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Never Eat Alone, EXPANDED AND UPDATED

And Other Secrets to Success, One Relationship at a Time

KEITH FERRAZZI

AND

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PORTFOLIO
PENGUIN

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SECTION 1

The Mind-Set

Becoming a Member of the Club

Relationships are all there is. Everything in the universe only exists because it is in relationship to everything else. Nothing exists in isolation. We have to stop pretending we are individuals that can go it alone.

—Margaret Wheatley

How on earth did I get in here?" I kept asking myself in those early days as an overwhelmed first-year student at Harvard Business School.

There wasn't a single accounting or finance class in my background. Looking around me, I saw ruthlessly focused young men and women who had undergraduate degrees in business. They'd gone on to crunch numbers or analyze spreadsheets in the finest firms on Wall Street. Most were from wealthy families and had pedigrees and legacies and Roman numerals in their names. Sure, I was intimidated.

How was a guy like me from a working-class family, with a liberal arts degree and a couple years at a traditional manufacturing company, going to compete with purebreds from McKinsey and Goldman Sachs who, from my perspective, seemed as if they'd been computing business data in their cribs?

It was a defining moment in my career, and in my life.

I was a country boy from southwestern Pennsylvania, raised in a small, hardworking steel and coal town outside of Latrobe called Youngstown. Our region was so rural you couldn't see

another house from the porch of our modest home. My father worked in the local steel mill; on weekends he'd do construction. My mother cleaned the homes of the doctors and lawyers in a nearby town. My brother escaped small-town life by way of the army; my sister got married in high school and moved out when I was a toddler.

At HBS, all the insecurities of my youth came rushing back. You see, although we didn't have much money, my dad and mom were set on giving me the kind of opportunities my brother and sister (from my mom's previous marriage) never got. My parents pushed me and sacrificed everything to get me the kind of education that only the well-to-do kids in our town could afford. The memories rushed back to those days when my mother would pick me up in our beat-up blue Nova at the bus stop of the private elementary school I attended, while the other children ducked into limos and BMWs. I was teased mercilessly about our car and my polyester clothes and fake Docksidors—reminded daily of my station in life.

The experience was a godsend in many ways, toughening my resolve and fueling my drive to succeed. It made clear to me there was a hard line between the haves and the have-nots. It made me angry to be poor. I felt excluded from what I saw as the old boys' network. On the other hand, all those feelings pushed me to work harder than everyone around me.

Hard work, I reassured myself, was one of the ways I'd beaten the odds and gotten into Harvard Business School. But there was something else that separated me from the rest of my class and gave me an advantage. I seemed to have learned something long before I arrived in Cambridge that it seemed many of my peers had not.

As a kid, I caddied at the local country club for the homeowners and their children living in the wealthy town next to mine. It made me think often and hard about those who succeed and those

who don't. I made an observation in those days that would alter the way I viewed the world.

During those long stretches on the links, as I carried their bags, I watched how the people who had reached professional heights unknown to my father and mother helped one another. They found one another jobs, they invested time and money in one another's ideas, and they made sure their kids got help getting into the best schools, got the right internships, and ultimately got the best jobs.

Before my eyes, I saw proof that success breeds success and, indeed, the rich *do* get richer. Their web of friends and associates was the most potent club the people I caddied for had in their bags. Poverty, I realized, wasn't only a lack of financial resources; it was isolation from the kind of people who could help you make more of yourself.

I came to believe that in some very specific ways life, like golf, is a game, and that the people who know the rules, and know them well, play it best and succeed. And the rule in life that has unprecedented power is that the individual who knows the right people, for the right reasons, and utilizes the power of these relationships, can become a member of the "club," whether he started out as a caddie or not.

This realization came with some empowering implications. To achieve your goals in life, I realized, it matters less how smart you are, how much innate talent you're born with, or even, most eye opening to me, where you came from and how much you started out with. Sure, all these are important, but they mean little if you don't understand one thing: You can't get there alone. In fact, you can't get very far at all.

Fortunately, I was hungry to make something of myself (and, frankly, even more terrified that I'd amount to nothing). Otherwise, perhaps I would have just stood by and watched like my friends in the caddy yard.

I first began to learn about the incredible power of relationships from Mrs. Pohland. Caryl Pohland was married to the owner of the big lumberyard in our town, and her son, Brett, who was my age, was my friend. They went to our church. At the time, I probably wanted to be Brett (great athlete, rich, all the girls falling over him).

