



ATD BLOG

# Building Relationships for Career Success



By **Rita Balian Allen**  
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Today's workforce has many options when it comes to forms of communications and connections. We tend to rely on virtual formats for an easy, convenient way to maintain personal interactions. Of course, these decisions are individual and are influenced by many demographic factors, including personality preferences, comfort levels, generational differences, cultural differences, and geography, to name a few. But regardless of our chosen form of connecting, establishing, building, and nurturing mutually rewarding relationships is a critical part of managing our careers. This often-overlooked fact is even more essential today due to current market demands.

To start with, we must ensure we are investing the proper amount of time, effort, and energy in developing and nurturing relationships with key stakeholders within our organizations as well as within our field and industry. We should nurture these relationships in a deliberate and strategic but authentic manner, and we should prioritize this work as a necessity rather than a luxury. Given that many are doing a lot more today with less resources than needed to accomplish expected deliverables, adding to our workload can certainly be challenging. However, it is not impossible and doable in ways that work for each individual. We must consider the costs of not investing in these relationships: missed opportunities, underdeveloped resources, unidentified trends, lack of visibility, untapped possibilities, and friendships or partnerships that could have been established but weren't.

One constant throughout our careers is our relationships, which help preserve our livelihood and foster engagement and creativity just as much as our professional capabilities. As we navigate the peaks and valleys of our professional lives, building and nurturing sustaining, long-lasting relationships within our network of colleagues is invaluable. In fact, the ability to do so can make or break careers. It is also important to stress the difference between having a high quantity of connections or followers and having deep, high-quality relationships. It's not the number of contacts we build up but the depth of our relationships that determines our success.

According to the [Harvard Business Review article](#) "The Power of Healthy Relationships," "Data from the field of social psychology demonstrates that leaders who prioritize relationships with their employees and lead from a place of positivity and kindness simply do better. The most effective leaders of all (as measured by their success rates and the success of their organizations) are values-driven, transparent, compassionate, humane, and recognize employees as unique individuals. As a result, their employees perform better, too: They are more engaged, less likely to turn over, more loyal, and more productive. Companies that are run by these types of leaders enjoy higher client satisfaction, a better bottom line, and boosted shareholder returns."

The article goes on to share: "A research study by Julia K. Boehm and Sonja Lyubomirsky considering evidence from three types of studies—longitudinal, cross-sectional, and experimental—showed that happiness is in turn predictive of workplace success. And when you dig deeper to explore what 'happiness' at work means for employees, it comes down to positive relationships."

Embracing a positive outlook and allowing ourselves to be energized by the opportunities that result from building mutually rewarding relationships does not have to be overwhelming or intimidating. Start with these three steps to begin unleashing your potential and embracing the concept of relationship-building as user-friendly and vital to managing your career:

## **Step 1: Get to know your contacts and their needs**

Understand your commonalities and differences. Take the time to get to know the other person and their needs, interests, aspirations, and challenges. Share about yourself, your interests, and your capabilities as well as ways to compliment and balance one another. Suggest and initiate ways to assist each other in addressing needs, concerns, and challenges. Learn how to become a resource for the other person, focusing on them rather than yourself.

## **Step 2: Listen actively**

Engage in dialogue, offering your undivided attention, and show your genuine interest in helping and becoming a resource for others. Start a two-way conversation and keep it going with intentional follow-up. Heighten your emotional intelligence. Listening more than speaking leads to attentive comprehension as well as effective and satisfying results. Take good notes on conversations for future reference and continuity.

## **Step 3: Offer your time and expertise**

Extend yourself, your knowledge, and your contacts as appropriate. Do not wait for an ask but offer to help in a variety of ways without expecting anything in return. Act in ways that truly exhibit your passion and values. Exercise the "golden rule," common courtesy, and professional etiquette. Additionally, exercise the "platinum rule," which takes into account the other person's needs and expectations over our own.

When building relationships, sharing your most authentic self will build trust and credibility. Create your own formula that fits your style, approach, and needs. Deep relationships with mutual trust, respect, and admiration make all the difference. These relationships create a dynamic where we want to help each other by initiating acts of kindness and support for one another. Our colleagues' successes are rewarding for us, and it's satisfying to have been able to contribute in even the smallest way.

Be mindful of who is in your network, and practice networking etiquette to ensure you continue to enrich your relationships. In addition, stay true to your personal brand and remember that how you engage reflects your brand, which will become part of your legacy. Set realistic goals and hold yourself accountable. Use specific timelines and a formal system for follow-up to keep you on track. Once you have set up a formal system, it will become second nature, worked into the day-to-day pieces of your job and life. You'll experience the results and reap the rewards.

#### About the Author



#### [Rita Balian Allen](#)

*Rita Balian Allen, MS, PCC, is the president of Rita B. Allen Associates, an international career management firm specializing in executive coaching, leadership development, management training, and career development. She is a lecturer at Northeastern University, a sought-after speaker and presenter, and the author of numerous articles, blogs, and the book *Personal Branding and Marketing Yourself: The Three Ps Marketing Technique as a Guide to Career Empowerment*. Rita was voted one of the top 10 executive coaches by the Boston Women's Business Journal. Her mission is to help empower individuals to take charge of their careers and organizations to maximize their talent potential. Rita brings much human resources experience to her practice and has worked with leaders across all industries and professions.*