

## Building Relationships: The Single Most Important Aspect of Business

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In today's market, getting ahead means connecting with people and improving their lives

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What does it take to stand atop the current business world? For all their intelligence and hard work, most incredibly successful people got to where they are because they excel at developing relationships. This may sound naive but it's actually a hard-headed insight.

As networking expert Keith Ferrazzi observes in his book, *Never Eat Alone*, today's companies show their employees little loyalty, and employees give none in return. As a consequence, if professionals want allegiance and support, "we must find them in a web of our own relationships. It isn't the blind loyalty and generosity we once gave to a corporation. It's a more personal kind of loyalty and generosity, one given to colleagues, your team, your friends, and your customers."

### What Exactly Does It Take to Establish and Maintain Business Relationships?

Since the current business world calls for making strong personal connections, it's absolutely essential that you master the art of relationship-building. However, this is no easy task. Creating a support-base of mentors, friends, colleagues, clients, etc. requires a number of different skills, as well as a great deal of time and energy. Nevertheless, you can make it happen if you follow through on these crucial principles:

**Don't Inconvenience Anyone.** In discussing how to put yourself out there, executive talent agent Debra "The JobWhiz" Feldman asserts you need to size up the situation. Whether in person or on the phone, you have to make sure the other person isn't busy "so that you have their full attention and are not an unwelcome, annoying interruption bound to be ignored if not outright disparaged." Feldman, who has earned acclaim by generating personal introductions to source prospective career opportunities for senior-level executives, notes that most people simply assume they're engaging others at an opportune moment. Make a point of avoiding this common mistake.

**Be Especially Gracious to Assistants.** When it comes to those you're trying to schedule time with, their assistants are often the ones who determine if you get penciled in. **Recognizing this basic fact, Michael Crom, Executive Vice President of Carnegie Training, advises to "contact assistants during normal business hours and far in advance when dealing with time-sensitive items. Always follow up phone-conversations with emails which assistants can use to help keep track of their boss' schedule. This will make it easier for them to not only help you but want to help you."**

**Research Individuals You Want to Meet.** If there are people you want to get to know, research them before introducing yourself. Having taken the time to learn about their favorite projects and activities, you'll create a sense of intimacy discussing what they're passionate about. Peppering the conversation with humor and insight, you'll establish yourself as someone they would enjoy spending time with in the future.

**Be Patient When It Comes to Exchanging Information.** As far as taking that next step, Ferrazzi reminds people that there's no hurry when it comes to, say, asking for someone's number or suggesting a cup of coffee. "Don't rush it," he says. "Let the conversation get to a place where you have a reason to

follow up, so that suggesting you exchange info feels completely natural. If no natural opportunity presents itself—say, offering to email the link to an article you've been talking about—then it could be as simple as you apologetically breaking off the conversation to talk to someone else you know across the room. Don't grind your conversation into the ground—instead leave them wanting more."

**Follow Up Promptly.** Once you've had a great first encounter, make it your job to follow up—and quickly. Ferrazzi recommends following up within 12 to 24 hours after your initial interaction. Not only will this make someone feel significant, it will ensure that they have a vivid and positive recollection of you and your company. Adding that you should focus on what value you offer them, Ferrazzi says that "your follow-up is all about getting back to them with something they want—the contact you suggested, the name of the book you recommended, the address of that restaurant."

**Help People With What They Care About Most.** If people show a desire to spend more time with you, don't try to win them over by paying for fancy dinners or other extravagant outings. Rather, show a genuine interest in what they care about most: health, career and family. Ferrazzi affirms the belief that if you can provide meaningful assistance in any of these regards, you'll most likely earn great loyalty. Just think about it: wouldn't you feel loyal towards someone who gave you the name of a great doctor or landed you a job? How about teaching your kids how to play the piano? People appreciate all forms of kindness, but nothing counts more than help with vital concerns.

**Use Every Avenue Available.** Last but not least, remember to take advantage of online services. Social networking sites like [Community.keithferrazzi.com](http://Community.keithferrazzi.com) and [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com), the popular business networking site, are great ways to make contacts. These outlets enable you to come across a large number of people quickly and meet people you would never get to know in person or over the phone.

### **The Bottom Line**

When it comes to building relationships in business you have to throw any tendency for self-absorption by the wayside and think about what's good for the other person. While you should never let anyone exploit your good will, any beneficial relationship in business will entail you providing value to someone else. Ultimately, what you give is what you receive.