

lasting | relationships

By Rajesh Setty

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“Shared joy is a double joy; shared sorrow is half a sorrow.”

Swedish Proverb

The problem with networking today:

Networking, apparently, is key to success—even encouraging many to seek out an MBA program that supposedly gives them a “packaged” network, and thus the success they seek. Ahem!

Success today—in business, especially—is not a one-man effort. It has never been, and will continue so. To succeed well—what many call making the dream a reality—you need help. Numerous books and “smart” classes coach the art of networking—typically winding up asking the reader or student to attend networking meetings, exchanging cards, and to send out “connect” emails. They all help—to an extent only, though. Have we ever stood back and wondered why?

People attend “networking” meetings hoping to establish connections that will help them succeed. Here are a few reasons why “networking meetings” may not help:

The WIIFM attitude: People walk into a networking meeting EXPECTING to serve their own purposes: What’s In It For Me (WIIFM)? This does not help them or the meeting. While some may change their attitudes, numerous more will continue to seek some purpose in the networking meeting, and slowly—after finding no singularly remarkable achievement—give up on the exercise.

Value: The WIIFM (I love these acronyms that serve absolutely no purpose—they are not even remarkable enough to be remembered!) attitude directly throws up another pitfall. The individual’s value to the meeting is a good starting point—how many of us have truly invested in ourselves to be of value to others? Stop for a minute now, and review this.

Poor communication skills: One may have the right attitude and also something of value to offer but may not have the skills to package what he or she has to offer into a nicely turned value pitch. This is a problem unless the other person has “mind reading” skills.

Relevance: If you got the wrong place, you may not have anything relevant to offer to people.

Wrong Objectives: Some people have the wrong objectives for a networking meeting. Their criteria for success include “the number of business cards collected, given or exchanged.” Even if they succeed in their goals, it may not mean much.

Bandwidth: Every relationship takes away a part of your life and you should be willing to give that kind of time and attention to nurture the relationship. If you don’t have the bandwidth to foster a relationship, you are better off not starting one.

Wrong expectations: Just like those “get rich quick” schemes that rarely work, expecting to become a great networker by attending networking meetings won’t work.

Primary Driving force: What Matters Most

Most people are found working on at least two projects at any point—one

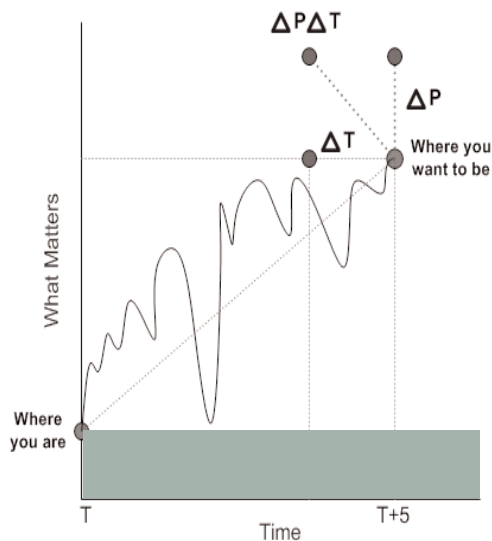
professional and the other a personal project. I say “at least two projects” since I am sure all of us are working on more than two projects: probably four or five projects at work and another four or five projects at home (personal life). This is the way of the new world. It is neither good nor bad—it is the way it is. For those of you, who keep wondering whatever happened to “focus”, remember this.

In other words, everyone has several “What matters” graphs for their life. Amongst these, there is one or may be two things that matter most to people.

Take a “What Matters” graph for any person. For this discussion, let’s assume that one of the key things that matters to this person is Money. So, the “What Matters” graph is plotted on Money. Point A refers to the current situation. It can be any amount that the person currently has (may be \$100K or may be \$100M or any amount.)

There are two regions in the graph. The shaded part is called the

“Forbidden Zone” meaning no person will want to plot something in this region in the future. Example: If a



person has \$1M and if money is something that matters to the person, he or she won't wish to have \$500K five years from now.

The second area is called the “Dream Zone” where the person will plot whatever matters to him. Where exactly the point is plotted depends on several things that include but not limited to attitude, self-esteem, and belief on the person's capacity to reach that spot. That's point B (where you want to be).

Now, we are all smart people and we know that going from Point A (where you are) to Point B (where you want to be) is not a straight line.

You may reach point B or somewhere there in a jagged line with a bunch of successes and failures on the way.

