

You have certainly heard the saying, "It's not what you know, it's who you know." While this may be an exaggeration in some fields, it holds some truth no matter what you do for a living. If you are in the entertainment industry where auditions are hard to come by and the jobs are highly competitive, who you know is definitely an advantage that may set you above all the other equally talented and qualified applicants. The same may hold true for your industry.

If you are just starting out in your career, pay special attention to this idea. You want to create relationships that will last the duration of your career. The people that help to train and educate you will be great allies in the future. You may need references or recommendations. You may move to a new city and need contacts in that area that someone in the education field can offer you. Or you may just need to have a resource for support and guidance in the years to come.

It is also important to start out your first job with the idea that the people you meet there could be partially responsible for your success or failure. So be as genuine and eager to learn as you can without being false. You do not need to be dishonest about your interests or about how much you like someone's company to form a relationship. Simply ask questions, learn about their career path, and seek them out when you need advice or partnership on a project. You will quickly form bonds that will last.

If you are well along your career path, it is not too late to look back on the people that helped you get where you are and use them as a networking support. Keep your old day planners and address books and maintain contact with the people who took an interest in your career. Send holiday cards and occasional updates on your progress. Always thank them for their role in your success and show genuine interest in their progress as well. These connections will continue to pay off in the long run.

As you work to establish yourself in a company, either in a managerial or executive position, or perhaps as an owner of your own business, you want to have people on your side who can make a difference to your bottom line. This means that you need to have something to offer as well. Offer to help out a colleague on a tight schedule with a project. Be there to cheer someone on at a presentation. And above all, avoid gossip and badmouthing anyone. This kind of negative behavior only reflects badly on you and makes the person listening to you wary of trusting you with their support or friendship.

Finally, do not overlook the people who come up behind you. Just because someone is new and less experienced than you does not mean that they cannot be of service to your advancement. A good word from a fellow employee is valuable. So be forthcoming with your support and guidance when asked. The most important adage when it comes to relationships is, "As you give, so shall you receive."