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Relationships are not Formed or Maintained in a Vacuum

By Monica Wofford, CSP





The Dyson commercials have altered my perception a bit about the value of living in a vacuum. Silly, I know, but have you ever seen this man's commercials? Based on the popularity of his product and his passion about vacuums, I'm beginning to wonder if living in a vacuum

of his might be worth checking into. Okay, seriously, wouldn't it be nice sometimes to live in a nice, cozy, secure, fully protected enclosure where no harm could come to you and no distractions would ever take your eye off the "ball"? Well, pun completely intended, with reference to my vacuum analogy... that would "suck."

Without the potential for an occasional hurt feeling or a multitude of distractions, some might argue you are missing the spice of life: interactions with the variety of people out there. You can't develop relationships in a vacuum, figuratively or literally, and from those very relationships that bring fun and pain at about the same pace, you are able to elevate your own awareness and collaborate with those who may have an idea or two. Relationships are important, both personally and professionally and now, more than ever, you can make them on an hour by hour basis. How? Well, there's social media, and networking groups, and work, oh my! There's Linked In, and Facebook, and Twitter, oh my! There's BNI, and Woamtec, and a chamber for every need, oh my! I think you get the idea and the most relevant questions one might have about building relationships is not "Can I?" or "Should I?", but "Where to start?" and "How do I go about it?"



We are now living in the world's largest virtual cocktail party and just like at a real party, there will some folks you gravitate toward and some you back away from. It takes a discerning eye to know the difference in some cases, but remember not to throw the "baby out with the bathwater." Just because some folks at the party don't tickle your fancy doesn't mean you never go to another

about this sometimes daunting task of building relationships? Here are a few tips that may help.

BE YOURSELF - When collaborating with others, people want the real you not that character you play on TV, or your online profile. Be real and be consistent in your “real-ness”. If you are an over the top, gregarious person, who drinks Mountain Dew for breakfast (hmm... who could that be?) then be that person. Those who like that will gravitate to you and those who don't... well... as Bill Cosby once said “If 2% of the population loves what I do, I can still make a comfortable living.” The 98% of people, who may not think YOU are not worth hanging out with, are NOT reason to “Fake it, 'til you make it!”

REMEMBER TO ASK AND LISTEN -

We grow tired of those who talk incessantly about themselves and forget to ask anything about us. Maybe they're interested in us, maybe they're not, but if they never ask you a question, you're assumption might be they don't care to know about you. Don't be guilty of this “all about me” stereotype. Ask questions of others out of interest and remember that you never know who they might know that you might be able to help.



This same rule applies to selling to build a relationship. Ask questions to determine if this person is even interested or a potential customer before you cram your sales pitch down their throat.

FIND COMMON FRAMES OF REFERENCE -

Usually we are pulled toward those with whom we have things in common. If only we could wear a sign that says what your top five preferences or interests are, it would make it more efficient... but perhaps less fun. For task oriented people, this can be a challenge, but make a strategy or game out of it. See how much you can find that you share in common with someone else. Ask unusual questions that don't pertain to the weather or their job. Observe what they are wearing, what's on their key chain, on their wall and so forth and find topics, people, or elements that you both share that will build a common ground for conversation.

INVITE AND ALLOW - If you have heard

immediately relevancy. There are too many connotations associated with pushy sales people, dates who don't take no for an answer, or folks who "follow up" long past the time when the subtle "no" has been delivered and you don't want to get caught with this kind of pushy reputation. Ask questions, show interest, and "invite" the person to join you in a relationship. Let it happen and back off a bit if it's not happening naturally. There is something to be said for the appeal of someone not being overly eager and then you winning them over. You can't do that by pushing, but you can if you invite and allow them to come to you on their own terms. In fact, those people with a high need for control will find this method FAR more appealing.

Building relationships that you can collaborate with and invite into your inner circle takes work, but the moment it becomes work, you're likely pushing something that may have run its course or would not have happened naturally. The work is about interacting, engaging, sharing, allowing, inviting, and caring. And the truth is that if you really care to get to know someone and it's authentic, that will come through in your interaction and chances are the relationship will happen. Oh, and then there is that ever present sense of your own value and Contagious Confidence™. Having a relationship with yourself in which you value your own gifts, skills, and talents and believe you are WORTH having a relationship with is as important as the steps mentioned here. Sometimes it pays to go back to the basics first. Would you want to be in a relationship with someone who doesn't even like themselves? Besides, you're pretty cool to hang out with and have some great ideas to share that would add to the collaboration, right? I thought so.

Stay Contagious!

About the Author: Monica Wofford, CSP, is the CEO of Contagious Companies, where she helps develop skills that stick. Wofford also provides Key Note speeches and training for middle management to executive level audiences and works with Fortune 1000 companies such as Estee Lauder and Hallmark, and organizations such as the FAA and The US Mint. She is the author of Contagious Leadership and may be reached at 1-866-382-