

Building Connections Beyond Email or Text

Description

Relationships are one of the biggest determinants of our success. When we connect with people on a deep level, we may end up doing business with them. They may send referrals our way. More often than not, these people become informal mentors long-term. Business unfolds through strong relationships, but such relationships rarely “just happen.” We need to make them happen.

I travel a lot and meet a lot of people. Since I've always found the social capital factor to be incredibly powerful in building businesses and communities, I make a point of connecting people. If I know a person from one circle I feel could generate some real energy with a person from another circle, I'll usually send an email to both parties introducing them.

Then later I will check back in with one or both parties. Too often I'll hear, “I never heard back from that person.” Often, I find that the two people exchanged emails or texts and perhaps mentioned connecting by phone or even getting together. Yet the meeting never happened. It's at this point that I often wonder why one of them didn't pick up the phone.

I do understand why many people prefer email or text. We're all busy, and it can be much faster to zip out a quick email than to commit to a phone call (which could turn out to be long and drawn out). Some people prefer email because it gives them time to formulate their thoughts. Some people just have phone anxiety. I get it, but there are too many benefits of connecting in person to choose not to do so!

When you're trying to lay the groundwork for a real connection, there's no substitute for a real conversation. Here's why:

1. It gets you out of a crowded inbox.
2. You'll stand out from the crowd. When most people choose not to call, they'll notice and remember you.
3. It helps you make a better personal connection. Human beings respond to voices. They create rapport. People will be more invested in you after hearing your voice.
4. It makes misunderstandings less likely. People will get who you are and what you do much more efficiently than if they just skim (and maybe misread) your email.
5. It creates a different level of synergy. The give and take can generate some great ideas, and you can quickly find yourselves brainstorming a new project.
6. You may find you have more in common than you ever realized you did!

TIPS

The next time someone introduces you to another person, make a real effort to connect. The key is to approach the person with the intention of adding value rather than trying to “get” something from them. A few suggestions:

1. In your email don't just write, “Let's connect sometime.” (Sometime never comes!) Instead write,

“May I call you? I have some time right now.”

2. Position it as a quick chat. “I’d like to talk to you for 15 minutes.”
3. If the person is too busy to talk right then, then ask to schedule a call. Even better if it’s a video chat.
4. In person is even better. If you happen to live in the same city, suggest meeting for lunch. Suggest a couple of dates.
5. Do a little research on the person before you call (or meet). Come up with one or two talking points based on what you learn. For example: “I saw that before this job you worked at XYZ company in Chicago. I spent a couple of years in Chicago, too. Did you go to any Bears games?” This gets the conversation rolling, and they’ll appreciate that you took the time to learn a little bit about them.
6. Don’t try to convince or sell. This is more of a “getting to know you” call. Yes, let them know what you do but focus more on the other person, what their *what* is, and on making a connection.
7. Be warm and authentic. Keep it light and friendly. Be a pleasure to talk to.
8. Really listen to the person. Don’t be in such a big rush to say what you want to say that you interrupt them or skim right over what they say. Respond thoughtfully and ask questions. This demonstrates respect and makes the customer feel important.
9. Add value in any way you can. If the person mentions a problem and you have a solution or know someone else who does, share that information. Suggest a way to fix the problem or offer to introduce them to someone who can. If you don’t benefit directly from the solution, even better!
10. Follow up with a thoughtful email or a handwritten note. Thank them for the call and, if possible, share an interesting article or news item related to your discussion.

It would be impossible to achieve this kind of connection solely over text or email. Meaningful connections in business are everything. It may feel like a risk to make a phone call, but the bigger risk is missing out on what could have happened if you had.

Finally, look for ways to pay the social capital-building forward. Always be thinking, *Who can I introduce this person to?* You’re generating positive energy and showing others you believe the world is a place of abundance, not scarcity. People will be drawn to you. They’ll want to work with you. And you’ll be helping to spread the trust, collaboration, and good ideas that help businesses and communities thrive.

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