



## How to build a Personal Learning Network on TWITTER

-or-

### Why I was a Twit to Quitter TWITTER

When Twitter first made its appearance on the scene, I was skeptical about its value as a communication tool. I'm open about emerging media and willing to try anything, but this just didn't make sense. In its unmediated state, it's hard to see the value in Twitter. It's noisy, it doesn't work well for a conversation, and when I followed anyone who followed me, I had hundreds of Tweets popping up, interrupting my train of thought, and not adding anything to what I was thinking about. I just didn't get it.

And apparently I'm not alone in my first impression. Recent studies have shown that Twitter only has about a 40% retention rate, meaning about 60% of the people who use it don't come back. And an early survey found that only 7% of tweets were considered "of value" meaning they were being forwarded. I also took a good look at statistics about who was using it, and discovered that teens were not major users. It seemed to me that Twitter was dead in the water—after all, if teens didn't get it what future did it have?

A few months after I made my declaration of being a "Qwitter" I was convinced to take another look by a very smart friend whose opinion I respect. He made an incredibly persuasive argument for Twitter as an emerging communication platform that represented a whole new way of passing information around. Instead of being just a noisy gossip channel—essentially the update line on Facebook which seemed pretty shallow to me—here was a platform that had the potential to become a personalized micro-news channel. All you had to do was set it up properly.

Clearly, he saw something in it that I had missed on the first pass, so I figured I'd take another look; perhaps I was not looking at this from the right angle.

So I dove in again, got a good desktop Twitter manager, and set about creating my Twitter feed from scratch. And you know what?

What I found was a revelation.

Let me tell you why.

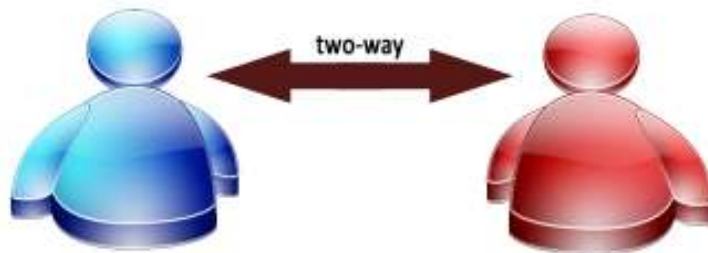
## TWITTER is a whole new pattern of communicating

Up until now communication platforms have been fairly self-explanatory, and worked in one of three ways:

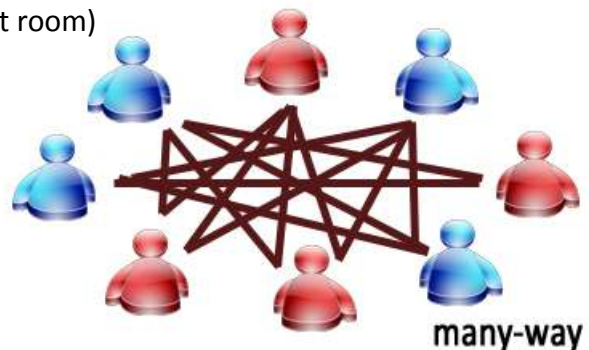
**One-Way Broadcast**  
(TV, radio, book, blog)



**Two-Way Conversation**  
(mail, telegram, telephone, e-mail)



**Group Conversation**  
(a table and chairs, a conference call, a chat room)



The internet opened up communication exponentially, but still, with first-generation development the patterns were familiar: e-mail is Two-Way, and a chat room is a Group Conversation, for instance. We get it.

Now we have TWITTER, which is the first of the next generation of tools that doesn't work in a familiar pattern. It's not at all self-explanatory how to get the best use out of the service, because what that means will vary. It is a very flexible pattern depending on your goals.

