

2

Be Audacious

“I would like to speak to Mr. Penney, please.”

The next voice I hear is J.C. Penney’s. It’s James Cash Penney, one of the greatest merchants of the last century and founder, at the time, of the largest retail chain in the nation. I’m actually on the phone with him!

I’ll tell you more about the phone call in a moment. First, let me explain what led up to it.

I am in my early 20s. The Chamber of Commerce in Alliance, Ohio, has put me in charge of their Annual Meeting. A pretty bold move on their part for entrusting someone so young with the task. As one of my responsibilities, I have to get a keynote speaker for the meeting.

The year before, the Chamber drew 600 guests to its Annual Meeting. Being a bit obsessive and wanting to make a good impression on community leaders, I’d like to attract 750 men and women. I know it will take a very well known name to get that kind of a crowd.

8

Power Relationships

I've just finished reading a book written by J.C. Penney. I am transformed. I call Ed Ahrens, manager of the local Penney's store.

"Ed, do you think there would be any possibility of getting J.C. Penney to come to Alliance to speak at the Chamber's Annual Meeting? Would you be willing to call him?"

"No. Not a chance. No way. And don't ask me again to try to get him. I would be embarrassed to even make the call."

So I do what you would expect. I go ahead on my own. I make the call. And now you know about the phone call. Here's how the conversation went.

"Mr. Penney, I just finished reading your book, *Jottings from a Merchant's Daybook*. I was mesmerized. If I know anything about you, you would not take no for an answer before even asking. Am I right about that?"

"Absolutely!"

"That's what I thought. Mr. Penney, we are having an Annual Meeting of the Chamber of Commerce in Alliance, Ohio. You have a great store here on Main Street. We want you to be our speaker. You are our only choice. I'll turn out the entire town for you." My voice is confident, but my heart is racing.

"I'd love to come," he says. "When is it?"

I give him the date. He does come. And we do turn out the whole town. Well, nearly a thousand people.

The phone call, and then the Meeting, turned into a lasting relationship. One that changed my life. I'll tell you about that in a bit. But first, the lesson. Here is the Second Law of Relationships: *Be unafraid to ask*. That's what I did—and you can do it, too. Reaching out to the right person could change and enrich your life forever.

Be Audacious

9

Back to the Annual Meeting. It was a huge success. After the Meeting, I had the 86-year-old wonder sign copies of his book. We sold nearly 200 books.

When we left the auditorium and parted, we said our goodbyes. His final words to me were: “I wish you were a Penney man.” I suspect this is the highest possible praise coming from J.C. Penney. I didn’t walk to my car—I floated.

From that time on, I maintained an ongoing relationship with Mr. Penney (always *Mr. Penney*). Every time I went to New York, we would have dinner. His wife was gone by then, and he seemed pleased to see me.

The relationship grew. He was the grandfather I never had. He loved telling me about his first store in Kemmerer, Wyoming—and how it grew into another. And another. He often talked about his mother. She was his greatest inspiration.

He never tired of giving me advice. His favorite was: “Work hard. Work as if your life depends on it. It does.”

I believe Mr. Penney was 91 when I got a call from his housekeeper. “Mr. Penney fell against the glass in the shower yesterday morning. He’s at the hospital. I think he would want me to tell you.” And, of course, I go to see him.

It is a few years later before I go to see Mr. Penney again. He is failing. He doesn’t speak. It’s a moment I will never forget. I am sitting beside his hospital bed. Once in a while, he opens his eyes for a moment. I am certain he doesn’t know who I am. I hold his hand, this man who has become my grandfather, my hero.

There is no recognition. I get ready to leave. Then I stop. It seems he is trying to tell me something. His lips are moving.

10

Power Relationships

I bend close. I can barely hear him. I lean closer. He whispers.

“I wish you had been a Penney man.”

Celebrity, wealth, and power can present a seemingly unbridgeable divide between you and someone you'd like to meet. Make the first move. And then, cultivate the relationship over many years. Invoke the Second Law: *Be unafraid to ask.*

How to Put the Second Law into Practice

“Be unafraid to ask.”

Here are steps you can take to begin crossing relational distances that you thought were insurmountable:

1. With whom would you like to connect? A well-known entrepreneur? A thought leader in your field? A CEO? Be bold. Make a list.
2. Next to each name, write down *why* that individual might be willing to help you.
3. Just do it. Start contacting the names on your list. There are many ways of getting in touch. There are some CEOs who will immediately answer their email. Try the phone.
4. Social media offers new opportunities to connect with outstanding or famous people. You could start by following them on Twitter or on their blog, and leaving comments. Eventually, your name may become familiar to them—and then they may take your call or answer your email.
5. Don't give up just because you've been turned down. Successful people usually admire persistence. You might get a yes on the third try.
6. Don't go too far and pester or annoy people. If multiple attempts haven't worked, take a break!
7. If you connect, mention something that you know is important to the other person—perhaps something they wrote, or an accomplishment they are proud of.

