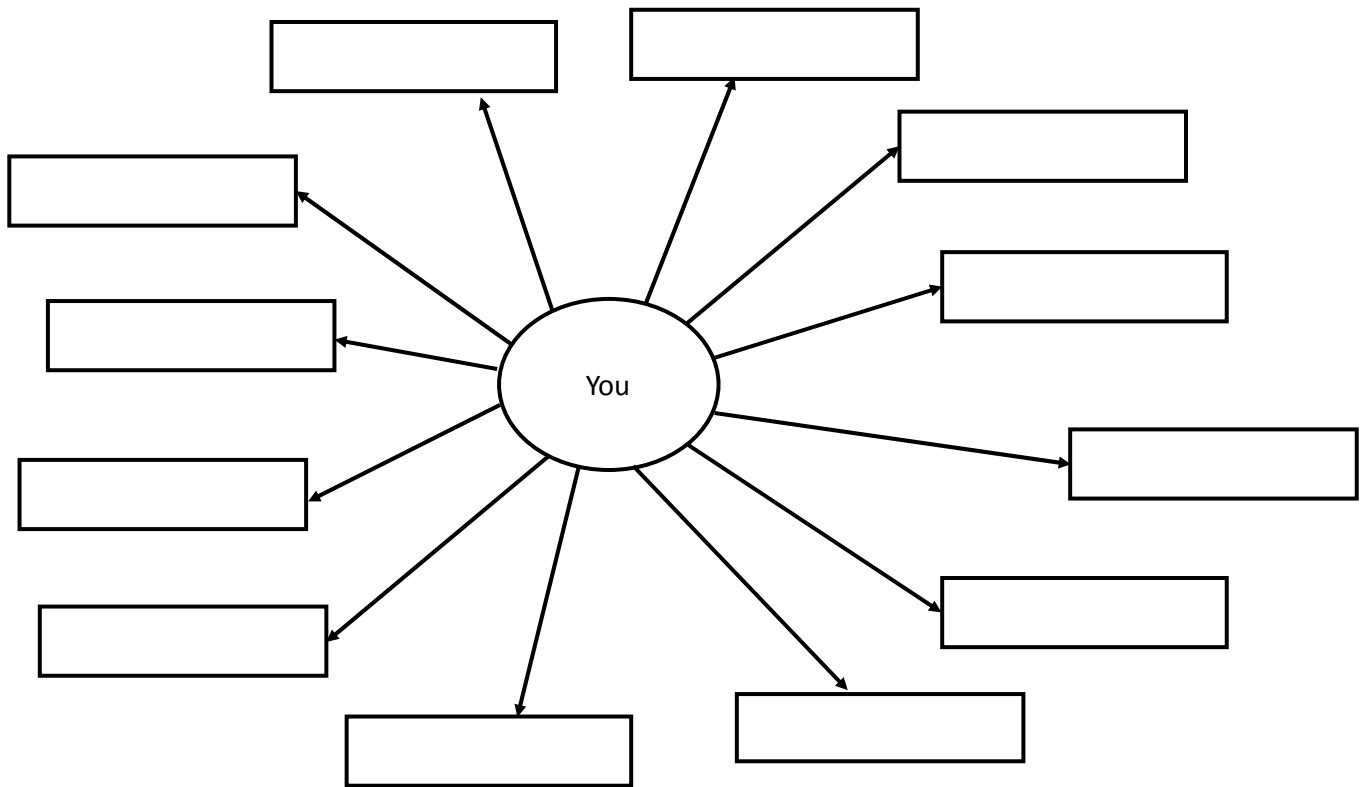


## Tips for creating your Personal Learning Network (PLN) Worksheet

**Step 1.** What does your current PLN look like? Map out your PLN in the spaces provided. Think of your current mentors, mentees, and peer collaborators. Include individuals both within and outside of your immediate network/institution.



**Step 2.** Think of 5 people you would like to add to your personal learning network.

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)

**Step 3. Create your action plan.** Name 3 behaviors you plan to implement following this workshop in order to expand your PLN

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

## Personal learning networks: A hack to maintain competence

By: Felix Ankel and Anand Swaminathan

Posted on the ICE Blog: <http://icenetblog.royalcollege.ca/2015/10/02/personal-learning-networks-a-hack-to-maintain-competence/>

You are a new #meded leader responsible for leading medical education programs to produce practice-ready graduates. You assemble a skilled team, attend #meded leadership courses, and participate in national meetings. How do you develop a discipline of continuous learning and adaptation for yourself? Can a personal learning network (**PLN**) help?

### Theory behind PLNs

Humans are hard-wired to learn and to network. (Geek warning, this is influenced by our **mirror cells** and **eusocial** traits). Many leaders network with people in their fields. The most successful leaders cultivate weak links at the periphery of their networks. Weak links (or weak ties) are individuals who span multiple networks or disciplines. Mark Granovetter first published “**the strength of weak ties**“ in 1973, long before Facebook, LinkedIn, and Researchgate existed. It is now one of the most often cited articles in the social sciences. Cultivating weak links outside of one’s traditional professional network allows for insight from diverse points of view, more effective decision making and co-creation of successful programs.

### Swami’s network. Example of a personal learning network (PLN)

When I started in education leadership 5 years ago, I was tasked with scheduling our resident academic conference (aka academic half day). I wanted to overhaul it. My challenge was that I’d only experienced our way of doing it. How could I build something different when I had no experience with anything different? I needed a network of educators to expand my own thinking and experience. I became interested in building my PLN to surround myself with smart people who think differently.

I started with the traditional route of network building: go to conferences, meet other educators and build relationships. The problem with this approach was that it required travel, (expensive and time consuming) without guarantees that I would meet the education leaders that I needed to meet. After a couple years of this unsuccessful approach, I discovered virtual networks existing in the Free Open Access Medical Education (FOAM) movement. Travel, geography and time were no longer an issue. Unfettered access became simple. I now have a robust heterogeneous PLN that has allowed me to collaborate with people around the globe.

Regardless of whether you pursue the traditional or FOAM approach to PLN building, consider these five pieces of advice.

- **Be authentic.** “The only way to do great work is to love what you do” – S. Jobs. Pursue your passion.
- **Be courageous.** Don’t be afraid to get out there. Take a risk and get involved. This means emailing leaders you respect, approaching them when you see them at conferences and getting involved in FOAM.
- **Be deliberate.** Build relationships with people you like working with. The best output comes from people who enjoy working together.
- **Be generous.** Give back as much as you take. Say yes when your network asks for help on projects, edits or advice and give back to junior educators when they come calling.
- **Look for weak links.** Search out people outside of your discipline and your location. Engage with people that are at the periphery of more than one network or discipline.

Following these steps, you’ll find yourself with a robust PLN that will challenge you to constantly improve yourself.

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