

You Need Relationships before Transactions

By *Harrison Barnes*

My wife and I enjoy taking classes. We've taken classes in meditation, various exercise classes, acting classes, different types of yoga, Eastern religion, and even classes that simply deal with the nature and meaning of various things.

Several years ago, my wife and I took a class with a rabbi. It was a nice class, and I enjoyed it. The rabbi seemed very committed to what he was teaching, and I had a lot of respect for him. He was very committed to the subject he was teaching. His work was his life. Most of the people who are really good at something will work long hours at it and dedicate their lives to it.

I once had a remarkable English teacher who would spend two to three hours grading each student's papers. He would use all sorts of differently colored inks to signal specific types of grammar issues and wrote long, in-depth comments on each paper, often half the length of the paper itself. He often spent more time grading the papers than the students had spent writing them. In addition, he would write college recommendations for his students that were often five or more pages. His commitment was incredible, and I have never seen another teacher like him.

Because this teacher was so committed to his work, I have made an effort to stay in touch with him throughout my career because I have great respect for him. Anyone who has that level of commitment tends to attract a great deal of respect. This is true for teachers, lawyers, doctors and others. Commitment says a lot, and this level of commitment deserves respect. The world does not take dabblers seriously. Commitment matters.

However, all the skill and commitment in the world pales in comparison to the power of relationships, and what relationships and connections can do for your career.

About eight years ago, the rabbi called me and announced that he had been fired from his job with the Jewish university we had taken the class at. I did not ask why. I offered him office space and financial support to get back on his feet. He turned down the office space because he wanted to work from home, but he accepted \$1,000 from me.

A short time later, he started teaching groups of students. Over the past several years, his popularity has grown, and he now has hundreds of students taking classes from him. I recently saw him on a nationally-syndicated television show where his teaching was featured. His star is rising, as it should be, with his level of commitment.

Over the past several years, he has called me each year. The [abbreviated] conversation typically goes like this:

"Hi Harrison. How are you, and how is your wife?"

"Good."

"Last year you gave me \$1,000. Could you give me \$5,000 this year?"

"I'll give you \$1,000."

"Thanks. I'll send you a link, and you can make a donation online."

"Okay, thanks."

"Bye."

Initially, when this man was fired from his job and called and asked for help, I was more than happy to give it. In fact, he spent a long time on the phone with me, and I wanted to help him a great deal. If he had asked for \$10,000 during that initial call, I might have given it to him. We had a relationship at that point, and the relationship was meaningful to me. In fact, I would have liked to have given him thousands of dollars a year if he had only made an effort to have a relationship with me.

What occurred over the next several years, though, did not work for me. He would simply call me and ask for more money. I gave him the same amount of money each year. If I did not make the donation online within a few days, I would get an email reminding me to make the donation right away. Since the "donation" seemed to be just money supporting him, it was more like he was just asking me for money. As his organization grew to be more and more successful, the money to support him really was no longer necessary, but, for the next few years, I kept giving him money due to our short, one minute phone calls.

The rabbi called me yesterday. It has been several years since I started giving him money. It has been bothering me that he just calls, asks for money and that is the only time I hear from him. This time, I told him so.

"You cannot expect me to give you money without any relationship," I told him. "You do not invite me over, you do not come see me, you do not reach out to me with notes and other correspondence, you do not even know what I do for a living! I'm not going to keep supporting you without more of a relationship."

I was hoping the rabbi would understand that in order to continue to remain successful, he needed to form relationships. You cannot just demand money from people and expect them to give you money forever. Instead of taking my advice, however, the rabbi said something I could not believe:

"I teach fundraising to the American Counsel of Rabbis and know how to raise money. I am very good at it."

"No you are not," I told him. "I know someone worth hundreds of millions of dollars that has been completely turned off by your behavior, just as I am. That person could easily write you a check for millions of dollars without batting an eye. Because you are so pushy and do not care about having a relationship with the people you are asking for money from, however, he will never take your calls."

