



How to Turn Relationships into Checks

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"Time has never written a single check. It's people...who end up writing the checks."

By Dan Sullivan

People often say, "Time is money." To a certain extent, it's really not true—time has never written a single check. It's people—and more importantly, your relationships with those people, who end up writing the checks.

One of the biggest limitations to your success is the various kinds of relationships you're locked into. There are almost certainly parts of your client base and centers of influence you use that don't (and won't) grow or get any better. Your goals may change and get bigger, but if you're pursuing them through the same old relationships, it will get harder and harder to achieve them.

Of course, more relationships do not equal more income. In fact, it's easy to get overwhelmed trying to maintain all your business relationships and give them equal service. It's important to realize that as you grow your business, there comes a point where you're no longer obliged to work with everyone who walks through your door.

There is an important natural law at work here, the Pareto principle: 20 percent of your clients generate 80 percent of your income, while 80 percent of your clients generate only 20 percent of your income. To top it all off, most of the time it's the 80 percent who provide less income that also dominate 80 percent of your time!

Within both camps, there will be relationships that are just too costly, either financially or emotionally. But a small core of your client base represents the kind of people you want to work with in the future, as you grow. One approach that we teach at Strategic Coach, which works very well for our clients, is to focus far more on those top 20 relationships—the current clients or prospects that truly appreciate what you do and are willing to reward you for it.

These are the people who won't view you as a source of free information or a commodity; they value your wisdom and see you as a partner in making some important part of their life and business better or easier.

Once you've identified your top 20 relationships, I'd recommend systematically finding a way to delegate responsibility for the other relationships. This frees you up to devote more time and attention where it will be most rewarded. Whatever income might be lost initially will soon be replaced many times over by the remaining, more profitable clients.

Many entrepreneurs are just one relationship away from some incredible opportunities, but they have to be willing to focus their attention on their very best relationships in order to find or create it. So look for those clients, customers, prospects, connections, suppliers, centers of influence, and strategic partners with whom you can (mutually) get out more than you put in.

Of course, the most important relationships of all are the ones with your spouse and family. Yet with all the demands of running a business, it's all too easy to let these slip into the background. Focusing on your best business relationships has the benefit of giving you more time to spend on those personal relationships that bring life's best rewards. These are the relationships that really sustain you when the going gets tough.

Many people who own and run a business think they have to choose between their relationships. In a sense, they're right. You must choose to have good quality relationships, but you need them in every aspect of your life.

It's true: time has never written you a single check. It's relationships that equal money. And if you want better opportunities and bigger checks, it's your most valuable relationships with the highest potential that you must develop. 