Action Items:

- How many “What Matters” graphs do you have in your life?
- How do these look like?
- Amongst these graphs, can you identify your primary “What Matters” graph?

The relationship building framework

In this section, we will establish a framework for building lasting relationships. There are some important issues that concern ALL of us in our everyday lives that you may want to remember when you meet someone.

1. **Everyone is managing multiple projects:** I am assuming that we are all interested in developing relationships

with powerful people. There is one thing in common defining most powerful people—time. As we handle multiple projects simultaneously, we have developed the chronic ailment of lacking sufficient time to give each of our project—and powerful people are no better off (at least this should be comforting!).

2. Everyone wants to be listened to:

While we are interested in talking about what we think is interesting, many times our audience is distinctly interested in something else. A good way to clear the clutter is for us to give in—and LISTEN. We are now with an upper hand because we know what the other person is interested about, and can quickly engage their attention if we can contribute to their interests. Round one to us! Now, let’s move on to the framework. Here are the steps:

1. Identify What Matters
2. Provide a Time Advantage to your relationship (dT)
3. Provide a Performance Advantage (dP)

4. Provide a Performance AND Time Advantage ($dP.dT$)

5. Design a Two-Way Street

6. Build fairness from ground-up

7. Communicate with Clarity

1. Identify What Matters

In the first few minutes of your meeting, your only job should be to listen and understand “What Matters” to your newfound acquaintance. While this may look like a big task, all you need to do is to LISTEN. You will be tempted to talk but listen. Otherwise, there is very little chance that you will talk something that will be of interest to the other party.

Remember that you will never get absolutes – neither on where the person is or where he wants to go. That is not the objective. When the person talks about some of the projects that he or she is working on, you have to start inferring from these projects to understand what matters for the other person.

2. Provide a Time advantage

Once we identify what matters to the other person, our first job should be to explore if we can make an impact on this relationship from a time viewpoint (dT), where the time to achieve a goal is reduced by the benefit of the relationship. Let us suppose that the person has some ambitions to reach certain goals in certain timeframes. The impact of our relationship could probably help the person achieve these goals in lesser time—providing a “time” leverage to this relationship. This is probably one of the most powerful benefits we can explore offering.

3. Provide a performance advantage

The other way to make an impact on any relationship could be in terms of performance. What could you do to stretch the person’s goal a bit higher? Suppose the person wanted to be at \$5M mark in five years time, with your help, could the goal stretch to probably reach \$5.25M? This is another powerful additive to the relationship that only you could possibly bring (dP).

4. Provide performance and time advantage

How about combining the two? You can also add value on both dimensions – Time and Performance ($dP.dT$)

In other words you can help the person reach higher goals in a shorter time. What could be better? Now you probably are in the rare bracket of people who will be adding REAL value to the relationship.

5. Design a two-way street

What could the other person do in return? Of course, we know that you know about your primary driving forces in play. The best long-term relationships are mutually beneficial and neither party “uses” the other party for a one-sided benefit. Could the other person make an impact on time or in your performance or on both dimensions?

6. Build fairness from ground-up

Once you go through the above five steps, it is not rocket science to divine if

both parties (you and your new found acquaintance) will be happy when they answer the WIIFM question in context of this new relationship. If one of you is making a difference the size of a parking lot and the other is making a difference the size of a football field, you know that it is not a fair game—and no point in pretending it is. One of you will figure out that it's not—sooner than later.

Note: What if this is not a fair game but you still want to get into this relationship—when you can't give enough to equal what you will receive? There are many things that you can do but two things come to my mind:

Build capacity: You should do this anyway, but in this case it is extremely important to DO it. Build enough capacity to ensure that you CAN at some point give back enough

Give First: You can always give without expecting a return. Take time to give without expecting a return for some time. You can build enough equity in the emotional bank account to start a serious relationship.

7. Communicate with clarity

Remember that you are not drafting contracts to setup a new relationship. You should be able to nicely communicate to the other person that you ARE an opportunity for him or her. Better yet, you should be able to communicate that you are NOT coming in the way of their opportunities. You won't have a lot of time to communicate this – so investing in improving your communication skills – oral, written, non-verbal, email, phone or whatever medium you can think of – is always a great investment.

Even the best intentions are wasted if they can't be communicated with clarity.

