

How to Nurture Professional Relationships

One of the most important skills you can develop to be successful in your professional life is to be successful in nurturing and growing relationships. Time spent on this activity will create lasting benefits for everyone.

by Kevin Eikenberry

Early in my consulting career I started telling people the consulting business is a relationship business. I was right, just a little short sighted.

Actually all business is a relationship business.

All work is a relationship business.

All leadership is a relationship business.

And while our focus in this article is on business or professional relationships, I believe you could say, at some level, life is a relationship business.

Regardless of how you would say it, it is hard to overlook the importance of relationships in all of our professional endeavors.

Having stronger relationships creates less stress, promotes higher productivity, improves speed and efficiency and helps our work in almost every measurable way.

Like most anything of great value, strong relationships don't just show up on their own. If you want relationships at all, let alone better ones, you must do something. You must do your part, take responsibility and do the things that will build relationships for mutual benefit.

While there are many things you can do to nurture relationships, the seven that follow are things you can do – right now. And, when done consistently, authentically and with sincerity, each will help you nurture and grow the professional relationships you desire.

Make it a priority

If relationships are important to you, you must make them a priority. I know you are busy. I know you have plenty to do. I know that unless there is a major problem or conflict, relationships won't logically show up as an urgent item on your to-do list. (If you have conflicts or an issue, you need a different article!) If relationships really are important to you, put your focus and your calendar where your mouth is. Spend time doing the things that will build relationships, rather than neglecting them. Neglecting relationships lead to weed-filled garden results. What's that, you ask? A big mess!

Care

If you want to nurture relationships, you have to sincerely care about people, their thoughts and feelings, and their well being. It is often said (and I've seen the quote

attributed to different people) “People don’t care how much you know, until they know how much you care.” Your professional expertise and knowledge matters, of course, but keep it in perspective. When you do, let people know you care. And if you really don’t care, you need to think long and hard about why that is true.

Make connections

Connections come in many forms. On one hand we need to connect with people on things that matter to them. This, of course, starts with caring. We also can make connections for people with other people. Once you know their interests and needs, you can introduce them to others, connect them to resources and/or connect them to anything else that would help them.

Be trusting

Want more trusting relationships? Trust others. Look for opportunities to show your trust, knowing that people tend to live up to the trust placed in them. Will you occasionally be disappointed? Sure. But will you build relationships further and faster in every other situation (and perhaps even in the relationship where you are disappointed)? Absolutely.

Expect the best

Much like trust, you can expect the best of other people. People can tell when you are being cynical or have low expectations. People can also feel it when they know you believe in them and have confidence that they can succeed. Ask yourself – how often do I truly expect the best for others? And, when I do, do I let them know?

Listen

It seems so simple, yet it is most often overlooked. Think about any person you know, and realize that they likely yearn to be really listened to. Do you ever feel that way? And how do you feel about another person when they really listen to you? If you are like every person I’ve ever met, when you are listened to it strengthens the relationship with that person. You can do that for others – anytime (including right now). LISTEN!

Take the lead

Inherent in all of these suggestions is one important element. If you want to nurture relationships in whatever way you choose, you can go first. Relationships won’t grow unless someone takes action. Be the one to go first. Make the first move. Offer the olive branch. Make the apology. Ask the first question. You get the idea. Take the lead.

These are just seven of probably 107 (or more) strategies you can use to nurture your relationships and help them grow. I encourage you to take personal responsibility for the quality and health of your relationships, today. All of these tools can help you take that responsibility and take your relationships to a higher level now – and forever.