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Relationships, not Transactions

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In one of our recent meetings, the predominant conversation was all about the power of relationships and building your own web of interconnected relationships. This topic arose because the preliminary conversation was about the ineffectiveness of marketing. The frustration level with marketing tactics that cost too much and produce too little was, to put it mildly, extremely high.

So we explored relationships and what they can do for you. First and foremost, we agreed that the world is smaller and connections are instantaneous, yet the human element of business is more and more distant. Technology, more to do with less time to do it, and the ever-present multi-tasking is evolving business to purely transactional interactions.

Transactional based business is turning all of our products and services into commodities. Differentiating perceived commodity products and services with one-way marketing tactics can only be nominally successful at best.

We looked at the most successful people. They build their business based on who they know. They build on their relationships, and separate themselves from the masses by not acting like one of the masses. Successful business leaders recognize that the only true differentiator today is the relationship you have with your client. Relationships supersede transactions and differentiate us on an individual basis.

So what do we know about building relationships and engaging people in the right way?

Building relationships is a lot of work. It is not a one-time event, but rather an ongoing activity that needs to be part of your daily routine. Building relationships requires authenticity. Be genuine in your motivations. Remember, it's about the relationship, not the transaction.

There is risk in building a relationship because it requires openness and transparency. You have to give of yourself first before you can expect any

degree of openness in return. Effective relationship building also entails accountability to action – to others and to yourself. If you make a commitment, follow through on it. Trust builds when commitments are met.

When you do connect with someone, provide immediate recognition back to them after you've met. This could be as simple as an email, or an article you discussed, a book they might have an interest in, or a thank-you gift. Help by looking for connections to other people. Building relationships is predominantly not about serving yourself, but rather helping others.

Ask for personal information about the people you connect with, enabling the relationship to expand beyond just business. At their most effective level, relationships do not have a qualifier such as a "business" relationship or a "personal" relationship. Relationships are just relationships.

Build your base of relationships. Identify the Top 20 people you want to connect with NOW. Identify the Top 20 people you want to connect with LATER. Connect and reconnect frequently -- with emails, phone calls, quick visits, articles, books, etc. Always look to help, and don't keep score.

As business leaders, show the way regarding connecting and building relationships. Stop managing your business in order to grow it. Manage relationships that will grow your business. As hard as this may sound, stop selling. First come connections with people. The old adage is people buy from people. If you and your people are in a transactional mode, prospects and customers end up buying stuff because that's all they know – and stuff is a commodity.

Who you know is the precursor to success. How you deal with others paves the road to success. If you focus on building your relationships, and treat it as a top priority, success will follow.

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