Building your relationship building muscle

Now that you have a framework for establishing a long-term relationship you can now focus on supercharging this relationship. Remember that every

relationship takes a piece of your life and you should be willing to give away that piece of your life as an investment towards building that relationship. In the initial days you build relationships, you have a lower leverage (as there are only a few relationships that you can gain instant leverage from) but as you progress in this journey you have a higher leverage, and you can get a lot out of every hour of your life.

Once you are committed a long-term relationship with the other person (let's say John) you can supercharge this further by following this simple five step process.

1. Observe both of your networks

Both you and John had your own network before you met each other. The network has the same characteristics in general. There are some people close to you and there are some people not so close to you – geographically and emotionally. While you may think that you have a network of hundreds and thousands, let's focus on filtering it to those connections where you know

what matters to each one in your network. They may be geographically far away from you but you are in contact with them at least at a reasonably regular frequency.

2. Identify potential connections

The next step is simple and straight forward. Of all the key connections you have, identify those connections that can make an impact on John's goals and desires. For the sake of discussion, let's assume that you identified three people Fred, Sara and Dana who might benefit from building a relationship with John. So, there are three potential connections:

- Fred : John
- Sara : John
- Dana : John

Each of these connections makes sense in the first pass. I am sure John will be happy with any of these introductions. But wait!

3. Filter and fine tune

The qualification however is not complete and we need to go through

one more level of filtering. Here are some filtering questions:

What can John do to each of these connections? What impact can he make on these people's lives?

Who amongst these are open to a new introduction? Who can give the new relationship the attention it requires? We all know that timing is everything. If one of your network is in the middle of a tight project with looming deadlines, this may not be the best time to make a new introduction.

What is the past history of such introductions? What are the track records of these people when you made a new introduction for or to them?

When you filter and fine tune, may be Dana will need to drop off from the potential connection list leaving only two connections:

- Fred : John
- Sara : John.

4. Make introductions

Connecting people is one of the most

beautiful things that you can do for two people. Without you, chances that the two of them would have met NOW are quite remote. By filtering and fine tuning, you are setting up an opportunity for each person – an opportunity to get further to their hopes, dreams and desires – faster than they could or an opportunity to reach to levels higher than they originally anticipated.

Your job is now to connect two sets of people – John : Fred and John : Sara. Make it as simple as possible. Provide the contact information for each of party and the reason why they both should meet each other. That's it!

If you want to make this process easy, my friends at *Fresh Tilled Soil* have created a simple application called “You Should Meet” using which you can make introductions and keep track of them with ease. Check it out!

[Disclaimer: I am involved with the company “You Should Meet” as an advisor simply because I love the application and admire the people over there]

5. Step away

This is the most important part. I learnt this from one of my heroes Tim Sanders (the author of “Love is the Killer App” and “The Likeability Factor”.) You are not a broker and you are not making the connections to get something out for yourself. Your best bet to make this work is to **step away** and let both the parties develop a long-term relationship. You don’t have exclusive rights on any relationship and if you try and pretend that you do, you will only frustrate yourself and others in the process.

How do we execute the “Step Away” part? It’s easy and you can do it as part of the introduction. You can say something like, “I hope you both take it up from here. I am happy to help if there is a need but otherwise, I wish you both the very best.” With this, you are giving a clear signal that there is nothing more that you are looking for as part of this connection and you have stepped away making room for a new relationship to blossom and prosper.

Don’t forget the basics

We covered one approach on “how” of building bulletproof relationships. While you can use some of the techniques that have been outlined so far, none of these will WORK if you forget some of the basics or fundamentals. Here are a few of them:

1. Clarify your purpose

It all starts with the purpose. If your purpose is to gain a competitive advantage and the vehicle for this is going to be “long-term relationships,” you are starting off on the wrong foot. Gaining competitive advantage should come in as a “side-benefit” of powerful long-term relationships. It cannot be any other way. On the other hand, if your purpose is to genuinely provide significant help and you derive happiness in the success of the relationships you build or introduce, you will get a lot more than you can imagine.

2. Never misuse privileged information

The fact that you have a long-term relationship with a person means that

you both trust each other—completely. Obviously, you have a lot more information about this person—and much of it is confidential. There will be times when you COULD use this information for your personal gain. I say you COULD and not you SHOULD. Misusing the information is the fastest way to destroy that long-term relationship you took years to build. Typically, quick short-term gains have disastrous long-term consequences.

