

The Business Connector

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The Relationship, Stupid

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James Carville is an astute political strategist who used his talents to impact the 1992 Presidential campaign. His efforts were instrumental in upsetting President George H.W. Bush's reelection bid and seating Bill Clinton in the White House.

Carville believed that election would neither hinge on moving speeches nor debates on special interest programs. He believed that the election would hinge on a basic issue that was affecting every voting American – the abysmal state of the U.S. economy.

Thus he kept the Clinton election team focused on centering its campaign initiative on this basic issue by writing on a dry erase board three simple words: "The economy, stupid." As history now shows, Carville was right – the 1992 Presidential election hinged on this issue.

Success in most everything – business, athletics and the political arena – comes down to the basics. The basics are simply those fundamental elements or actions that, if in place or appropriately executed, generally guarantee success.

In football, flamboyant players and misdirection trick plays are fun to watch. It is, however, the teams that focus on the consistent and appropriate execution of the basics – namely blocking and tackling – that are vying for some sort of championship year after year.

In school, as we progressed along, we aspired to take more challenging classes such as chemistry, American history, and English literature. Our ability to succeed here, however, was predicated on

mastery of educational basics – reading, writing and arithmetic.

Networking is like anything else. We need to consistently execute the basic to be successful. In networking, the basics are creating strong relationships.

Consider what our parents, teachers, and other mentors, have told us for years: "It is not what you know, but whom you know." While this is certainly true, at the same time it is not the whole truth.

We can all think of someone who knew somebody significant, but never benefited from that connection. We can probably even think of that same situation somewhere in our own lives. It is more than just whom we know; it is the relationship we have with them.

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Those in our network may be drawn to us because of the car we drive, where we golf, or the clothes we wear. Those things do not bind them to us, however. It is the relationship that does that. Our network is solidified by our genuine care and concern for those with whom we interact, both personally and professionally.

This is the exact reason why we are unable to persuade a prospect to do business with us. Even though we may offer a superior product, at a lower price and with better service, the prospect will remain with his or her accountant, attorney, insurance agent, or whatever.

The tie that binds is not some mystical spell or formal contractual obligation. It is simply a relationship, which has been forged over many years of interaction, familiar experiences or perhaps common interests.

Consider CNN's involvement in the Gulf War. It was not sheer luck that it was the only major news operation left in Iraq as the United States and its allies launched Operation Desert Storm. It was relationships.

For years Ted Turner had been providing periodic seminars at CNN's Atlanta headquarters for news organizations around the world. This allowed the young upstart CNN to develop relationships with its counterparts in the Middle East. These relationships were further developed when Turner traveled to the Middle East early in 1990.

It was these relationship that provided CNN correspondents with a relatively safe haven in Baghdad and other parts of the Middle East when the other major news organizations were on the outside looking in.

Knowing this, we should consume ourselves more with the conversations we have with our network rather than the circumstances in which we have them. We should center our attention on the value we can bring to our network rather than the value it may bring to us. In short, we need to focus on developing relationships.

Love him or hate him, James Carville has the solution for keeping us focused on this basic idea. Place on our dry erase board, our desktop blotter or on our screen saver three simple words: "The Relationship, Stupid." ✓