to work. Try filling in the blank, "The _____ Trusted Broker Network." The subject needs to be specific enough so that the information it produces or activities that result will always be relevant to you, but general enough that others will have incentive to join you.

An example might be the *Unengaged People Trusted Broker Network*, or the *Somali Refugee Trusted Broker Network*. The *Global Missions Trusted Broker Network* might be too broad to be very helpful.

How to Create A Trusted Broker Network

Identify a Champion to initiate creation

This would be someone whom you trust. Someone who matches the characteristics of a Trusted Broker, but would also have the instinct to find others and initiate a network.

Create a place for the Champion to stand

Part of the reason that relational interconnectedness doesn't happen naturally is that it isn't anyone's job to act as a liaison with intriguing contacts outside their own organization. After all, in wartime, collaborators are executed. The word itself brings loyalty into question and threatens the brandedness and standardization of everyday business.

Then there are financial limitations. Budgets are tight for everyone these days, and usually reserved for advancing projects that focus on internal goals. Some consideration for a travel reimbursement budget for attending conferences might be in order. Maybe some of the money we would have spent on updating databases could be re-allocated?

Think about starting a small new department called Strategic Partnerships in order to authorize the Trusted Broker and officially recognize the importance of the task they will undertake. Trusted Brokers will create remarkable intangible benefits that will prove difficult to measure in traditionally accepted terms.

New ideas are threatening. They "don't belong" in systematic organisms. Even our physical bodies have a defense mechanism for inconsistent cells - they're called antibodies. Antibodies are automatically released to target and destroy material that "doesn't belong." If a Strategic Partnerships department is to survive these defensive attacks, it will need protection from leadership.

Set the Champion on the hunt to collect people

These are criteria for use in inviting a new Trusted Broker:

- Recognized as having qualifying experience in the theme of the Trusted Broker Network that is being formed
- Cooperative mindset - not competitive or contrarian
- Thought leader
- Easygoing and friendly - it's likely this person would enjoy the others and be enjoyed

The Champion casts the vision of the Trusted Broker Network culture to one who matches the criteria. The prospective Trusted Broker weighs their available margin, their freedom to participate, and their own incentive. Then she makes a decision to participate or not. The champion moves ahead with those who can move, and works to create greater incentives to join for those who aren't currently motivated enough.

Two simple lists

The Champion records the response of prospects as “marginally interested” or “intensely interested.” A free project management application named Trello can be easily configured to visually keep track of progress. The Champion is initially the core component of the network, where the other Trusted Brokers may not yet be connected except through their shared relationship with the Champion.

Trusted Broker Network formation

Once the Champion intuits readiness in a small but solid core group, he initiates community between all these trusted friends. He might decide to start when he has found four intensely interested and two marginally interested. At a moment of “ripeness,” the Champion calls an interest meeting with all the Trusted Brokers with the goal of birthing community between them collectively, based on the initial trust they each have with the Champion. Optionally, the Champion could add in new Trusted Brokers as they are found in consultation with those who've already joined.

There is no right minimum or maximum, but perhaps a reasonable range could be between three and ten in order to keep meeting logistics manageable. If the number of people in the Trusted Broker Network ever reaches twelve, it could be advisable to look for ways to subdivide into two networks with slightly different specialized foci, and retain ties to each other utilizing another layer of Trusted Brokers.

Maintain a conducive environment

New Trusted Broker Networks should resist the urge to immediately jump into projects, but begin with exploring overlapping interests and developing relationships. Create a private social network on one of the various platforms that exist (Slack, Facebook, Basecamp...). Schedule a monthly conversation on a video

conferencing platform (Skype, Zoom, Vsee...). Think about holding an annual retreat in a centralized location that may give opportunity to spend two to three days together in deep discussion.

Example of Nested Trusted Broker Networks

What would the ministry world look like if Followers of Jesus adopted the Trusted Broker culture? Imagine interlocking Trusted Broker Networks, nested together for even greater synergies, without interrupting the tight focus of each group. For example, suppose that you and I are part of the Diaspora Peoples in North America Trusted Broker Network (resist the urge to pause and think of an acronym). Diaspora people are those who have been moved from their homelands for a variety of reasons, and settled in other places. The three most broad categories are refugees and asylum seekers, immigrants seeking work as professionals, and international students. Each of these subcategories of diaspora would warrant having its own Trusted Broker Network.

An International Student in North America Trusted Broker Network could link together several of the campus ministries that already exist. It could also have people who concentrate on subsets of students from diverse parts of the world, or who practice different faiths: Chinese Buddhist international students or Saudi Muslims. Maybe the Buddhist focused people among the International Student workers would find it useful to create an overlapping *Buddhist Diaspora in North America Trusted Broker Network*. A lot of key information would exist between only two Trusted Brokers who stand in those crossroads.

It might not be unusual for one person to be functioning as a Trusted Broker in a couple of different networks that make sense for their personal or organizational goals.

In a world where this protocol has become commonplace, Trusted Brokers in relatively small groups could make the world feel smaller and make information more accessible because people trust relational connections.

The most ironic thought is that the only way to truly construct the perfect database would require a Trusted Broker Network at its core.

Got Coaching?

Would you benefit from a brainstorming session to explore how this Trusted Broker Protocol could be applied in your situation? This booklet has been prepared as part of a collaborative effort between NextMove and the Vision 5:9 Network - each of them a global network of collaborative churches and organizations. If you have any questions or desire further dialog, enquire by email to:

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