

A2A: The Tuck Network

Just do the numbers. Six degrees is supposed to be all that separates any person on the planet from any other. But when you're talking about the Tuck network, that number shrinks dramatically. Every graduate tells the same story: call someone from Tuck, whether it be a classmate or someone from a generation 20 years removed, and you will hear back without fail—some say within 24 hours; others say it never takes longer than 3.

"It's an untold story," says Jay Rice T'97. In 2001, when he was considering his next career move, several non-Tuck contacts asked if he knew another Tuck graduate, Peter Saulnier T'87. Rice did not. For one thing they were in different fields—Saulnier was CFO of Country Road Communications, a consortium of rural phone companies, while Rice, then a strategy consultant, was heading toward venture capital. Furthermore, they were in different Tuck generations, a decade apart.

Nonetheless, Rice pursued the lead. "I didn't hesitate for a second," he says, "and Peter was quick to take my call, even though he'd never heard of me. It was surprising that someone would be so helpful to a complete stranger, but that just shows the power of the Tuck network." For his part, Saulnier was happy to respond. "I love to get calls from Tuck people because you know that they will have a lot to offer," he says. "It's a way of widening your own circle."

Saulnier introduced Rice to the CEO of a startup software company, who ended up hiring him as vice president of business development, offering just the kind of front-line business exposure he had been seeking. This experience helped

Tuck alumni network over the phone, over email, and over dinner. They also meet at Tuck. The alumni shown in these photos attended Reunion in October 2003.



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prepare Rice for his current position as director of market intelligence and strategy at North Atlantic Capital, a technology-oriented venture capital firm. From this vantage point, he has been able to provide Saulnier with specialized research in the telecommunications industry and introductions to potentially useful contacts. “It feels great to be a giver as well as a receiver,” Rice says. “What goes around comes around,” says Saulnier.

Although their friendship via phone and email has deepened over time, Rice and Saulnier have yet to meet face to face. In a sense, they don’t have to: the Tuck connection provides both common ground and instant trust—a trust that carries over to the personal level. For example, says Rice, several years ago, a group of classmates hit hard by the declining economy formed a kind of informal support group, sharing contacts and job tips, discussing strategy, and even providing pre-interview coaching. “It’s great to have a set of friends who can be both cheerleaders and objective career counselors,” he says. “It was like the way we helped each other during job searches at Tuck. You’d think that as business school graduates we’d be competitive with each other, but we weren’t. We all wanted each other to succeed.”

TUCK LOYALTY

“Tuck Love” is an expression coined to describe intra-Tuck marriages, but to Cynthia Richmond Umscheid T’02, it also applies to the common experiences,

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—PETER SAULNIER T’87

LUIS BLAQUIER JR. T’93
Executive Director, Goldman, Sachs & Co;
New York, NY



JEAN DONOVAN T’78
VP, Leo Burnett USA; Chicago, IL

“When you meet a fellow Tuckie, there’s an immediate bond, whether that person is in your class or 20 years your senior.”

—CYNTHIA RICHMOND UMSCHIED T’02

devotion to the school, and loyalty to each other that Tuck alumni share. “When you meet a fellow Tuckie, there’s an immediate bond, whether that person is in your class or 20 years your senior,” she says. “When my friends were looking for jobs, they would contact Tuck alumni in whatever capacity and always hear back within 24 hours”—a reaction time that amazes her colleagues from larger schools. Umscheid is captain of Tuck recruiting at the consulting firm The Parthenon Group. She is pleased to be an additional link in the chain. “I’m willing to spread as much Tuck love as I can,” she says, only partially tongue-in-cheek.

Umscheid’s boss, Tuck Overseer William Achtmeyer T’81, is among those who set the tone. As Parthenon’s chairman and managing partner, he is on the receiving end of many requests. “All you need to say is ‘I’m from Tuck,’ and I’ll take the call,” he says. As is typical with Tuck alumni, the connection runs both ways. Achtmeyer estimates that he places from 20 to 25 calls a year to members of the Tuck network, seeking feedback on matters unrelated to his overseer concerns. The response he gets is as good as the one he gives. “My partners from other schools are astounded at how often Tuck partners can reach various people through the Tuck network. They’ll say they can’t get to a certain person, and we’ll say, ‘Gee, maybe we can—through Tuck.’”

Jim Becker T’75, who heads Wingspeed Corp., a data communications firm that serves the aviation industry, has a simple explanation for the network’s effectiveness. “If people come to you through Tuck, there’s already been a certain level of screening—you know they’ve been through a training process of intellectual rigor. And if you don’t know them personally, it’s easy to check them out.”