At the club, I was Mrs. Pohland's caddie. I was the only one who cared enough, ironically, to hide her cigarettes. I busted my behind to help her win every tournament. I'd walk the course the morning before to see where the tough pin placements were. I'd test the speed of the greens. Mrs. Pohland started racking up wins left and right. Every ladies' day, I did such a great job that she would brag about me to her friends. Soon, others requested me.

I'd caddie thirty-six holes a day if I could get the work, and I made sure I treated the club's caddie master as if he were a king. My first year, I won the annual caddie award, which gave me the chance to caddie for Arnold Palmer when he came to play on his hometown course. Arnie started out as a caddie himself at the Latrobe Country Club and went on to own the club as an adult. I looked up to him as a role model. He was living proof that success in golf, and in life, had nothing to do with class. It was about access (yes, and talent, at least in his case). Some gained access through birth or money. Some were fantastic at what they did, like Arnold Palmer. My edge, I knew, was my initiative and drive. Arnie was inspirational proof that your past need not be prologue to your future.

For years I was a de facto member of the Pohland family, splitting holidays with them and hanging out at their house nearly every day. Brett and I were inseparable, and I loved his family like my own. Mrs. Pohland made sure I got to know everyone in the club who could help me, and if she saw me slacking, I'd hear about it from her. I helped her on the golf course, and she, in appreciation of my efforts and the care I bestowed upon her, helped me

in life. She provided me with a simple but profound lesson about the power of generosity. When you help others, they often help you. "Reciprocity" is the gussied-up word people use later in life to describe this ageless principle. I just knew the word as "care." We cared for each other, so we went out of our way to do nice things.

Because of those days, and specifically that lesson, I came to realize that first semester at business school that Harvard's hyper-competitive, individualistic students had it all wrong. Success in any field, but especially in business, is about working *with* people, not against them. No tabulation of dollars and cents can account for one immutable fact: Business is a human enterprise, driven and determined by people.

It wasn't too far into my second semester before I started jokingly reassuring myself, "How on earth did all these *other* people get in here?"

What many of my fellow students lacked, I discovered, were the skills and strategies that are associated with fostering and building relationships. In America, and especially in business, we're brought up to cherish John Wayne individualism. People who consciously court others to become involved in their lives are seen as schmoozers, brownnosers, smarmy sycophants.

Over the years, I learned that the outrageous number of misperceptions clouding those who are active relationship builders is equaled only by the misperceptions of how relationship building is done properly. What I saw on the golf course—friends helping friends and families helping families they cared about—had nothing to do with manipulation or quid pro quo. Rarely was there any running tally of who did what for whom, or strategies concocted in which you gave just so you could get.

Over time, I came to see reaching out to people as a way to make a difference in people's lives as well as a way to explore and learn and enrich my own; it became the conscious construction of my life's path. Once I saw my networking efforts in this light, I

gave myself permission to practice it with abandon in every part of my professional and personal life. I didn't think of this behavior as cold and impersonal, the way I thought of "networking." I was, instead, *connecting*—sharing my knowledge and resources, time and energy, friends and associates, and empathy and compassion in a continual effort to provide value to others, while coincidentally increasing my own. Like business itself, being a connector is not about managing transactions, but about managing relationships.

People who instinctively establish a strong network of relationships have always created great businesses. If you strip business down to its basics, it's still about people selling things to other people. That idea can get lost in the tremendous hubbub the business world perpetually stirs up around everything from brands and technology to design and price considerations in an endless search for the ultimate competitive advantage. But ask accomplished CEOs or entrepreneurs or professionals how they achieved their success, and I guarantee you'll hear very little business jargon. What you will mostly hear about are the people who helped pave their way, if they are being honest and are not too caught up in their own success.

After decades of successfully applying the power of relationships in my own life and career, I've come to believe that connecting is one of the most important business—and life—skill sets you'll ever learn. Why? Because, flat out, people do business with people they know and like. Careers—in every imaginable field—work the same way. Even our overall well-being and sense of happiness, as a library's worth of research has shown, is dictated in large part by the support and guidance and love we get from the community we build for ourselves.

It took me a while to figure out exactly how to go about connecting with others. But I knew for certain that whether I wanted to become president of the United States or the president of a local

PTA, there were a lot of other people whose help I would need along the way.