3. Don't rob Peter to pay Paul

This is not the best analogy that I could find. It still helps me make my point. I have told this before that every long-term relationship you build will take up a piece of your life. You have to invest the time necessary to grow the relationships. One easy way to find this time is to take away from people that are close to you—immediate family members. We both know that it's not the right thing to do. Let's leave it at that.

4. Grow

One word that seems simple, but is extremely hard to manage. You have

heard this before: You need to be running just to stay where you are. You are either sliding or rising. You can't stand still. This is not an option. You will have company whether you are sliding or rising. The company you will have when you are rising will let you rise higher faster. The company you have when you are sliding will provide you sympathy – which helps but won't take you to any great heights. To be clear, sliding is very different from failing. When you slide, you are consciously not taking care of your interests. Failing is just a statistical result when you try new things. You are smart and intelligent. Who would you want to be friends with – the ones who are growing or the ones who are sliding? If it is clear for you, why do you think the other person will think any different?

5. Have respect for people's time

Time, unfortunately is in short supply in everybody's life. We all have so much to do but there is so little time. The more powerful a person is, less is the time he has available to spend on

things that matter less to him. You can win big if you just ensure that every time you request time from a powerful person, he gets the highest ROI (return on investment for an interaction) for that time spent. That way, you can be assured that you will get another meeting. If not, you can get away with one meeting and forget about any further interactions with that person.

6. Use the tools in the right fashion

We are definitely living in interesting times when it comes to the number of productivity tools that are available to us today. Take networking and the situation is no different. You will find many social networking tools at your disposal. Most of these tools don't charge you money to use their basic services. Unfortunately, if you are networking in the wrong manner, social networking tools will only make your situation worse.

I have met too many people who think their “LinkedIn” contact count is an indicator of their power. In some cases,

it may be true but very rarely is it a common trait. I have seen that many of these people spend enormous time in increasing the contact count rather than spending the same time in building relationships. After a while, they may achieve their dream number (of LinkedIn contacts) but that may mean nothing if there is no ongoing investment in the relationship from both sides. I am sure many of you LinkedIn users out there continue to get requests to “Link In” from someone that you truly don't yet have a relationship.

LinkedIn is a great tool if used right. There are many ways of using LinkedIn right. The above was one simple example of a great tool being wrongly used. Think about your own life. How are you using the tools that are available to you? Sometimes I think that it would be better not to use a tool than to use it wrongly.

7. Never be an “extra baggage” for anyone

My friend used to say it jokingly – “You should either be a driver,

navigator or a passenger but you should never be extra baggage. Extra baggage adds weight and sometimes costs money to just lug around.” None of us want to be in this category consciously. However, several of us may be playing that role without our knowledge in some people’s lives.

Questions from the field

In the last couple of years, I have spoken at several places and shared these concepts. At the end of each talk, I face many questions. I have compiled a partial list of those with my responses in this section.

Question: I don't have time. Is there something that I can do fast?

Response: I wish I could say yes, but I am afraid I cannot. Building long-term relationships takes a long time. There are no short cuts to this. Every relationship that you want to build will take away a piece of you. For the relationship to be meaningful, it requires your investment. There is one positive news, though. As you become more powerful, you will gain more leverage. With higher leverage, you can do things faster than someone else with lower power and leverage. So, start acquiring power and increase your leverage and you will have less complaints about lack of time.

Question: I help a lot, but nobody helps me back. So may be in my case your advice of investing first may not help.

Response: I am sorry to hear that. The power of reciprocation is unquestionable in all of our lives. It is actually strange to hear that it did not work in your case. But don't give up. May be you need to look at who you are helping. May be the people that are being helped don't really think that you are helping. May be they are thinking that you are just doing your duty – and that they don't need to give back anything. There is some soul-searching that you need to do now.

Question: How easy is it to build long-distance relationships?

Response: Not very easy. The principles are still the same. You have to add value (provide time advantage or performance advantage or both) no matter where the other party is residing. With the current technological advances, the distance is definitely shrinking but

you can never replace a handshake with a video conference. To make up, walk the extra mile to strengthen long-distance relationships.

Question: How do I build relationships with people who are more powerful than I am?

*Response: You **want** to build relationships with someone who is more powerful than you. That person wants to build relationship with someone who is more powerful than him or herself. If you look at this chain and if the above logic seems valid, it will be impossible for anyone to build a strong relationship with someone more powerful than them. Fortunately, there is help. However powerful a person is, he or she is working on one or more important projects and there is never a case where he won't welcome new help, especially if it is substantial. Any powerful person can easily determine (usually in a very short time) whether you will be an opportunity or a liability for themselves. If you can prove that you can be an opportunity for the other person, why wouldn't they want to engage in a relationship with you?*

Question: How many people should I connect in a year?

