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## The Third “R”: Go for Great Relationships

In real estate it’s “location, location, location.”  
In healthcare it’s “relationship, relationship, relationship.”  
Pat Sweeney, former senior vice president at McKesson Corporation

**D**isconnected influence steers us into thinking solely about getting results. But when that keeps us from thinking about building relationships, a very peculiar thing happens: We often get worse results.

Of course, results *are* important to consider—tasks completed, projects accomplished, budgets approved, and sales achieved. Results stand out. They get attention. They’re easy to measure, publish, and verify.

Results also lend themselves to scorekeeping because they’re more visible than the emotional math of relationships. But more visible doesn’t mean more important. Relationships aren’t always evident, but they *always* have an effect. If you damage your relationships, people will be less willing to support your great outcomes and might even work to undermine them.

Of course, there’s not anything wrong with reaching for results.

That’s why we say you should go beyond “doable” goals and aim for inspiring ones. But if you focus too narrowly on getting results at the expense of building relationships, you may achieve neither.

As an illustration, how many times have you seen someone embarrass or belittle others publicly and unnecessarily—for example, by making sarcastic remarks behind other people’s backs about their mistakes or shortcomings? If you think about it, you’ll realize that you silently lost some respect for the perpetrator of those remarks, even if the person got a laugh in the room. Even if *you* laughed at the time.

Moreover, it probably made you stop and wonder later on: “Does this person say similar things about me behind my back?” Most likely, that question stayed in the back of your mind, making you trust the person less and feel less willing to connect and open up honestly. That kind of distrust can throw huge roadblocks in the path of great outcomes.

Conversely, people who invest in relationships get everyone to buy into their great outcomes. For instance, John worked for several years with Mel Hall, the former CEO and chairman of Press Ganey Associates. He remembers the first day he met with Mel at the Press Ganey headquarters. As they walked around, they’d encounter people randomly in the halls. Mel knew everyone’s first name. He introduced each one of them to John, telling him what their role was and how long they’d worked with the company (he knew that too), and mentioning something special about their contributions.

“They are the ones who make the difference,” Mel would say. “If you really believe that, that they are the source of competitive advantage, then it’s imperative that you know about them.”

All of the powerful influencers we’ve talked with believe in this philosophy. They know that strong relationships make other people want to listen and buy in, rather than being suspicious or adversarial.

But building strong relationships with the people you want on

your side takes mindfulness and effort. Here's a look at how our influencers put their philosophy into action every day.

## ■ Rocking Relationships

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Joey Gold has one of the strangest résumés of anyone we know: He's a rock star turned aerospace engineer.

Joey's done everything from opening for Ozzy Osbourne (a story we'll get to in Chapter Ten) to managing technical projects for a major international aerospace firm, and he's a master at creating great outcomes. In addition, he's one of the most "connected" influencers we've met, and his story shows that positive influence gets great results no matter what career you're in.

Joey says, "I've always valued people and treated people with the utmost respect. On the road, I knew everyone's names—the roadies, the t-shirt vendors, the promoters, the other bands, the security, the bus drivers, the ushers—everyone. To me, it was one big organism and everyone was needed and valued, and everyone needed to be treated with respect. I appreciated them and wanted them to feel appreciated."

He adds, "It's the same now at work. I know the executives, their administrative assistants, the person who vacuums my office and takes out my trash—everyone. I'm nice to everyone and it isn't fake. I truly like everyone. Everyone has value, and I do what I can for people. I spend a fortune on See's Candy at the end of the year and write cards to all of the assistants, people who do the office moves, security, and people who help with sanitation. I do it because I want to, not because I want something out of them."

Joey gets treated well at work, and he makes sure his team does, too. "I get an office for someone on my team when it wasn't available

at first,” he says. “I get items ordered for my team when there’s supposedly a backlog of orders.”

Joey says he gets support not because he gives out See’s Candy but because people know his respect for them is genuine. “It was the same when I was in music,” he says. “I was the ‘nice guy’ in Hollywood—the one who didn’t do drugs, lie, and steal your girlfriend. I treated people well, and I think it helped me and the band to get treated well, and it got us out of some tough spots. But I didn’t treat people well then or now to get them to do something for me.”

Instead, he says, “I try to treat people well because it’s a better way to live and it was the example my father showed me. As it turns out, it’s led to success I wouldn’t have imagined in music, battling back from cancer, going back to school for an undergraduate degree in mathematics, getting graduate degrees in electrical engineering and management, achieving a terrific second career in aerospace, and having an incredible wife and family. I’m blessed, and I’d be ashamed not to treat people well.”

For Joey, strong relationships are integral to achieving great outcomes. It’s a philosophy our next influencer also lives by—and in fact, she believes in it so strongly that one of her great outcomes is based on building bonds.

