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January 2006 // Everything's Personal



Dear [member_name_first],

"Connecting is a philosophy of life; it's a worldview." That quote comes from one of my new favorite books—a gift I gave to many friends and associates during the holidays—*Never Eat Alone* by Keith Ferrazzi. Its central point is that success comes not from intellect, education or skill alone (although those are certainly important) but from our ability to build and maintain personal connections with others. Through building a strong network, you can find success—whether it's landing a new job, finding clients for your business, recruiting donors or volunteers.

Now before you turn up your nose at the concept of networking—most of us associate it with schmoozing, faking and flattering—consider this simple but rather revolutionary idea: making connections is all about being honest, open, respectful, interested and genuine. It's about being yourself.

In Hollywood, they always say "It's who you know," and I've found that to be true in all aspects of life. Not only does a wide circle of friends enhance my personal life, but I also attribute my business success to knowing and keeping the right contacts in my network. I enjoy meeting people, and I find that my firm's most effective projects and most satisfied clients emerge when I build a strong personal connection with them. I've built my network of connections over time, through my involvement in design organizations, my work in the nonprofit world, my speaking engagements and my social interests. The avenues are almost endless!

Do you have any ideas for connecting with other people? I'd love to hear them! Please feel free to e-mail me: peleg@topdesign.com.

Cheers...

PELEG TOP
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"Never Eat Alone: And Other Secrets to Success, One Relationship at a Time"
by Keith Ferrazzi

Once in a while a great book appears in my life. It inspires and motivates me. It becomes one of those life changing books I want to tell everyone about it. So, I decided to start the year with a Book of the Month column in our newsletter. Each month I will share a recent inspiring book from my bookshelf and hope it inspires you as well!

In this month's book, the author's theory is that success depends on your network of personal connections and meaningful relationships as much as it does on your skills and talents. At its heart, author Keith Ferrazzi's strategy is about being friendly. "Being liked can be the most potent, constructive force for getting business done," he writes. The book reminds readers of Dale Carnegie's very simple principles of making friends and influencing people:
1) Be interested in others
2) Be a great listener
3) Shut up and let the other person do most of the talking
4) Relate to the other person in their own terms
5) Show genuine appreciation

Check out the book here



"Partners in Independence" - Jr. Blind of America 2005 Annual Report

Most annual reports tell a company's or organization's story by the numbers. But the Junior Blind of America annual report tells its story by the lives it has touched. In creating this important project for Junior Blind, Top Design focused on blind and visually impaired kids who

have made major strides toward independence—kids like Kendall, who's learned to explore the world around her thanks to JBA's Camp Bloomfield, and Denzley, who's part of JBA's Children's Residential Program, where he's developing a richer life. The report also introduces some of the staff and volunteers who make it all happen. Top Design's annual report for JBA includes all the requisite financials, to be sure. But it puts the real spotlight on people—where it should be!

Download a PDF of the Annual Report here



LinkedIn.com

The most effective means of connecting with other people is naturally face-to-face. But a host of networking websites (you've heard about social networking sites like MySpace and Friendster) aim to help users expand their circles of friends and acquaintances. One that I highly recommend is the business-networking site LinkedIn (http://www.linkedin.com) which I recently joined. LinkedIn lets you create "contact cards" for people you know—coworkers, former classmates, business partners, vendors, etc. The idea is that you can then use those contacts to make further connections: Your old high-school buddy may introduce you to your next important client or board member. I invite you to check out LinkedIn and, if you're interested, become a member (it's free!) and link to me.



My favorite tips from "Never Eat Alone" include some on-target tips for turning the people you meet into meaningful contacts.

Don't schmooze. You should have something to say, and say it with passion. If you "work the room" during an event, you'll make lots of superficial contacts; it's better to engage two or three people in meaningful conversation.

Don't gossip. Gossip is a lazy way to carry on a conversation—it may prompt a listener's interest, but it's a shallow topic that will lead people to think you can't be trusted with their own information.

Don't fake it. You've heard about "transparency" in business or government. Same goes for networking. Don't be someone you're not. Remember Popeye's mantra: "I am what I am."

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