

The Value of Personal Relationships

There's no denying that sending an e-mail or a text is a quick, efficient method of communicating basic facts these days. Faster than snail mail, cheap (free, really), can be sent or read from anywhere, and certainly faster than a face-to-face conversation. But are these electronic means of communicating a substitute for developing a personal relationship based on shared experiences, lessons learned from life and mutual trust? Heck, no!

So what's the ROI (return on investment) of developing a personal relationship with someone? Consider the downside: it takes a long time to develop; there's no guarantee of success; but if you or he/she are reassigned, it's all out the window, right? Let's look at these one at a time.

First, a trusting personal relationship takes time to develop. You don't meet someone – personally or professionally – and five minutes later you declare them someone you trust completely; we humans don't work that way. Only after repeated interactions – frequently under stressful conditions – do you declare them someone you can trust. And that's the goal. This may take months or longer, but it's so worth it!

Second, I'll use the cocktail party as a strawman. You meet XXX number of people at a cocktail party. You have a quick convo with a person at said cocktail party, and you either enjoy their company or you don't. So what happens next? If it was an unpleasant encounter you move on; likely to never interact with them again; if it was fun, you might contact them and get together. BUT.... big distinction – if the person you didn't like happens to be the Mayor or the President of the Chamber of Commerce or the Superintendent of Schools, you need to develop a relationship with them in any case, and that doesn't mean you have to “like” them. But you do need to figure out a way to work with them as they will likely remain in their position for an extended period of time.

Third, let's look at reassignment. Does this mean that your efforts to develop position relationships with people are not worth the effort? NO! How many times have you been stationed in Hampton Roads? San Diego? DC? These are places that all of us have been assigned multiple times in our careers. Chances are good we'll be back! So if you develop a positive working relationship with a Norfolk City Councilman when you're a JO, then you come back as a senior officer and the Councilman is the Mayor, that relationship has blossomed and grown.

Human dynamics are complicated, but it is definitely to your advantage – and that of your Chapter – to develop good, trusting relationships with the leaders of your community. You can do this!