Becker’s wife and classmate, Mimi Macksoud T’75, has experienced the power of the network on several levels. Macksoud and Becker met at Tuck and married the year after graduation (Tuck Love, definition one). More recently,



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she and T'75 classmates Janet Duchaine and John McGeachie have embarked on a joint business venture, a customer-relations management system called Orion's Belt.

Macksoud and Duchaine's friendship ripened during the mid-1980s, when Macksoud and Becker, like many Tuck parents, received a mailing from a camp run by Duchaine's husband, Jonathan Fauver, also T'75, and decided to send their sons there (Tuck Love, both definitions). In 1999, when Duchaine was planning to end her 24-year career with the CIGNA Corporation to brave the storms of entrepreneurship, Macksoud was among the first people she contacted. Macksoud sent back a quick—and challenging—reply: “Just how entrepreneurial do you want to be?”

The enterprise that grew from this exchange is premised on the very idea of networks. “People have always made business connections the old-fashioned way, by thinking ‘Who do I know?’” says Duchaine. Orion's Belt leverages this standard approach using proprietary software and publicly available information to provide an instant read on who you know—and also on people known by those you know. “Orion's Belt is based on the latent design behind the concept of one degree of separation,” says Macksoud. “It's the living, breathing embodiment of the Tuck network.”

LAW OF SMALL NUMBERS

All business schools have alumni networks in one form or another. What distinguishes the Tuck network, in addition to its loyalty, is its relatively small size—a consequence of its small alumni base. Intriguingly, this limitation confers a special advantage. “The law of small numbers works in our favor,” says Liam

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—WILLIAM ACHTMEYER T'81



GARY CAHN T'83
Retired CFO, National Strategies;
Washington, DC

“The law of small numbers works in our favor.”

—LIAM DONOHUE T’95

Donohue T’95, who heads Arcadia Partners, a venture capital firm. “Other B-school alumni may get 100 phone calls a year from graduates looking for a job in private equity. There’s no way they can deal with that volume.”

In contrast, the Tuck-related calls Donohue receives are manageable in number—and varied in nature. “They run the gamut from people looking for jobs or advice on careers to companies looking for capital. There are those with needs and those with opportunities.” And Donohue makes it a rule to respond to them all.

Sometimes this open-door policy confers a direct benefit—as when Donohue made a highly profitable investment in a company proposed by a caller whose Dartmouth contact had directed him to Tuck. “Tuck connectivity also extends to the whole Dartmouth community,” says Macksoud, stressing another unique advantage of the network.

More often, the benefit simply derives from the abilities Tuck graduates possess. “The Tuck personality is down-to-earth and team-oriented. Tuck people get things done,” says Donohue. Which may explain why Arcadia employs some dozen Tuck graduates, either directly or through companies in its portfolio.

Michael Granger T’85, founder of ARK Capital Management, a financial advisory and private equity firm based in Chicago, has a different take on the Tuck personality. “Lots of care goes into selecting a Tuck class,” he says. “The school cultivates a certain kind of spirit from the beginning. It’s looking for people who can fit into the Tuck culture, people who will enjoy being at Tuck because it stands for community first. That’s what Tuck is all about. When you’re part of a good community, you can work wonders.”

Granger’s own Tuck community includes his mentor Fred Whittemore T’54, advisory director at Morgan Stanley, philanthropist, and member (and former



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chair) of Tuck's board of overseers, who has been generous with his time and counsel over the years. Another community member is his friend and confidante Lafayette Ford T'86, senior vice president at the Bank of America, who recently helped Granger plan an investment forum and arranged for it to take place at Chicago's Union League Club, to which he belongs. "I look for business opportunities for Mike, and he does the same for me," says Ford.

Granger's community also extends to the graduates, known and unknown, who call him for advice, referrals, and a candid take on opportunities in private equity. "When I get a message that someone from the class of 2002 has called, I feel a certain amount of joy that someone from Tuck is reaching out, and I look forward to talking with that person and seeing how I can help. It's a duty but not a chore."

Duchaine takes the idea of community one step further. "When a Tuck person calls, you know you have something in common with that person and that the bar of ability has already been raised. That's the strength of the bond. I never hesitate to take those calls, because it's Tuck—because it's family."

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—MICHAEL GRANGER T'85



See **Alumni Resources** on page 144 for services offered to Tuck alumni. For a list of online resources, visit www.tuck.dartmouth.edu/alumni and click on Online resources.

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