What was so interesting to me about this rabbi was that he was someone who should be doing great things. He could, for example, probably start a university. He could have many more students and be far more successful. He is very smart and

very committed. Commitment is not enough. You cannot get people supporting you without forming relationships. You need to have relationships to go places.

In the recruiting industry, far too many recruiters never reach their full potential because they care too little about relationships. Instead of building a relationship, they simply pick up the phone and ask the person they are recruiting if they are interested in opportunities. If the person says "no," then they simply move on to the next name. I've interviewed countless recruiters over the years. Experienced recruiters come in many stripes.

For example, there are recruiters who will come into an interview and brag that they consistently make 100 calls per day looking for candidates. These recruiters will occasionally find low-hanging candidates who are interested in moving, but these recruiters typically do not do all that well. The reason that these recruiters do not do that well is because they are concerned with the transaction and not the process. Being concerned with the process means developing a relationship with people.

The most successful recruiters have a different approach. These recruiters may spend years getting to know less than 100 attorneys. They will spend as much time as they can with many of these attorneys and do everything they can to get them into their good graces. They will send interesting articles and personal emails now and then. They touch bases during various holidays and birthdays. They are constantly reaching out and forming relationships and more concerned with the process than the transaction. If business comes to them, then that is good. If not, they are having a good time in the process of relationship building.

A by-product of this relationship building is also the ability to learn information about your industry that you would not otherwise learn.

If a man wants to have sex with a woman, he simply does not walk up to the woman and ask her to have sex. How often does that happen? If someone did this, people would think he was crazy. Many women might call the police or even sue if it happened at work! Instead, most men try and get to know the woman and may take her out on several dates and learn a lot about her. People do not want to be used. Almost everyone wants a relationship and not just a transaction.

Why do people try and go after transactions and not relationships so often?

I know a very successful person who works as a financial advisor, which is basically a stockbroker. This man spends every weekend inviting various people over to his home for barbecues and spends most of his evenings taking people out for dinner, to movies and doing other sorts of networking. He never asks for business and, because of this, people respect him more. They feel good that he is spending time with them, and they refer people to him. He earns millions of dollars a year doing a job that does not even require a college education, and this is all due to the fact that he focuses on the process and not the transaction.

Anytime someone approaches any of our companies, I want to maintain a relationship with that person throughout their career. It is nonsensical to look at anyone as a transaction. Why not dedicate your career to connecting with people and serving them with advice and whatever you can throughout their career, regardless of whether or not they will ever spend money with you? You should nurture every relationship you have and ensure that you are doing your best to create a bond. No one should be looked at simply as a transaction. Instead, they should become a relationship to you.

I know a man who wanted to work for our company. He was working for another company for seven years before he finally told me he was interested in working with me. He called me every four or five months and asked me out to lunch. He sent holiday cards and was always checking in. This sort of thing is not unusual among high-level executives. More importantly, when this man wanted a job, I was right there and hired him instantly. I did not have the budget to hire him, but found a way because he had formed a relationship with me. With the bond we had developed over several years, I would have felt terrible not hiring him when he finally was looking for a job.

Your most valuable assets are your relationships. People rise and they fall based on the strength of relationships. If you look at anything as simply a transaction, then you can be undersold, outbid, and just become a service provider. If you look at something as a relationship, you become a friend, advisor, confidante, and get the satisfaction that you are connecting with numerous people.

In law firms, the most successful people are typically not the smartest, or even the most committed, people. In fact, it is often the most intelligent people who are the least successful. While the smartest attorneys may be committed, without relationships and relational capital, they have a difficult time maintaining strong long-term careers. Attorneys who are able to connect with others are also the same attorneys who are able to get business and keep the smartest and most intelligent attorneys busy.

In your career, skill, drive, and smarts will only take you so far. If you want really great things, you need to form relationships with others. Relationships need to come before transactions.

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