What is TENG?

This question probably strikes you as odd coming from me, but what constitutes the actual makeup of TENG? Our official guideline is that TENG serves CIOs, CTOs, Vice Presidents and Directors of IT, as well as comparable IT executives who earn at least $150,000 per year. But some discussions that I have shared with a few chapter leaders as well as some recent Email traffic lead me to believe that a few members are confused about our makeup. Here are examples:

- We are receiving more inquiries from non-qualified people. Some of our chapter chairs have reported that people who are not senior enough to qualify for membership are either referred to them or request to join. These nominations are due in part to altruism on the part of our members trying to help others and to the desperation shared by a large number of jobseekers. This latter group understandably sees TENG membership much as a shipwreck survivor views a life preserver. Some chapters refer these people to other local networking groups, if they exist. One or two chapters, who wish to contribute on a broader scale, are contemplating creating a "spin off" for technical and mid-management IT professionals who do not fit the TENG member profile.
- I personally receive on average minimally ten nominations per week of people who do not qualify for membership. Most of them are not senior enough, but some of them are clearly not IT executives. Nearly all of these nominations originate from existing TENG members, although a few come from FENG members and some other known sources. It is always difficult for me to reject potential members because it is counterintuitive to my desire to want to help them. Whenever possible, I refer unsuccessful candidates to other network groups or provide them with career search advice.
- I reject on average, about the same number of job leads each week for the same reasons. Please don't take it personally if I reject one of your leads, because I appreciate the thought and intent which underlies every member contribution.
- A few members have registered surprise when I have refused to share leads for positions which are too junior for our membership. Some feel that any IT lead should be shared, because one of our members will inevitably know someone who would fit. A few others have expressed differing views about what constitutes a senior IT executive. I agree that this is a judgment call, but I am consistent, barring a few late night mistakes.
- Some people have VP titles within companies with thirty employees and are very hands on technically. Others are Project Managers in larger firms, but direct twelve other Project Managers with a legion of indirect reports and have $40 million budgets.

As the national chair of TENG, I have to deal with a constituency that ranges all the way from a Director who has earned $150,000 per year plus incentives to a large enterprise CIO who may have earned a seven figure paycheck. Ask each of them to explain the term "senior IT executive" and you will hear two entirely different definitions. One challenge that we face is that many CIOs are less than comfortable networking with others who they feel would be subordinates. On the other hand, if we restrict TENG to large enterprise CIOs or if we divide it either by company size, or title or compensation, we would have a number of small special interest groups that would probably lack the networking and sharing clout we presently enjoy. I would like to think that under our existing model we

have more in common worth sharing with each other, than we do differences which may divide us. Extremes being what they are, I doubt that a CIO who is earning $350,000 will find value in networking with a Project Manager who has earned $110,000, which is why we don't accept the latter as members. But that CIO may be willing to network with another CIO from a smaller enterprise, or a VP or Director from a larger one and will encounter these people at local meetings.

When I first created TENG, I had considered including IT sales and marketing executives along with our core IT operational members, and initially accepted a few of them. I learned very rapidly that had I continued to accept them, TENG may have grown to be much larger than it is presently, but that the volume of leads we share would have caused every member to receive a significant number of leads that would be of no value. We accept people who are or have been CIOs, CTOs, Vice Presidents and Directors or comparable senior IT executives. Who are the "comparables?" They include CEOs and other senior executives of substantial technology firms who came up the IT executive track, senior executives from IT consulting and service firms and a selection of senior IT audit and IT finance leaders.

This is my own opinion, which is based upon purely anecdotal evidence, but my years as a recruiter have taught me that most senior executives are willing to network, but many of their subordinates are not. While a large number of our members acknowledge that they ignored networking in the past, for the most part, most senior IT executives have offered referrals to me whenever I was performing a senior level search. Ask most technical people for referrals and their typical reply is, "I don't know anyone." I suspect that many networking groups for the technical and mid-management people never gain the traction that senior groups establish. Networking ability and interest may indeed be an attribute which helps to define a senior executive or at least may be one indicator of someone with the potential to be one.

While I can't please everyone all the time, most members have registered their approval with TENG, especially because of its focus and quality. TENG is about more than just networking. It is also the fellowship and mutual support that occurs at the chapter level. Read the Success Stories. Most members, who land, do so through non-TENG sources. Those who stay on after landing, do so because TENG was more than just a stream of Emailed leads. It gave them hope, a sense of belonging, a common bond with their peers and some badly needed support. In some cases they did not always agree with me, but they understand that TENG, while imperfect, is free and better than nothing. They in turn, have given back through nominating new members, sharing leads, attending chapter meetings and helping others. They also understand that they have built relationships, which may help them land a yet unknown job or solve a challenging business problem in the future. On the other hand, there exist a group of other members who never attend local meetings, never share leads or introduce new members and who simply disappear when they land. I can't say whether this is a failure on my part or theirs. But TENG is like any other organization: you take out what you put in.

TENG will continue to grow and may change over time. One constant will be that as long as I am chair, I will do my best to see that it serves our members. As always, thank you for your friendship, trust and support.

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