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Meet the MasterMinds: Connecting with Keith Ferrazzi

Keith Ferrazzi, author of the bestseller, [Never Eat Alone](#), is CEO of Ferrazzi Greenlight, a consulting, training, and development firm. Previously, he was chief marketing officer for Deloitte Consulting and Starwood Hotels, as well as CEO of YaYa Media.

“Let me start off by saying that I hate the word networking.”

Ferrazzi must have struck the right chord because his book reached #10 on the *New York Times* Best Seller list. MCNews asked Ferrazzi how consultants can use his style of relationship building to strengthen a consulting practice.

MCNews: Can we agree that our discussion *isn't* about “networking”?

Ferrazzi: We can. Let me start off by saying that I hate the word networking. I've been called the consummate networker, or the world's best networker, or something ridiculous like that, and it turns my stomach. I consistently get calls from people who say, “Hey, I'm a great networker, you're a great networker, let's get together.” It makes my skin crawl.

Picture the person who has a martini in one hand and is sloshing through the room, passing out business cards with reckless abandon. Such people give what we're talking about a bad reputation.

MCNews: You're talking about something more substantive than handing a business card to a total stranger.

Ferrazzi: Yes. I'm talking about building deep, close, personal, sincere relationships that make others care about you and you about them—emotional reciprocity. Wonderful gifts come from that reciprocity: people looking out for each other and working for each other's success; availability and access in ways that you don't have with mere acquaintances.

In addition, strong relationships require a level of intimacy and vulnerability that a lot of people ignore or are unwilling to put out there. You need fertile ground around you. You have to take enough risk yourself that others are comfortable doing the same and showing up in relationships in an intimate way.

MCNews: And those connections create a basis for personal fulfillment and professional success?

Ferrazzi: Sure do. Your readers should understand that relationships are the core of their success as consultants. That's certainly true for selling and account management, and equally true for expanding business with current clients. Relationships are, in fact, *the* critical component.

Given that, the question consultants should ask is, how do I build deeper, closer, more effective relationships?

MCNews: What's your advice for getting a relationship off to a good start?

Ferrazzi: I believe there are a few core principles for doing so, and one of them is generosity.

Your job is to make your clients successful. Generosity is the mentality with which you approach your clients to make sure that you're exploring all aspects of what they need. Whether you're offering the client a CRM package, redesigning the sales force, or creating a new marketing strategy, that solution should contribute to a winning outcome for your client.

Where a lot of consultants go awry, by the way, is to think that making clients successful means selling them your product. Clients don't care about your product. They care about the problems they are grappling with. As solution selling has been teaching us for years, your job is to figure out what the problem is and how you can solve it.

“Our job is to step back and figure out ways to help others reach their goals.”

Sometimes the solution you bring goes well beyond your product. For example, I may be working with a client who has an aspiration to get into politics someday, but today she has a job as the chief financial officer of a growing company.

While working with her, I'll also see if I can introduce her to a current senator or congressman so that she can move toward her real dreams and aspirations.

Our job is to step back and figure out ways to help others reach their goals. If we do that, the products we're selling become part of the package. If we do that, our clients will work hard to keep us around. We'll become an integral component of the solution clients believe they need, personally and professionally.

MCNews: Some people work hard on building relationships, but they may do it in a random, non-systematic way. Do you have any advice on the best way to invest time in building relationships?

Ferrazzi: We train people to use what we call a relationship action plan. In the strategic planning phase of your action plan, specific goals are crucial because targeted constituencies and individuals are matched to those goals.

In most strategic plans, people write out what they want to do and where they want to go. The component we add is to identify the individuals—internally and externally—who are crucial in helping you achieve those goals. Some of them can directly affect outcomes for you, and some are influencers in the process.

Take my situation. If I want to build my training and development business to a certain level this year, I know I need to focus on particular markets. I'll narrow down the industries I serve, at least for now, to high tech, professional services, and financial services. Those are my three markets.

I'll then identify a subset of those and write down the names of specific people and companies I'd like to do business with. The identification of who I want to connect with is aligned with my goals.

I also know that members of the media are a major constituency. I need to spend time with them so that I build my brand through the media and public relations.

The next step is to define your value proposition—what I call your currency—for those individual targets or constituencies. What do I have to offer them? Generosity is the core of building relationships. So what do I have to give?

There are other steps after this initial planning stage. But, at this point the process is to focus, target, and define.

MCNews: Do you find that it takes a long time to build a strong, new relationship?

Ferrazzi: I'd argue that it takes less time than most people think. Because of their fears and insecurities, most people take a very long time to develop intimacy. I believe you can jump start intimacy if you're willing to take more risk and be more vulnerable early in relationships.

You have to take the risk and be vulnerable first. The quicker you do that in a relationship, the better. With the right approach, in five minutes you can develop a level of intimacy with somebody you've never met before that is deeper than what you probably have with people who share cubicles and office space within a rope's throw of you.

It's not easy for people to be that open. But there is a process, and it starts out very simply by being willing to share some of your passions in life and asking others to do the same. Then it goes to the next level: sharing some of your struggles and asking others to do the same.

You also offer honest and sincere feedback as a part of your generosity. Be willing to demonstrate to others that you care about them enough to be straightforward.

All of those things are building blocks to jump starting intimacy, which ultimately culminates in being deeply understood—something you don't normally experience in a relationship for a long time.

So the assumption that it's going to take a lot of time may be flawed because it's based on your past experiences.

MCNews: But most people don't behave that way naturally in business settings, do they?

Ferrazzi: That's absolutely right and that's the point. That's why it can be a distinct, competitive advantage if you're capable of doing it.

MCNews: Was there an event or defining moment that led you to think the way you do about the importance of relationships?

Ferrazzi: When Deloitte made me chief marketing officer, I knew I needed coaching because I was young for the job. So I brought in executive coach, Nancy Badore. I said, I'm trying to create a great team here, but I'm frustrated that people aren't getting it as quickly as I'd like.

She looked around my office and said, the first thing I can tell you is that if you're trying to send the message that your team is important to you, look at your walls. They're all about you and famous people, and you and your bosses, and you and politicians. There's not a single picture of your team in this room. I instantly got it, and realized she was right. I was more focused on myself and my own success than I was on the success of the people who worked for me.

That night, I took down every picture. It was a pivotal time for me because I realized that, to be successful, you first need to focus on how other people will get there, particularly those who work for you.

MCNews: Last question: If you were to give a consultant one piece of advice, what would it be?

Ferrazzi: Well, beyond what I've already said, be cognizant that the principles that apply to creating the best business relationships are the same principles that apply to creating great personal relationships.

And building relationships is not just about a ruthless focus on clients and prospects for commercial gain. The focus should also be personal. Maybe one of your personal goals is to experience more joy in your life through creativity. As a result, some of the people you're going to go spend time with might be actors, painters, and poets.

The three things I always look at are professional, personal, and community. People need to take a close look at how they balance those three facets of their lives.

MCNews: Thanks for your time.

You can find out more about Keith Ferrazzi, his book, and his services at ferrazzigreenlight.com and ferrazzigreenlight.com/nevereatalone. Check out his blog at <http://nevereatalone.typepad.com/blog>.