

# The Leadership Contact Advantage™



## Why Leadership Success Depends on Meaningful Relationships

A White Paper from Confident Approach

### Executive Summary

Organizations invest millions in leadership development every year.

Leaders attend courses on communication, coaching, strategy, change management, emotional intelligence and decision-making.

Yet many organizations continue to struggle with:

- silo behavior
- weak collaboration
- slow execution
- poor stakeholder engagement
- resistance to change
- underutilized opportunities

Why?

Because leadership effectiveness is often determined by a capability that receives surprisingly little attention: The ability to create, develop and sustain meaningful relationships.

At Confident Approach, we call this capability: **The Leadership Contact Advantage™**

Our experience, supported by decades of behavioral research, suggests that leadership success often depends less on what leaders know and more on who they connect with—and how effectively they build those relationships.

## Leadership Happens Through People

Strategies do not execute themselves. Change initiatives do not implement themselves. Organizations do not collaborate by accident. People make these things happen. Every important leadership objective ultimately depends on relationships. Relationships with:

- employees
- peers
- senior executives
- customers
- suppliers
- partners
- stakeholders

Leadership is therefore fundamentally a relational activity. The quality of a leader's relationships often determines the quality of the leader's results.

## The Hidden Leadership Gap

Most leaders know which relationships matter. They know:

- who influences decisions
- who controls resources
- who can accelerate progress
- who can create obstacles
- who needs to be aligned

Yet many of these relationships remain underdeveloped. Some are neglected. Others never begin. The result is an invisible leadership gap. Leaders understand the importance of the relationship but fail to consistently invest in it.

This gap often appears as:

- poor cross-functional cooperation
- fragmented communication
- weak stakeholder alignment
- slow implementation
- unnecessary conflict
- missed opportunities

The issue is rarely awareness. The issue is execution.

## Why Traditional Leadership Development Often Falls Short

Most leadership programs focus on the leader. They ask questions such as:

- What is your leadership style?
- How do you communicate?
- How do you make decisions?
- How do you motivate people?

These are important questions. But they overlook another critical question: **Which relationships must exist for leadership to succeed?**

LNQ® starts with a different perspective. Instead of focusing first on the leader, it focuses on the relationships that drive organizational performance.

## The Stakeholder Reality

The LNQ® process begins with stakeholder mapping. Leaders identify critical internal and external stakeholders and categorize them into three groups:

**Strong Relationships** Relationships characterized by trust, communication and collaboration.

**Relationships Requiring Development** Relationships that exist but need strengthening.

**Missing Relationships** Important stakeholders with whom little or no meaningful contact currently exists.

This exercise often creates powerful insights. Many leaders discover that some of the relationships most critical to future success have received the least attention.

## From Awareness to Action

Awareness alone does not create change. Relationships are built through behavior. Once stakeholders have been identified, leaders develop a practical relationship activity plan.

The questions become:

- Who needs contact?
- Who should initiate it?
- When should it happen?
- How frequently?
- What outcome is desired?

This transforms relationship-building from a vague aspiration into measurable leadership behavior.

## The Research Behind LNQ®

LNQ® (Leadership Networking Questionnaire) was developed by Behavioral Sciences Research Press, the same research team behind the internationally recognized Sales Call Reluctance® and SPQ Gold/FSA assessments. The instrument emerged from decades of research into: **Inhibited Social Contact Initiation Syndrome (ISCIS)**

This research explored why individuals often fail to initiate important contacts despite understanding their value. The findings revealed that hesitation, avoidance and contact barriers frequently limit performance—not only in sales, but also in leadership. The fundamental insight remains highly relevant: Organizations achieve results through relationships. Leadership effectiveness therefore depends heavily on a leader's ability to create meaningful contact.

## Why Leaders Avoid Important Contacts

Most leaders already know what they should do. The challenge is not knowledge. The challenge is action. Research suggests that leaders may experience barriers such as:

- reluctance to approach influential stakeholders
- fear of rejection
- fear of appearing intrusive
- discomfort with visibility
- avoidance of difficult conversations
- hesitation around self-promotion
- uncertainty in unfamiliar social situations

These barriers often remain invisible. Yet over time they can significantly reduce leadership effectiveness.

