

Knowhow: Building Relationships

Advice for forming business contacts that last

By Deborah C. Scaringi
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It is finally spring in New England! The grass is greening up and the tree buds are getting ready to burst open. Watching the world refresh around me is a welcome change to the wintry mountains of snow.

Recently, I noticed a robin diligently building her nest in a nearby tree. She worked swiftly, carrying each twig individually. She deftly wove each sprig together and I watched it slowly take shape into a recognizable nest.

In reflecting upon her work, I realized that this natural occurrence mirrors a process that can sometimes be taken for granted in the business world. Take a moment to consider how a nest is built — the bird selects single pieces of material and fits them together to create a shelter. Building the nest is the result of the effort of one

persistent creature that takes the time and effort to weave it all together. The final result is a comfortable resting place for the bird to raise her family. This effort is very similar to building the relationships necessary for a long-term successful business.

Thriving businesses are rooted in strong relationships that are built diligently over time. Each interaction made between two individuals intertwines with the next until a meaningful relationship emerges. Here are some points to consider when developing your connections:

- Each relationship begins by choosing a suitable foundation to build upon. Spend time developing relationships that show some potential. If you feel initial chemistry with someone, go with that instinct and build upon the spark.
- Real relationships take time and are built through single gestures of helpfulness and outreach. You can't force a relationship to flourish. Each email, phone call, status post or meeting builds upon itself. Slowly expand your connection with someone through single touch-points until a recognizable relationship emerges out of your efforts.
- Be courteous and friendly. Go the extra mile when you can. Offer useful information that makes their lives easier. Ultimately, these characteristics establish trust — a must-have component when building loyalty.
- Take a sincere interest in the lives and businesses of people. Sincerity cannot be faked — you need to believe in the people you choose to know.
- Be helpful in a meaningful way and without the expectation that you deserve something in return. Communication will become two-way when both individuals feel mutually connected to one another as the result of earned trust and chemistry.
- Make an effort to follow up on both business and personal topics. If it helps you, keep notes of the happenings in someone's life and ask them about it the next time you speak. Keep a balance — be mindful to avoid prying into personal lives or overstepping professional boundaries.
- Maintain relationships over a lifetime. If you get new business out of a relationship, don't disappear once you have the work. Be sincere in thanking people for the work and then continue to be in touch. The relationship should be inconsequential of the gained business.

Your goal this spring should be to think about how you build your relationships. Much like building a bird's nest twig by twig, relationships take time to develop before they become rewarding. Begin the process by identifying the right individuals with whom you want to connect. Commit to making small meaningful

gestures that build upon each other until they reach the tipping point of mutual trust. Most importantly, once a relationship is secured, maintain it for a lifetime.

Deborah C. Scaringi is a business development and marketing communications consultant. She can be reached at deb@scaringimarketing.com.