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## ■ Elevator Pitches vs. Vulnerability Pitches

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Debbie Quintana is an innovator in the gift basket industry. She made the prestigious “40 under 40” list for Silicon Valley, and won the 2011 Silicon Valley Women of Influence Award.

Debbie is the CEO of The Best Gourmet Gifts, a gift basket company that’s been driving significant change in that industry. For example, she pioneered the concept of letting customers watch live on

video while their custom gift basket is being put together so they can make changes if they want. She also created a Gift Basket Association and an industry-leading magazine.

Debbie drives for results, but she's also a natural relationship builder. However, when she decided to get involved with professional networking groups in her region, she couldn't find what she was looking for.

If Debbie can't find something, she makes it herself. So she created the Women's Networking Alliance, which now has nine chapters in the United States and is adding a tenth in Australia.

"I wasn't looking for a place where it's all about collecting leads and referrals," she says. "I didn't want elevator pitches, I wanted vulnerability pitches. I wanted a place where it was about growing as a person and a businessperson. I wanted it to be about sharing challenges, talking about where we need help, being open, and not being judged or evaluated."

The alliance keeps chapter sizes small, and they're highly selective about adding members. They look for people who care about other people and demonstrate that concern through their actions.

"It's not for everyone," Debbie says, "but that's fine with us. I'd rather have five people there for the right reasons than forty for the wrong reasons. I want real relationships.

"Instead of posturing and preening," Debbie says, "people get vulnerable. It's not so much about *how great I am*, but *where I need help*. We don't do fake. We don't do 'pretend.' Sure, we have fun and laugh, but we're also not afraid to get down to the ugly stuff. We show weakness, and we ask for help, even if it's hard, even if it's embarrassing."

Debbie offers an example. "Someone might say, 'I don't know how to use Facebook and I'm embarrassed about it. In fact, I'm so technology challenged I'm not sure I can continue my business. I don't understand it and I'm falling further behind and I'm afraid.'

"Then we rally around that person. Or we ask questions like, 'What attribute or characteristic do you want to improve on, and why?' Every year we give inspiration awards, which are about personal qualities, facing fear, character, and commitment."

The people in this unique networking group do gain powerful professional benefits from their participation. But those results aren't the primary point. Results come, but they come from being with relationship-oriented people in a relationship-building environment.

#### **BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS THE ZAPPOS WAY**

Tony Hsieh, CEO of the hugely successful online shoe company, Zappos.com, offers a view on building relationships that's very similar to Debbie Quintana's. In his book, *Delivering Happiness*, Tony writes:

I personally really dislike business networking events . . . .  
Instead, I really prefer to focus on just building relationships and getting to know people as just people, regardless of their position in the business world or even if they're not from the business world.

I believe that there's something interesting about anyone and everyone. You just have to figure out what that something is. If anything, I've found that it's more interesting to build relationships with people that are not in the business world, because they almost always can offer unique perspectives and insights and also because those relationships tend to be more genuine.

If you're able to figure out how to be truly interested in someone you meet, with the goal of striking up a friendship, instead of trying to get something out of that person, the

funny thing is, almost always, something happens later down the line that ends up either benefiting your business or yourself personally. I don't really know why this happens or why it works, but it seems that the benefit from getting to know someone on a personal level usually happens two to three years after you started working on building the relationship, and it's usually something that you could not have possibly predicted would have happened at the beginning of the relationship.

For Debbie and Tony, great networking outcomes don't start with a transactional relationship—"Pass my business card on to your boss, and I'll recommend your software to mine." And they don't start with a focus on results (although the results are often amazing). Instead, they begin with transformational relationships in which people share their strengths, open up about their vulnerabilities, unselfishly offer assistance, and build ties that don't begin and end with business cards.

Because of their commitment to building real relationships, Debbie and Tony are revered as "super mentors," with hundreds of mentees multiplying their influence. But as our next influencer shows, you can build remarkable relationships in a very different way by asking people to mentor *you*.

### ■ Teaming Up with the "Fat Brains"

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Gina Rudan, author of *Practical Genius*, has a catchy label for people between the ages of twenty and thirty-five. She calls them "fat brains." (That's because at that stage of life, people ostensibly have more fat content in their brains than at later ages.) Fat brains, Gina says, are young, energetic, committed, forward-thinking people.

They are more technologically adept than their older counterparts, want to make a difference, are bold and creative in solving problems and integrating work and play, and above all, aren't afraid to try new things.

Gina says that everyone should have several fat brains in their lives. She herself has over a dozen she counts not only as good friends but as "reverse mentors."