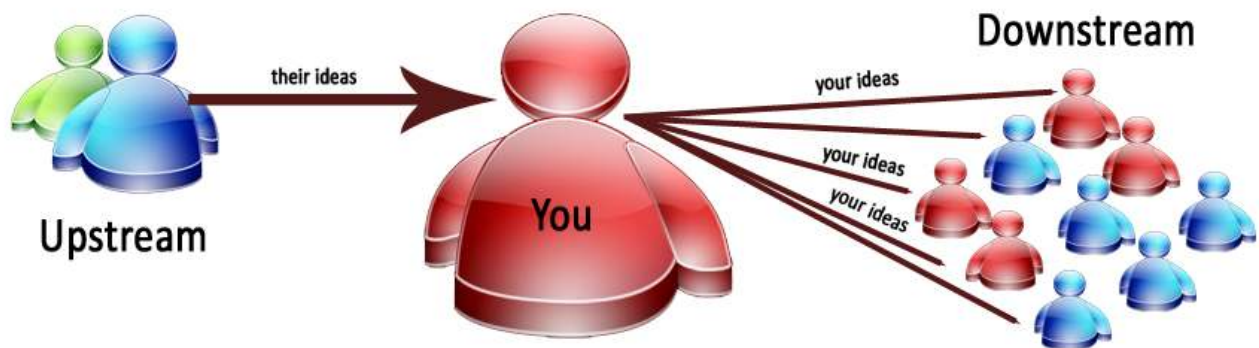
However, for those of us interested in the world of ideas, TWITTER is a very powerful tool for creating something new: a **Personal Learning Network**.

## HOW THE TWITTER PATTERN WORKS

The best analogy for understanding how TWITTER works is to imagine yourself standing in an idea stream.

**There is an UPSTREAM:** These are the people you choose to follow

**There is a DOWNSTREAM:** These are the people who choose to follow you.



**TWITTER is not a conversation.**  
**TWITTER is a network for broadcasting ideas.**

Imagine being able to subscribe to the thoughts of any person you are interested in learning from. Presuming they are on TWITTER, and presuming that they are good at it (more about that in a moment), it is possible to have a direct feed of ideas and interesting stories that excite you, make you think, and enhance your own personal growth. **That is a Personal Learning Network.**

### **PRINCIPALS for creating a good PERSONAL LEARNING NETWORK**

- **Subscribe to a very narrow number of people who consistently send down good ideas**
  - Look for people who Mindcast ideas , not Lifecast details that don't matter to you.
  - If you find some one you think might be interesting, follow them. If they send down 6 out of 10 Tweets that are interesting, great. If the quality is less, un-follow, and look for someone else more interesting or more to the point.
  - Think about following people who are leaders in your field, colleagues who are interesting thinkers, or bloggers who cover what you are interested in.
- **Don't start sending out ideas right away.** Spend some time adjusting your upstream feed.
- **Don't reflexively follow people who follow you.**



## Setting up a PERSONAL LEARNING NETWORK step-by-step

### THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT TWITTER

- Twitter messages (called Tweets) are 140 characters
- If you add a link to a tweet it's usually best to shorten it or it will eat up your whole tweet
- Programs like TweetDeck do this automatically, or you can go to [www.tinyurl.com](http://www.tinyurl.com)
- There are a couple of messaging conventions you might want to know:
  - Putting "@" in front of a person's username indicates a response to that person
  - Putting an "RT" in front of a forwarded Tweet tells people it's a forward
  - Putting a "#" in front of a person, event, or organization is called a "hash tag" and it is one of the ways people search for keywords. So for instance #MCDS would indicate a Tweet about Miami Country Day School. #ebooks would be the same for the topic e-books.
- The best Tweeters broadcast ideas, not news about themselves
- The best Tweets are quality over quantity
- Think of your incoming tweets as a stream of water. You don't have to drink the whole stream, just dip in to what peaks your interest.
- Adjust your incoming feed as much as you have to. People don't get notified when you unfollow. This is a different kind of social contract. You do not have to be nice or worry about what people think of you.
- Twitter has recently added a feature to the main site called "Lists". Now users can create lists of people they like to follow, often grouped by subject. This is a great way to get a feed going if you are interested in a particular subject. If you find someone who is a good tweeter on a subject you are interested in, see if they have any lists. For instance, lists for new, for education, for bookselling, for digital or e-books issues—you name it, someone has probably put together a list about it.