## What LNQ® Measures

LNQ® measures the behavioral factors that influence relationship-building effectiveness. These include:

**Networking Brake** Factors that inhibit relationship-building activity.

**Networking Accelerator** Factors that encourage relationship-building activity.

### Leadership Networking Behaviors

Including:

- Social Initiative
- Spontaneous Networking
- Assertive Networking
- Status Networking
- Referral Networking
- Public Speaking Initiative
- Tele-Contact Networking
- Visibility Management

### Leadership Networking Initiatives

Including:

- Internal Networking
- External Networking
- Corporate Intelligence
- Corporate Visibility
- Advice-Giving
- Liaison Activities

### Leadership Readiness

Including:

- Goal Focus
- Motivation to Initiate
- Motivation to Persist
- Goal Diffusion

Together these measures provide a comprehensive picture of a leader's ability to create meaningful contact.

## **Coaching for Sustainable Change**

Assessment alone does not change behavior. For this reason LNQ® is integrated with coaching and development planning. The objective is to:

- reduce contact barriers
- strengthen networking confidence
- increase meaningful activity
- improve stakeholder engagement
- build sustainable relationship habits

Leaders are coached while executing their stakeholder activity plans, ensuring that insights are translated into action.

## **Meaningful Activity vs. Busy Activity**

Many organizations measure activity. Few measure meaningful activity. Meaningful activity is not:

- attending more meetings
- sending more emails
- filling calendars

Meaningful activity means initiating the contacts that move relationships, collaboration and organizational goals forward. This distinction is critical. Leadership effectiveness is not determined by how busy leaders are. It is determined by the quality and relevance of the relationships they create.

## **The Leadership Contact Advantage™**

The most successful leaders are often not those with the highest authority. Nor are they always the most technically competent. They are frequently the leaders who:

- build trust quickly
- create strong stakeholder relationships
- connect people across boundaries
- develop influence through relationships
- maintain meaningful contact over time

These leaders possess a Leadership Contact Advantage. And in increasingly complex organizations, this advantage becomes even more valuable.

## Why This Matters Today

Modern organizations face unprecedented challenges:

- hybrid work
- digital communication
- organizational complexity
- rapid change
- increasing specialization

In this environment, relationship-building becomes a strategic capability. Organizations that systematically develop their leaders' ability to create meaningful contact gain advantages in:

- collaboration
- engagement
- execution
- innovation
- stakeholder alignment
- organizational performance

## Conclusion

Leadership is often described as influence. Influence begins with relationships. Relationships begin with contact. The leaders who consistently create meaningful contact are often the leaders who create meaningful results.

LNQ® helps leaders identify the relationships that matter, understand the barriers that limit them, and develop the behaviors that strengthen them. Because leadership success is rarely determined by what leaders know.

It is often determined by who they connect with—and how effectively they build those relationships. That is The Leadership Contact Advantage™.

## Competence Alone Is Not Enough

For decades, organizations have assumed that competence, hard work and technical expertise are the primary drivers of career advancement and leadership success. These qualities are certainly important. However, research suggests they may not be sufficient.

Studies examining senior executives and mid-level managers have found that successful leaders often combine competence with something equally important: **Visibility, relationship-building and strategic networking.**

The research also revealed an important distinction. Many professionals understand the value of networking and stakeholder engagement. Yet not everyone is equally comfortable initiating contact, building visibility or developing influential relationships.

In other words: The challenge is often not knowing what to do. The challenge is doing it consistently. This finding mirrors decades of research into behavioral execution and social contact initiation. People frequently understand the importance of specific behaviors while simultaneously experiencing hesitation, discomfort or avoidance when it comes to performing them.

As a result, important relationships remain underdeveloped, opportunities are missed and leadership effectiveness is reduced. LNQ® was designed to identify these behavioral tendencies. Rather than measuring the size of a person's network, LNQ® examines the attitudes, motivations and barriers that influence a leader's willingness and ability to create meaningful professional relationships.

Because leadership success rarely depends solely on what leaders know. It often depends on the relationships they build, the visibility they create and the contacts they are willing to initiate.

## **About Confident Approach**

Confident Approach helps organizations improve leadership effectiveness, team performance, customer engagement and behavioral execution through research-based methodologies focused on meaningful contact, trust-building and sustainable behavior change.

Our work combines insights from:

- Leadership Networking Questionnaire (LNQ®)
- Sales Call Reluctance® Research
- SPQ Gold/FSA
- Belbin Team Roles
- Behavioral Sales Science
- Organizational Development

Because sustainable results are created through meaningful human contact.

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