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IL-NET National Training and Technical Assistance Center for Independent Living

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Creating Your Own Peer Network

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Today's presentation is brought to you by the Administration for Community Living at the US Department of Health and Human Services in conjunction with the IL-NET. The IL-NET is operated by ILRU and collaborates with NCIL, APRIL, the University of Montana, and a consultant network of subject-matter experts. The IL-NET T&TA Center provides training and technical assistance to centers for independent living, statewide independent living councils, and designated state entities.

Image Descriptions: Logos of Independent Living Research Utilization, Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living, National Council on Independent Living, and University of Montana.

Today's Presenters:

- Jeremy Morris, Executive Director, Ohio Statewide Independent Living Council

- Tyler Morris, Executive Director, CIL Jacksonville

- Kimberly Tissot, President & Chief Executive Officer, able South Carolina

- Sandra Breitengross Bitter, Director of Training, IL-NET at ILRU

Image Descriptions: Logos of Ohio Statewide Independent Living Council, CIL Jacksonville, Able SC, and Independent Living Research Utilization

What You Will Learn Today

- The importance of peer support for ourselves as people with disabilities working in IL

- To create peer support groups that will be supportive, strong, and will challenge you to grow

Disability Leadership Is Not Easy

- Ongoing ableism in personal and professional life

- Needing to adapt or help staff with finding accommodations

- Seeing and hearing hard situations from consumers and the community

- Political impacts

- Staying up-to-date with trends

- The need to vent and process with a group of people who understand

- Discrimination from other organizations and funders

- Leading a movement is hard

We Need Our Peers!

Business Lessons from Taylor Swift

Think of your bracelets as being a symbol of your IL network:

1. Exclusivity to Build Anticipation
2. The Power of Friendship Bracelets and Connectivity
3. Playing (And Leading) Acoustically
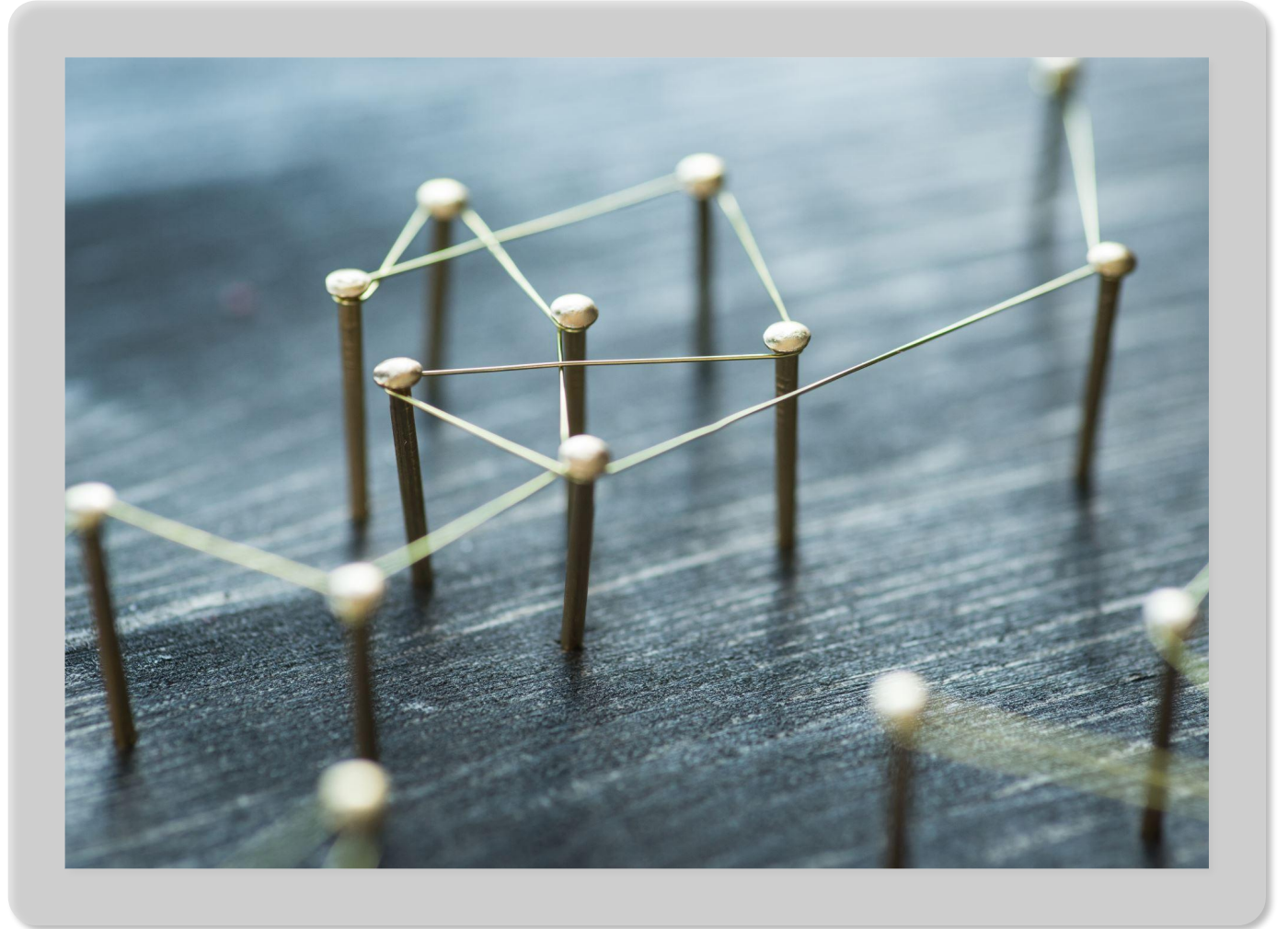4. Celebrating Eras Utilizing First Follower Theory
5. The Value of Authenticity
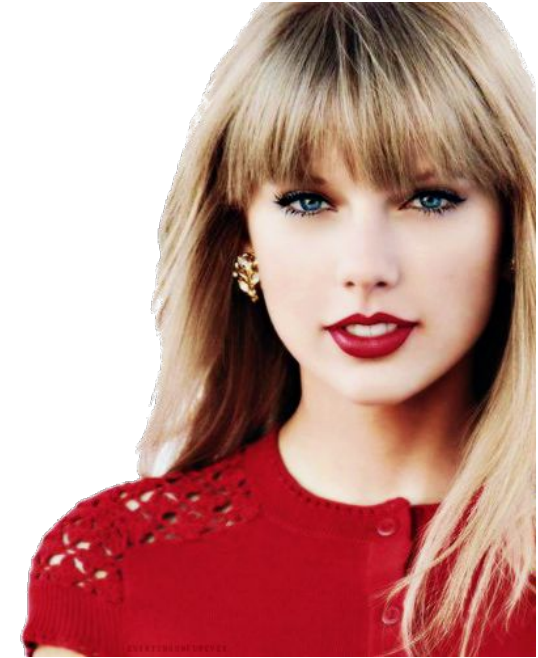
"You've got no reason to be afraid".
How do you start networking to build your IL Swifties?

