



The importance of our social networks

In the knowledge society, in addition to technical skills and access to information technologies, it is becoming increasingly important for people to have diversified and supportive social connections. Although resources and opportunities may be available, one may not necessarily be aware of their existence, or even have direct access to them. In those cases, knowing people from different backgrounds, grades of expertise, and social levels turns out to be essential. For instance, who among us has never required a letter of recommendation in order to get a job, or had to rely on somebody else's knowledge in order to find a specific doctor? Isn't it through word of mouth that many kids get to know about the Clubhouse?

Strong and weak ties

Throughout our lives, we tend to form different kinds of relationships with different people. With people like us, our greatest buddies and closer relatives, we establish strong ties that reinforce our beliefs and provide us with the support required to endure life's challenges. With other people, with whom we usually do not have such in-depth connections, we develop weaker ties that help us address a larger variety of perhaps more specific needs. Even though we usually don't pay too much attention to our weak ties, some authors say that it is through them that we become aware of new opportunities and broaden our horizons. Some studies even demonstrate that, when searching for a job, in some cases having a wide network of weak ties is equally or more important than having strong personal skills.

Teenagers and social networks

In terms of personal development, one can understand adolescence as a time when young people strive to go beyond local family ties to build a social network more in tune with their own values and that allows them to explore new things in the world with their own legs. In that phase, the quality of the human support available, the different role models that kids have access to, and the kinds of relationships that they engage in turn out to be extremely influential for the rest of their lives.

Computer Clubhouses as social hubs

Based on the ideas described above, one can imagine that, in many ways, the 'club' aspect of the Computer Clubhouse is more important than the impressive technologies that are available there. As managers and mentors, we should make sure that the social opportunities that members experience are really the best for their age and condition. In order to do so, we should create activities in which kids get to know more about what happens beyond the Clubhouse walls, bring people who care to interact with them side-by-side, reflect about the people that they know, and develop an environment that helps them see the world as a supportive and resourceful place to live in. What do you think?

Further Reading...

Espinoza, Vicente (1999). Social Networks Among the Urban Poor, in *Networks in the Global Village*, edited by Barry Wellman.

Granovetter, Mark (1973). The Strength of Weak Ties. *American Journal of Sociology* vol. 78, pp. 1360-1380.