

Staying in Touch

Type: Q&A Subject: Adding Value

By Andrew Sobel

Question

How do I stay in touch with past clients, in a meaningful way, when there is no ongoing business?

Answer

This is a very common dilemma. We may have dozensâ€”even hundredsâ€”of client relationships that are no longer active for one reason or another. There are a couple of things you can do to make this process more successful, and then there are 4 main ways you can stay in touch.

First, tell clients in advance you're going to check in with them 3 or 6 months after you've finished a particular program or piece of work. This way they'll be expecting a call from you and you won't feel awkward about contacting them.

Second, be selective. Distinguish between people who should be on your broader list of contacts, and those who are really key individuals you should invest to stay close to and have a face-to-face meeting or phone call with once or twice a year. You might have 10 or 20 relationships at a single client organization you worked with, but only a few of those are going to be with economic decision makers or high-potential up-and-comers. This doesn't mean you won't stay in touch with the othersâ€”it just means you should be willing to invest more serious time with the "critical few."

Finally, think about 4 ways of staying in touch:

- **Ideas or content.** Is there a particular issue that this individual is interested in? Follow up around that topic. Send him articles, books, or other publications with a short, handwritten note. Call up and suggest a cup of coffee, saying you recently completed another project that he might be interested in hearing about. Add value around an area of concern to that person.
- **Connection.** Personal introductions are a great way to add value. Who in your networkâ€”or your firm's networkâ€”would this person benefit from meeting, and vice-versa? I've brokered many meetings and conversations between people in my network, and they have always found it valuable and been grateful for the opportunity.
- **Personal help.** Personal help can take many forms, ranging from help with private schools for a newcomer to town, to finding a medical specialist for someone in need, to offering advice to a teenage daughter about applying to your alma mater. Always be thinking, "Is there anything I can do to be of assistance to this individual?"
- **Fun.** This used to be the main way professionals kept up with their networksâ€”by taking clients and past clients to dinner and to sporting events. Many clients don't have time for this anymore, but some might still relish tickets to see The Rolling Stones or a playoff game.

Finally, stay in touch regularly. Every week, follow up with at least a few people on your list. This is not a once-a-year event.