Response: Of course, there is no clear or absolute answer. From what I know of master networkers (or shall we say master relationship-builders) they make north of 300 connections in a year. If that looks daunting, please don't worry – they didn't start there. They got there by diligently working and investing in such relationships. It all takes time.

Question: I don't have anything to contribute? Can I still build relationships?

Response: Yes you can. But would you be happy with relationships that won't have anything to return to you? Anything in life that doesn't contribute will get marginalized very quickly.

Question: When is a good time to start building relationships?

Response: Let me start my response with another question – “When is it not?” It is never too late to start building relationships. Just the fact that it takes a while to build a strong relationship, it is better that you start early.

Question: I am happy to invest in building relationships. But how do I make sure that I get the right return every time?

*Response: Relationships will help business. They are **not** the business itself. Of course, there are no guarantees to this investment, as there are no guarantees in any other investment—including money. Sometimes you get more than what you expect, sometimes less, and sometimes nothing. Sometimes you will get your returns in just a few months, sometimes in a few years, and sometimes a few decades later. In fact, you will waste a lot of time if you keep thinking about the right return on investment for every investment you make in a relationship. It may even make the relationships very artificial and business-like. In the end it may hurt rather than help. Returns will come but it is hard to be scientific about the quantity and timing of it.*

Question: What are some good books to read?

Response: That’s an easy one. I have provided a list of books that I think will be useful in the next section. However, relationship building is an action sport – meaning you have to be in the playground rather than on the stands. The books will definitely help but what really helps is how much of what you get from the books you put into practice.

Relationship building Reading List

Here is a list of books that will help you in building bullet-proof relationships.

Influence by **Robert Cialdini**: Influence is all about how to communicate to influence others. If you don't have the ability to communicate with clarity, all bets are off.

Fierce Conversations by **Susan Scott**: Don't be misled by the title. This book is all about learning to have authentic conversations with people that matter most to you.

Purple Cow by **Seth Godin**: Purple Cow talks about creating remarkable companies. This book aims to transform you to be remarkable. Many concepts that Godin teaches in *Purple Cow* can be applied to yourself as a person.

Love is the Killer App by **Tim Sanders**: Sanders clearly explains the importance of knowledge (why you should read more), network (how you should leverage your network) and compassion (dealing with people). Since I read that book I have made more than a hundred new connections between the people in my network without expecting a personal gain. It has worked great so far!

Never Eat Alone by **Keith Ferrazzi**: Great book on networking. Ferrazzi practices what he preaches and has applied the same principles to become one of the most networked men in the world.

The Innovation Paradox by **Richard Farson and Ralph Keyes**: Farson teaches a powerful lesson to everyone that life is a series of successes and failures. No exceptions!

Selling the Invisible by **Harry Beckwith**: This is a masterpiece from Harry Beckwith. It is about selling services. However, there is a lot of relevance as you can't escape SELLING yourselves almost everyday.

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Rajesh Setty is currently the president of Foresight Plus where he partners with select business leaders to provide them with a sustainable and unfair competitive advantage. Setty also serves on the boards of multiple privately held companies in the US and in India.

Setty’s latest book *Beyond Code* (Foreword by Tom Peters) was published late 2005. He speaks and writes frequently on topics that include Entrepreneurship, Leadership and Open Source., and maintains a blog called *Life Beyond Code*.

Praise for *Beyond Code*

“The theory and practice described in BEYOND CODE are right on. Read it as if your life depends on it. It DOES!”

- From the Foreword by Tom Peters for *Beyond Code*

“Rajesh understands what makes the biggest difference in project and technology management: People. This book will give any reader a tool kit to avoid "thing thinking" and manage way beyond simple code. Read it and grow.”

- Tim Sanders, Author of “Love is the killer app”

“Beyond Code is a little powerhouse of a book - an explosive mix of inspiration and instruction, exercises and enthusiasm.”

- Dan Pink, author of “A Whole New Mind”

“Beyond Code is not just great for software consultants - It's great for ALL consultants.”

- Marshall Goldsmith, author of “The Leader of the Future”

“Beyond Code is packed with wisdom. It should be required reading for every young professional, and remedial reading for many further along in their careers.”

- David Maister, Author and Consultant