## AT TWITTER –It all starts here

1. Go to [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com) and sign-up for a user name and password
  - a. If you manage to catch it, decline Twitter’s list of recommended people to follow. If you don’t catch it, no worries. You can unsubscribe to these celebrities later.
2. Once you are in the program, click on the **Profile** link at top and fill in your profile.
  - a. Fill in a description that explains who you are and what you are interested in, on a professional or casual basis. Be specific about your interests, especially if you want to develop a following.
  - b. This profile is one of the things people will look at if they want to follow you. Add a picture or an icon.
3. Click on the **Find People** link at the top, and search for specific people you are interested in following.
  - a. Consider starting with these: A favorite magazine or journalist, a favorite blog, a colleague, an academic who works in your field, or a friend you want to follow.
  - b. More advanced: At Twitter.com, see who the people you are following are listening to (following) themselves. Chances are if you find their commentary valuable, they are also listening to some good people. Subscribe to anyone who looks interesting.
  - c. See if one of your favorite people has made any Twitter Lists. These are lists of people they think are interesting, usually grouped by topic. You can subscribe to an entire list that looks interesting, and then tweak it by evaluating it as it starts to flow in.
4. If you want to stop following people, click the **>following** link under your name, and click the wheel icon next to the person’s name. Click **>unfollow** on the drop down menu. You can have a great feed with only one person if it’s the right person.

## GET A DESKTOP FILTER –This will help you manage the flow

1. **Download TweetDeck**, a free Twitter manager at <http://tweetdeck.com/beta/download/>
2. When prompted, put in your Twitter name and password
3. TweetDeck will automatically import the recent tweets of the people you are following, and it will set up some pre-set columns.
4. If you have subscribed to both professional and personal people, break them out into two columns so you can see them separately.



### Basic commands:

- Create a column by clicking on the “blue t” icon at the top left
- Move a column by using the arrow at the bottom
- Post a Tweet of your own by clicking the yellow square at top left
- REMEMBER: a tweet can only be 160 characters
- If you mouse over anything in tweet deck you will get an explanation
- Mouse over the photo of the person and you will see some options for both the message and the person

**EXPLORE, EXPERIMENT, AND HAVE FUN! There’s no pressure.**

## WHAT TWITTER IS GREAT FOR

- A curated news feed from your favorite news sources or bloggers
- A way to explore a new topic by listening to the leading thinkers in a particular area
- A way to create a following by generating interesting content of your own, like interesting book recommendations, observations, or other creative content
- A way to alert your followers to blog posts or other content you are creating

## WHAT TWITTER IS NOT SO GOOD FOR

- Marketing yourself or your business without creating any content for your followers; for instance, just saying “Buy my Product” or “Shop My Store” is not very interesting to your followers, so you won’t build much of a following in this way.
- Making extended observations-use a blog or e-mail for that

## Fun Ways to Explore Twitter and Find Interesting Thinkers

**MentionMap:** <http://apps.asterisq.com/mentionmap/#>

Maps out a user relationship to other Tweeters, topics, and hashtags in a very beautiful and interactive real-time format. Start with someone whose ideas you like, and see who else is in their map.

**Search Twitter for feeds from your favorite magazines or writers.**

**Search the “Following” lists of Tweeters you like.** If you like their ideas, you will probably be interested in those people they follow. Before you follow someone new, scan their list of recent tweets. You will be able to tell right away if they are interesting to you.

**Check out the LISTS created by users you respect.** You will find them just to the right of the link to their Followers. If you like the topic of a list, subscribe and you will get the tweets of everyone on the list. Unfollow anyone not to your liking right away.

**Is there a public personality you really admire? See if they have a Twitter Feed.** Same goes for a brand or a store.

Remember, no one is notified if you “unfollow.” You are in complete control of the quality of information you get on TWITTER. You are also responsible for putting some thought into setting up a good feed for yourself.