Self-Help: A Misnomer

How do you turn an acquaintance into a friend? How can you get other people to become emotionally invested in your advancement? Why are there some lucky schmoe who always leave business conferences with months' worth of lunch dates and a dozen potential new associates, while others leave only with indigestion? Where are the places you go to meet the kind of people who could most impact your life?

From my earliest days growing up in Latrobe, I found myself absorbing wisdom and advice from every source imaginable—friends, books, neighbors, teachers, family. My thirst to reach out was almost unquenchable. But in business, I found nothing came close to the impact of mentors. At every stage in my career, I sought out the most successful people around me and asked for their help and guidance.

I first learned the value of mentors from a local lawyer named George Love. He and the town's stockbroker, Walt Saling, took me under their wings. I was riveted by their stories of professional life and their nuggets of street-smart wisdom. My ambitions were sown in the fertile soil of George's and Walt's rambling business escapades, and ever since, I've been on the lookout for others who could teach or inspire me. Later in life, as I rubbed shoulders with business leaders, store owners, politicians, and movers and shakers of all stripes, I started to gain a sense of how our country's most successful people reach out to others, and how they invite those people's help in accomplishing their goals.

I learned that *real* networking was about finding ways to make *other* people more successful. It was about working hard to *give* more than you get. And I came to believe that there was a litany of

tough-minded principles that made this softhearted philosophy possible.

These principles would ultimately help me achieve things I didn't think I was capable of. They would lead me to opportunities otherwise hidden to a person of my upbringing, and they'd come to my aid when I failed, as we all do on occasion. I was never in more dire need of that aid than during my first job out of business school at Deloitte & Touche Consulting.

By conventional standards, I was an awful entry-level consultant. Put me in front of a spreadsheet and my eyes glaze over, which is what happened when I found myself on my first project, huddled in a cramped, windowless room in the middle of suburbia, files stretching from floor to ceiling, poring over a sea of data with a few other first-year consultants. I tried; I really did. But I just couldn't. I was convinced boredom that bad was lethal.

I was clearly well on my way to getting fired or quitting.

Luckily, I had already applied some of the very rules of networking that I was still in the process of learning. In my spare time, when I wasn't painfully attempting to analyze some data-ridden worksheet, I reached out to ex-classmates, professors, old bosses, and anyone who might stand to benefit from a relationship with Deloitte. I spent my weekends giving speeches at small conferences around the country on a variety of subjects I had learned at Harvard, mostly under the tutelage of Len Schlessinger (to whom I owe my speaking style today). All this in an attempt to drum up both business and buzz for my new company. I had mentors throughout the organization, including the CEO, Pat Loconto.

Still, my first annual review was devastating. I received low marks for not doing what I was asked to do with the gusto and focus that was expected of me. But my supervisors, with whom I had already developed relationships and who were aware of all my extracurricular activities, had another idea. Together, we cooked up a job description that previously did not exist at the company.

My mentors gave me a \$150,000 expense account to do what I had already been doing: developing business, representing the firm with speaking engagements, and reaching out to the press and business world in ways that would strengthen Deloitte's presence in the marketplace. My supervisors' belief in me paid off. Within a year, the company's brand recognition in the line of business on which I focused (reengineering) moved from bottom of the consulting pack to one of the top of the industry, achieving a growth rate the company had never known (though, of course, it wasn't all my doing). I went on to become the company's chief marketing officer (CMO) and the youngest person ever tapped for partner. And I was having a blast—the work was fun, exciting, interesting. Everything you could want in a job.

While my career was in full throttle, in some ways it all seemed like a lucky accident. In fact, for many years, I couldn't see exactly where my professional trajectory would take me—after Deloitte, a crazy quilt of top-level jobs culminating in my founding my own company. It's only today, looking in the rearview mirror, that it makes enormous sense.

From Deloitte, I became the youngest chief marketing officer in the Fortune 500 at Starwood Hotels & Resorts. Then I went on to become CEO of a Knowledge Universe (Michael Milken)-funded video game company, and now, founder of my own company, Ferrazzi Greenlight, a research institute, consultancy, and coaching firm focused on changing behavior in the workplaces of the world's most prestigious organizations. I zigged and zagged my way to the top. Every time I contemplated a move or needed advice, I turned to the circle of friends I had created around me.

At first I tried to draw attention away from my people skills for fear that they were somehow inferior to other more "respectable" business abilities. But as I got older, everyone from well-known CEOs and politicians to college kids and my own employees came to me asking for advice on how to do those things I had always loved doing. *Crain's* magazine listed me as one of the forty top