

Session 3 Reading

Don't Be a Networking Jerk – Six Rules for True Connections

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Ambition can creep as well as soar. —Edmund Burke

I get e-mails all the time that read, “Dear Keith, I hear you’re a good networker. I am, too. Let’s sit down for fifteen minutes and a cup of coffee.” Why? I ask myself. Why in the world do people expect me to respond to a request like that? Have they appealed to me emotionally? Have they said they could help me? Have they sought some snippet of commonality between us? Networking isn’t a secret society with some encoded handshake practiced for its own virtue. We must bring virtue to it.

Here’s my stab at a code of conduct, to ensure that you never become a Networking Jerk:

1. Don’t schmooze. Have something to say, and say it with passion. Make sure you have something to offer when you speak, and offer it with sincerity. Most people haven’t figured out that it’s better to spend more time with fewer people at a one-hour get-together, and have one or two meaningful dialogues, than engage in the wandering-eye routine and lose the respect of most of the people you meet.
2. Don’t rely on the currency of gossip. Of course, using gossip is easier. Most people lap up such information. But it won’t do you any good in the long run. Eventually the information well will run dry as more and more people realize you’re not to be trusted.
3. Don’t come to the party empty-handed. In connecting, as in blogging, you’re only as good as what you give away. Be prepared to be generous with your time, ideas, and spirit.
4. Don’t treat those under you poorly. Soon enough, some of them will become “overlings.” In business, the food chain is transient. You must treat people with respect up and down the ladder.
5. Be transparent. “I am what I am,” the cartoon character Popeye used to say. People respond with trust when they know you’re dealing straight with them.
6. Don’t be too efficient. Nothing comes off as less sincere than receiving a mass e-mail addressed to a long list of recipients. Reaching out to others is not a numbers game. Your goal is to make genuine connections with people you can count on.

If you’re not making friends while connecting, best to resign yourself to dealing with people who don’t care much about what happens to you. Being disliked will kill your connecting efforts before they begin. Alternatively, being liked can be the most potent, constructive force for getting business done. Better yet, you’ll sleep better knowing you’re constantly striving to treat the people cross your path with humanity and respect.