She says, "I stumbled upon this notion when I quit my corporate job to start my own practice at the start of the last recession. I knew I had to surround myself with people who were living, breathing, and acting from the fringe and that meant entrepreneurs. I had to adopt a new tribe."

She attended a retreat held at a ranch in Texas by a young entrepreneur named Dan Lack, who called it "The Meeting of the Big Minds." Gina says, "There were young thought leaders, some of them starting businesses, others launching nonprofits. I knew I had found my new tribe."

She began to journal about what she'd learned by opening up to people half her age. "At one point I asked Dan to be my mentor and he laughed," says Gina. "I said, 'I'm serious, I'm going to look for your leadership and guidance about what I should be reading and conferences I should be attending, and we're going to have a nontransactional relationship.'"

That was three years ago. "In a lot of ways, we couldn't be more different," Gina says. "He's a young Jewish male, and a southern guy. I'm a Puerto Rican woman from New York. But the relationship blossomed. With my husband and son, we've essentially merged families with Dan and his relatives. We visit and interact with each other's families. People say, 'I can't believe you spend so much time with twenty-five-year-olds!' My husband is fifty, I'm forty, and Dan Lack is really part of my family now."

Because of Gina, Dan has a second family of people who go

out of their way to support him. And thanks to Dan, Gina learns about music, trends, technology, and social media. She also learns how to combine working and playing, problem solving and socializing.

“It’s something I didn’t get nearly as much in my previous career,” Gina says. “Having ‘work’ discussions in social environments: on beaches, in fringe coffee houses, at concerts, in my backyard. They do it without thinking about it. Business meetings and social meetings for them are the same. They look for experience and environment in everything they do. I find it to be an innovative approach that allows you to gain different perspectives, thought stimulation, and motivation.”

She also says she values her young mentor’s extreme determination. “Folks our age get exhausted easier,” she says. “But they are relentless. They never give up.”

Gina is changing her life by letting her tribe of young people teach her how they think, work, see life, and understand trends. As a result, at an age when many of us tend to start settling into a middle-aged rut, she’s constantly evolving, both personally and professionally. In return, she’s sharing her professional experience, knowledge, and talents with a new generation. That’s a great outcome . . . both for her and for her “fat brain” tribe.

While we’re on the topic of relationships, we’d like to introduce you to two more powerful influencers who’ve fostered their reputations by making introductions.

Jeanine “Nini” Martin, a director of national healthcare for Avanade, Inc., built her strong standing in her industry on a foundation of steady introductions. She says, “I’m one hundred percent relationship driven. I will invest months if not years in relationships, and I don’t even have ‘asks.’” She says that

people call her “The Connector,” adding with characteristic humility: “I’m Nini the nobody, but I have the ability to connect ‘somebodies.’” That ability has helped to establish her as a trusted adviser to state and local governments, medical academia, enterprise commercial firms, and independent physician associations.

Similarly, Michael Altman, of Simon, Altman & Kabaker Financial & Insurance Services, is legendary for connecting people one-at-a-time. He says his secret is no secret. “Whenever I meet someone, I try to learn about them, and think of whom I know who can help them. It’s that simple.”

How seriously does Michael take this goal? For many years, he’s made it his mission to make at least one introduction a day before noon.

## ■ Playing the Longer Game

Like our other power influencers, David Heinemeier Hansson—partner at the innovative productivity software firm, 37signals—knows that building relationships is more important than always getting his own way.

“Decisions are temporary,” David says. “Oftentimes the most important thing is not to be right. We make very few decisions that are so important that the criticality of them being right is so high. We care more about the long-term batting averages of our positions. I try to allow other people to win arguments.”

For instance, he says, in earlier years they were deciding whether to ask for credit card information from customers at the beginning or at the end of the trial period for using the software. “I thought, let’s keep it up front. Others said it would make a massive difference

to push it out until after the trial. My hypothesis was it wasn't true and would be a waste of time. We'd spend two weeks developing the capability, and that would be a waste." But a group of people felt passionate about it, so David and Jason Fried (the president of 37signals, and co-author with David of the book, *Rework*) told them to go for it.

David explains, "We were playing the longer game. Why should I use a veto in a situation like this? It would likely undermine their enthusiasm, responsibility, and ownership. And we can change it back later anyway. We can test it. We can be open to ideas like this. Even if it doesn't work, it might cost a bit in terms of resources, but we'll all learn, and they'll be more engaged and motivated. They'll be more interested in the work, and care about the well-being of the organization."

David adds, "Of course there is one more thing. I could be wrong." And in fact, if you go to the website today, you'll find that you can sign up for a free trial without providing your credit card information until the end of the trial. So his colleagues weren't just passionate; they were right.