Forbes, 2023

Three Forms of Networking

- **Operational**

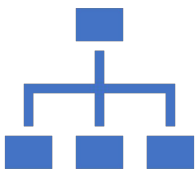- **Personal**

- **Strategic**

Operational Networks

Goal: Focus is on getting stuff done!

Mostly internal and focused on current priorities.

Who: Members are based on task and organizational structure.

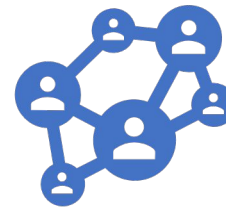**Depth:** Strong working relationships are the focus.

Personal Networks

Goal: Enhancing personal and professional growth

Contacts are external and focused on your interests or future interests

Who: It's up to you. There is no natural structure.

Breadth: Reaching out to those who can connect you to others.
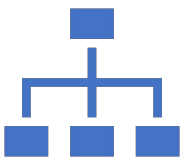
Strategic Networks

Goal: Figuring out future priorities and challenges and getting support for them.

Contacts are internal and external—focused toward the future.

Who: Membership based on your goals and strategy.

Leverage: Creating inside-outside links.

Benefits of Support Networks

- **Education**—Opportunities for continued learning and development

- **Perspective**—Exchanging diverse insight

- **Solutions**—Collaborating in response to challenges

- **Emotional support**—Understanding, empathy, mutual respect

- **Confidentiality**—Sharing without fear and judgment

- **Growth**—Introducing opportunities, development

- **Expanded network**—Connecting professional and peer networks

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Common Barriers to Support Networks

- **Limited existing network**—Challenging to find peers

- **Judgment**—Fearing the appearance of being less competent

- **Confidentiality & Trust**—Concerns about breaches of confidentiality and trust

- **Time Constraints**—Demanding schedules make time scarce

- **Ineffective Communication**—One-sided communication

- **Unalignable Values**—Differing philosophies and ethical norms

- **Organizational Culture**—Lacking support for peer connection

Considerations In Evaluating your Network

Relevance—Look for relatable peers

Trust—Ensure a high level of confidentiality

Communication skills—Seek clear and meaningful dialogue

Experience and Expertise—Choose those with relevant experience & expertise

Availability—Confirm peers have time and availability

Shared values—Align with those with similar values and ethics

**Diversity**—Consider those different backgrounds and leadership styles

Activating your Support System

- **Collaboration**—Working with allies creates more impact.

- **Goals**—Setting an expectation

- **Communication**—Maintaining regular communications will keep you connected

- **Show up**—Attending events and conferences will strengthen connections and create new ones.

- **Support**—Offering support and sharing resources creates positive relationships.

- **Humility & Gratitude**: Sharing credit and expressing gratitude goes a long way.

- **Be genuine**—Building relationships on trust and interest in other's success will be foundational.

- **Delegate**—Asking internal representatives to participate in professional groups/associations will build their leadership skills.

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What's Working For You?

- How are you connecting with IL peers outside of conferences?

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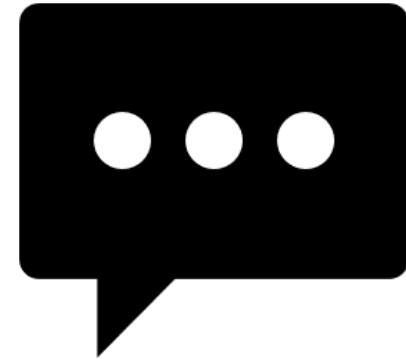
Questions & Discussion

What are you curious about?

What needs clarification or more explanation?

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Resources for Continued Reading

- Ibarra, H., & Hunter, M. (2007). How Leaders Create and Use Networks. Harvard Business Review. https://hbr.org/2007/01/how-leaders-create-and-use-networks

- Wei-Skillern, J., & Silver, N. (2013). Four Network Principles for Collaboration Success. The Foundation Review, 5(1). https://doi.org/10.4087/FOUNDATIONREVIEW-D-12-0018.1

- Crutchfield, L. R., & Grant, H. M. (2012). Forces for good: The six practices of high-impact nonprofits. Jossey-Bass.

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Evaluation Link:

IL-NET Attribution

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