

NETWORKING, *naturally*

By Thom Singer, San Diego State '89



All things being equal, people do business with those that they know and like. Prices can be matched, but a decade-long friendship and mutual respect cannot. This is one of the reasons that many top business people make the big money: their longstanding client relationships continue to bring in the deals. If a salesperson moves to a competitor, the business may very likely go with them. Those who understand the importance of having a professional network of strong relationships will never be out of a job.

What is Networking?

Networking is a word that many misunderstand and even more shy away from because they have a preconceived notion about it. They envision pushy salespeople trying to sell them a product that they have no interest buying.

A network is having a lot of people that know and respect you, and understand your business. It is then easy for them to call on you if they need your product or service, or refer you to others because you are first in their mind when a need arises. By the same token, you understand their business and look for ways to send them work. A network is a mutually beneficial “give and take” arrangement.

For many people, networking comes naturally. For others it has to be learned and the skills continuously honed. In the end, it is all about relating to other people and cherishing your relationships with those with whom you interact.

Why Strong Relationships Work to Your Advantage

In a fast-paced and competitive business environment things that make you stand out from the crowd are not only important, they are crucial. The core concept of networking to your business advantage is deceptively simple: All things being equal, people will give their business to the person with whom they feel the best emotional connection. While they gather information about a product or service on an analytical basis, they make their buying decisions based on their gut feelings.

Successful people build networks by cultivating true, long-lasting relationships. Building solid business relationships on foundations of less than genuine intentions will not work. People either know and trust you or they do not. Because a friendship is solidified over a long period of time, you will eventually be discovered if your motives are less than sincere.

You Have Been Networking Far Longer Than You Realize

From the early days on the playground you began making connections with people and forging friendships. Some of these relationships were stronger than others. Some were tumultuous. Others were joyous and beneficial. Most were somewhere in between. The point: you have been meeting people for a long time.



How Beta Can Touch Your Life

There are countless stories of Betas over the past 166 years who have assisted their brothers in achieving greatness in their personal and professional lives. Many have been presented with unique opportunities that forever changed their lives because of their association with our good and great fraternity.

My own experiences are no different. I have received job opportunities because of Betas, I was with a brother the night I met my wife and both of my children's godfathers are members of the Fraternity. In addition, when my youngest child was diagnosed with a rare medical condition as an infant, which required major surgery, it was a Beta that introduced us to the pediatric neurosurgeon who would save her life.

Some Assembly Required

Whether you are in college or out, from a small school or a great university, the friendships you forge with others can greatly impact your life. You need to reach out to other people and make your interactions with them a priority. This is an important activity you cannot delegate to someone else. Nobody can make and cultivate relationships for you. If you sit back and wait for a network of influential people to materialize around you, plan for a long wait. Look around you. You already have begun to network. But you must remember that at no point are you done. Your life will span nearly 100 years and countless people will pass through your life. Building and maintaining connections with these people has to be part of your routine, not just something you do on occasion. You have to make, keep and grow your relationships if they are to reward you with unimaginable opportunities.

When I went through fraternity rush in the spring of 1985, all of the houses bragged about the power of their strong alumni connections. As an 18-year-old college freshman I was not actually thinking about my future need for business connections. However, I did select Beta Theta Pi because the men of the Epsilon Beta chapter were of a quality that I wanted to be associated. On the night I accepted my pledge pin I had no idea of the extent that my Beta brothers would have on my personal and professional life.

It Takes Years to Successfully Build a Strong Network

One of the most important personal traits you need to successfully create a working network is patience. More often than not, people want you to prove yourself before you join their inner circle. Just as you would not invite a near stranger to Thanksgiving Dinner, people do not immediately welcome you into their network after an initial meeting. The pressure of a monthly quota can make one want to push relationships along faster in order to achieve more sales in the short term. To really build relationships takes time. This means months to some and years to others. If you cannot stay the course and let the friendship develop at a natural pace, then you will not succeed. Forcing a relationship will rarely lead to the long-term commitment you seek.

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