David also didn't think that having an illustration-based design for the company's home page would work. But instead of saying no, he decided to run an experiment for a week, and then go back to the old way. "But there was a huge increase in signups," says David. "I was wrong, and the person who proposed it was right. If you treat people the right way, you win whether you're right or wrong on an issue."

By choosing to play the longer game rather than forcing people to do what he wanted, David has helped to build an enormously successful business. And simultaneously, he built strong relationships with a network of dedicated colleagues who know they're valued and who want to add value in return.

## **BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WHEN YOU’VE REACHED THE TOP**

One key message of this book is that even if you begin with few connections and little money, you can become a power influencer. But here’s something else that’s crucial to remember: When you reach the pinnacle of influence, your work in building and strengthening relationships still isn’t done.

Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, MD, MBA, is president of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the largest philanthropy focused solely on health and healthcare in the United States. With \$9 billion in assets, the foundation generates approximately \$350 million in grants every year. Their positive influence as an organization is enormous.

Dr. Lavizzo-Mourey says, “Our mission is to improve health and healthcare, yet we can’t mandate social change. We don’t make policy, we don’t deliver services, we don’t produce healthcare products. We produce information. We engage with people. We influence. That’s what we do. That and our reputation are our biggest capital.”

Right now, the foundation is focusing on a great outcome: conquering childhood obesity. Dr. Lavizzo-Mourey says it will take at least a generation to reverse the obesity epidemic. To accomplish this goal, she says, “We look for ways to make it nonpartisan or at least bipartisan—get both parties at all levels of government speaking out.” In addition, she’s bringing together people from all walks of life—from religious leaders to food manufacturers and retailers—to create healthier outcomes for America’s children.

## ■ Take the R&R Test

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The relationships we've focused on in this chapter are the third element of the three "R"s that lead to great outcomes. These three elements aren't mutually exclusive. In fact, it's just the opposite.

All three of these "R"s—results, reputation, relationships—are inescapably interconnected. Over time, and sometimes immediately, the three "R"s catch up with each other. In particular, results achieved by self-serving means will ultimately damage a person's reputation and relationships. And when that happens, the chance for a great outcome is gone.

This is why the most influential people in our experience think about long-term implications even in their short-term actions. They drive for results, but they care about how they get those results. They don't make trade-offs between getting things done and earning trust and confidence with every interaction. The people around them know that they're not merely the means to the influencer's ends, but crucially important ends in their own right.

However, as we've noted, it's extremely easy to fall into focusing on *results* at the expense of the other two "R"s. In fact, this is the core mistake that disconnected influencers make. And it takes mindful effort to break this bad habit.

Here's a daily mental exercise we recommend to help you keep these two easily overlooked "R"s front and center at all times. We call this the "R&R Test."

### THE R&R TEST

**BEFORE** you find yourself interacting with another person or group, ask yourself: How can I strive to build relationships and create a basis for a positive reputation in this interaction?

**DURING** your interaction, ensure that all of your actions meet these standards: Will what I’m about to say or do increase people’s trust and respect and my own credibility? If what I’m about to say or do were being recorded on video and audio, would I be proud to have others whose opinions matter to me see the recording?

**AFTER** your interaction, review your actions and ask yourself: Did I conduct myself with integrity, clarity, and respect? Did my presence leave others better off after dealing with me than they were before? Do I need to follow up on any misunderstandings, mistakes, or missed opportunities?

When you ask yourself these questions every day, you’ll break the bad habit of focusing on “getting what I want” and allow yourself to envision the lifelong connections you want to build. You’ll make things better while finding respectful ways to do it. You’ll care about results, but you’ll also care about what happens to others along the way. And the magical thing is when you invest time in the two “R”s of reputation and relationships, you’ll achieve results that go far beyond anything you expected.

There’s an old adage about two people who are laying bricks on a wall. One is mechanically going through the repetitive motions of spreading the mortar and putting the bricks in place. Asked what he’s doing, he replies, “I’m laying bricks.” The other person is performing the same actions, but with alacrity and a glow in his eye. When he’s asked what he’s doing, he says, “I’m building a cathedral.”

When you create strong bonds that show other people that they’re integral to your great outcome—and that you want to be a part of theirs—they won’t just lay bricks for you. Together, you’ll build cathedrals.

▶ *Usable Insight*

*Every business transaction has its basis in a personal relationship.*

David Bradford, former CEO of Fusion-IO

▶ *Action Step*

Look for opportunities to ask the other people involved in your conversations, meetings, or projects what would make it a great outcome for them. For example, ask:

- What would be the best use of your time in our conversation today?
- If this meeting (or project, initiative, presentation, etc.) goes as well as possible, what would be the outcomes?
- What would make this meeting a success for you?
- What would need to happen in our conversation to cause you to want to continue the conversation sooner?