

column

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an overlooked key to success

I often hear company executives say their people are their greatest assets. But I wonder sometimes if the most important assets of company employees — their relationships with other people — are completely ignored in the modern business world.

Most MBAs I know say the most important thing they got from b-school was their relationships with other students. Years down the road their former classmates are working at different companies and many are doing business with each other.

I think most of us value our personal network. The people we know and trust are a great asset.

But name one company that knows how to tap into the collective relationship assets of its employees.

Think about your own company. When was the last time you hired someone because of the people they know or the relationships they have?

We almost always hire people because of their skills and experience — not because of their relationships.

In fact, how often does, "Who do you know?" even come up in interviews with potential employees or in meetings with existing ones?

When was the last time you went to a management meeting where everyone discussed the people they know who could solve your current business problems or open the doors to new business opportunities?

I think most companies overlook the relationships their employees have, relationships that could be the key to a company's success.

I think that is about to change.

One of my favorite Utah companies is

Corporate Alliance, a 5-year-old Provo company that is teaching hundreds of Utah executives how to succeed by focusing on developing strong business relationships. (Full disclosure: I liked the company so much that Provo Labs invested in it.)

Corporate Alliance teaches you to get out of the fast-moving business "current" occasionally and get into non-business "pools" (community events, non-profits and relationship summits) where you can deeply connect with other individuals and form powerful relationships and friendships by learning about and serving others with no strings attached.

I think Corporate Alliance will be the next Utah company (following in the footsteps of Franklin Quest and Covey Leadership) that changes the way corporations all over the world think and act.

The company's philosophies resonated with me because they are so close to the concepts contained in my favorite business book of all time, "Love is the Killer App."

The primary idea is that your relationships are your biggest key to future opportunities, so you need to take time for people and build a system to help you manage your relationships.

A company that adopts the Corporate Alliance philosophy will provide employees with opportunities to spend time in pools and develop relationships with others. And it will invest in technology that will help employees manage their relationships and measure the strength of those relationships over time.

But it is not a selfish, what's-in-it-for-me philosophy or gimmick. Corporate

Alliance teaches you to care about other people just because, and to establish a habit of reaching out to find out what you can do for others — just because it's the right thing to do.

Its "learn, serve, grow" philosophy not only unlocks the doors to myriad business opportunities but it brings personal satisfaction in business to a whole new level.

Most companies and most individual executives are so busy and so heads-down that the keys to future opportunities (relationships with others) are ignored.

Years ago I heard one Utah company founder talk about how valuable his relationships turned out to be. He and many other sales people had been laid off by a very large computer company. At dinner, they talked about starting over. Someone asked if each sales person there would sell their contacts for \$50,000 and get out of the computer industry altogether. Everyone said they would, except this one man.

He then took a trip to meet with some of his contacts and asked if they might order products from him if he stayed in the business. One of his best customers said, "Not only would I, but I will right now place your first order." Millions of dollars of revenue later, this former salesman owned a very successful business — because of his relationships.

So what value is locked in the relationships that you and your company employees have but don't openly discuss?

My suggestion is to start holding a monthly "Who Do You Know?" meeting and see what major opportunities — based on relationships — are currently hidden from your view. tm

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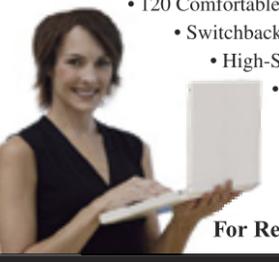
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