

Wendy Riemann: Givers gain: A key to a good network

Posted on Thursday, May 31, 2018

The column below reflects the views of the author, and these opinions are neither endorsed nor supported by WisOpinion.com.

I received an email this week from a former colleague asking to catch-up via phone. Nothing surprising there – such an email is common in DC where people may live mere miles apart but meeting up requires an hour in travel time; people change jobs as frequently as Mother Nature changes seasons; and who you know can often be a big key to professional success.

What WAS surprising was that I had not seen or heard from this person in at least 12 years. I have lived in D.C. long enough to know that she would be looking for a job.

Grateful that I was not in her position, I did make time for a call. I learned that she had, in fact, quit her job and was looking for a new one – although she could not tell me what sort of job she sought.

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)

Most interesting, she said that she always wanted to “catch-up,” but work was always “so busy,” there was “never time.” Now she finds herself with plenty of time.

While on one hand I am glad she felt comfortable enough to reach out, on the other, if she is digging back to a colleague from 12 years ago, perhaps none of that busy working period was spent building genuine relationships.

If you, my dear reader, lost your job tomorrow, who in your network would actually help? Are you investing in them now so that they may invest in you?

I only knew of one position off hand and shared a couple of search ideas with her. Truth be told, I wondered about how much more effort I could make on her behalf. First, what sort of reference would I possibly be for her? Second, if I knew of a good job, would I really want to connect her with someone I respected, when she appeared to not be interested in developing strong relationships? And third, people I have maintained relationships with over the years are also job searching in similar fields – shouldn't it be that my loyalty would be to them first, since I would probably never hear from this person again?

We all experience different stresses in life. However, ultimately, we prioritize what is important to us. We make the time for that in our “busy” schedule. I believe people to be worth prioritizing.

I have written before that I despise the word “network,” or at least “network” as a verb. My network of people (noun) is amazing and I am thankful for each of them. However, it only grew and grows because I try to care about them as people and try to think about how I can genuinely help them – not what they can do for me.

Candidly, the time to “network” and build relationships is when you do not need anything. Some of those relationships will be professional, and when you are lucky, some of those relationships will turn into genuine friendships – and I will go to the moon and back to help a friend.

Help me, help you. I get it. Being without a job is stressful and can be humbling but force yourself to stay prepared and eager. Do some homework on what a person has been doing before calling them – knock their socks off with a thoughtful discussion versus simply tossing the hard part onto their plate.

Next, have some concrete ideas of what you would like to do so a person can keep their eyes open. For example, “I am looking for a job in communications within the government or non-profit sector ... I hope to avoid corporate,” is far more helpful than “I am looking for a job.” Review the person's LinkedIn to see if a specific connection exists that might be beneficial.

Finally, think about how you can help them in the process, even if it is just liking their work Facebook page, providing a business idea, or following them on Twitter – at least you can be doing some good, while you search for work. In the end, givers gain.

— Riemann is president of 1492 Communications, a consulting firm. Like 1492 Communications on Facebook to learn more.