

RELATIONSHIPS KEY TO BUSINESS SUCCESS**By Jim Mathis**

Bear with me as I give a brief photographic history lesson to underscore the importance of relationships in business: Recently I was at work in a dimly lit club in Austin, Texas, U.S.A. shooting photos of a musician. The establishment had poor lighting, so I increased my camera's ISO (light sensitivity) to 12,800. This is an amazing number in photography, made possible only in recent years. It was not possible in photography's film era when an ISO of 400 was considered close to the limit of practicality.

When I was in college in the 1960s, a photo lab advertised they could push High Speed Ektachrome (slide film) from its usual speed of 160 to 1600, even though the manufacturer Kodak officially said this was impossible. "Push-processing" of film was like putting a supercharger on it, forcing it to do something beyond what the manufacturer intended. The name of this lab was "Elgin Smith's Studio 35," located in Prairie Village, Kansas.

Because of this, when I moved to Kansas City in 1971 I determined to meet and introduce myself to Elgin Smith, and we soon became good friends. When I opened my own custom photo lab in 1973, Elgin became my mentor and he taught me much over the years.

After starting my business I soon realized being associated with Elgin as a protégé was a huge asset to the business. It is doubtful my wife and I would have been as successful with our photography company as we were had it not been for his encouragement and referrals.

In the years since, I have learned relationships are the key to business success, no matter what your field of endeavor might be. This includes relationships with older people in the same business (as like Elgin was for me), relationships with peers, and maybe most important, relationships with clients and potential clients. This is why, to this day, I spend a significant amount of my time hanging out with friends. We hear a lot about the value of "networking," but for me that seems too calculating. There is no substitute for just being friends with people, enjoying their company, and benefiting from being around one another.

Someone might ask, "What if the potential client never does business with you? Has your time been wasted?" No. Most people are worth knowing even if they never become customers or send you a referral. We can learn something and grow through everybody we meet. Of course, this is not a new concept. The Bible, written thousands of years ago, says much about it. For example:

Relationships mutually enhance our lives. In most cases, we learn from one another – we have different strengths, interests and perspectives we can benefit from. So do not underestimate the value of your relationships. *"As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another"* (Proverbs 27:17).

Relationships provide strength in numbers. You may have heard that two oxen can pull many times more together than one ox can do individually. In the same way, in relationship with others, we can be more effective and successful in achieving our goals. *"Two are better than one because they have a good return for their work. If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!... Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken"* (Ecclesiastes 49-12).

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Where do you establish the majority of your relationships: at work, in your community, at church, or in the midst of your special interests and hobbies? How would you characterize these relationships?
2. Can you think of a very special relationship you have enjoyed that came about in an unexpected way, such as the way Mr. Mathis met Elgin Smith, who became a longtime friend and mentor? If so, describe what that has been like for you.
3. What is your attitude toward your customers and clients – as well as potential customers and clients? Do you tend to regard them in terms of how they can benefit you, or do you value those relationships without “strings attached” or conditions?
4. How do you respond to the biblical metaphors for relationships – comparing them to iron sharpening iron, or a cord of three or more strands that cannot be broken easily?

If you would like to look at or discuss other portions of the Bible that relate to this topic, consider the following brief sampling of passages:

Nehemiah 2:17-3:32 (a true team effort); Mark 6:7-12; 2 Timothy 2:2