3

Where Were You?

If you ever have a legal problem, call Catherine. She's a lawyer's lawyer. Smart, experienced, and calm under fire. She's been in the trenches, and also looked down at the trenches from on high. She sees the big picture as well as the minute details of every legal issue.

But there's a problem. You and I probably couldn't afford Catherine. She's a senior partner with a large, international law firm. She's worth every penny she charges, but her billing rate is out of this world. You have to have very deep pockets to get her services. That pretty much narrows the field down to a handful of large corporations who are facing bet-the-business decisions.

Oh, there's one other thing. Before becoming a senior partner at her law firm, Catherine was the general counsel for

one of the largest companies in the world. It's a powerful and important position. For most, it would be the crowning achievement of an extraordinary career. Because of this, Catherine has what they call "street cred"—that is, the credibility that only comes from having had to live by your wits in the rough-and-tumble real world of business.

I'm having breakfast with Catherine, and I decide to get some free counsel. Not about legal matters—about relationships.

"Catherine," I begin, "I'm curious. As a senior partner, you are trying to build relationships with in-house counsel at large companies and sell your legal services to them. But just a few years ago *you* were the general counsel. You hired lawyers and law firms all over the world." I pause. "So tell me—what it's like being on the other side of the desk?"

Catherine stops eating. She shifts her gaze away from her scrambled eggs to me. I think I see a hint of a smile.

"Before I got promoted, I was the deputy general counsel at my company. But even though it was a very important position, the outside law firms we worked with—and other types of consultants—always wanted to talk to my boss, the general counsel. They often tried to bypass me. They thought he made all the decisions, and they invested everything in their relationship with him. They treated me more like a gatekeeper."

I can see where this is going!

She continues: "On the day the announcement of my promotion to general counsel hit the newspapers, my office was flooded with calls from big law firms all over the country. They all wanted to talk to me. They coveted my business. All of a sudden I was very popular."

I've now deserted my French toast. I'm all ears.

Where Were You?

15

“So do you know what I said to all those blue-chip law firm partners who called me that day? The ones who never bothered to build a relationship with me?” She pauses. You can hear a pin drop at our table. “I politely asked each one of them, ‘*Where were you five years ago?*’”

Bam!

Many professionals ask me, “How can I build more relationships with CEOs and other top executives?” The best answer is the Third Law of Relationships: *Follow the person, not the position.* Build relationships with smart, motivated, interesting, and ambitious people, even if they’re not in an important job right now. Follow them throughout their careers.

You see, really important people—those who are at the top of their careers in any field—have brought their advisors along with them over many years. While it is not impossible to break into someone’s inner circle after they have achieved great success, it’s also not an easy task.

Just look at what U.S. presidents do. After they win the election, who do they put into key roles in their administration? Do they scour the land for smart and capable people they have never met? No! They draw on tightly knit networks of those they know and trust. They put the individuals who led their campaigns and advised them in other roles into the really important positions.

Whether you’re 20 or 50, you know interesting people who are going places. Follow them, stay in touch with them, and cultivate your relationship with them over many years. The fruits will be enormous. Not only will they help your career, but—perhaps more importantly—you will have an indelible impact on their success as well.

16

Power Relationships

Don't just focus on connecting with top executives or other successful people at the peak of their careers. Go for the bright ones on the rise.

Before you know it, you'll end up knowing a sprinkling of very important people in high positions. And when this happens, the relationship will be very different than if you are a latecomer. You will share history together. You'll be relaxed around each other. You will be treated like the old friend you are.

The Third Law of Relationships will ensure that you build power relationships today with tomorrow's powerful people: *Follow the person, not the position.*

How to Put the Third Law into Practice

“Follow the person, not the position.”

Don't wait! In 5 or 10 years your network-building task will be much more difficult.

- Make a list of 12 to 15 people you know who are not yet at the peak of their success or careers. Pick passionate, motivated, talented individuals.
- Ascertain what their top three to five goals and priorities are. Knowing these, decide how you can best add value in the relationship.
- Stay in touch with these individuals regularly over time. Here are some ways to add value while you stay in touch:
 1. **Ideas and content.** Send them ideas, suggestions, perspectives, articles, books, etc. that relate to one of their interests.
 2. **Connection.** You can add great value by connecting your key contacts to other people in your network.
 3. **Personal help.** Are they new in town, and do they need help navigating schools and doctors? Can you offer some career advice? How else can you help?
 4. **Fun.** Can you invite them to a meal, a sporting or cultural event, or something else that you would both enjoy?
- Organize your staying-in-touch activities. Put them in your calendar so that each month you are implementing two or three activities to connect to and support these individuals.

