

Building Better Relationships Through ERM

A proactive mindset and process for deepening bonds.

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During the course of writing *Never Eat Alone*, I codified years of lessons and experiences into a mindset and process for achieving depth, focus, and excellence in relationship building. Over the past five years I've refined these ideas into a systematic, phased approach through vigorous field research and have trained tens of thousands of clients in sales, marketing, and general leadership positions to more effectively manage the key relationships to their success.

I have developed a concept and practice called executive relationship management (ERM), which connects the rigor of CRM with advanced interpersonal relationship building. Many people recognize the value add of CRM software solutions to corporations, but these are limited to database and activity tracking technologies. Too few people achieve discipline around the less focused and more challenging personal and professional skills of ERM. ERM can be mastered by taking a proactive, disciplined approach to your personal network, allowing you to decrease the cycle time to building important relationships and to scale intimacy throughout the workplace. The training structure comprises two main modules, mindset and process/skill set.

The ERM mindset is that relationships are core to our success and business relationships are just personal relationships in a business environment. Thus success in business is a natural outgrowth of sincere relationships based upon the heart of all great relationships: intimacy and generosity.

The foundation of intimate relationships is our capacity to make others comfortable by being friendly and genuine. We achieve a deeper level of connection as we share with others our interests, passions, dreams, and aspirations. Think about the power of having a deep conversation about dreams over a bottle of red wine. As we lower our walls and trust grows, we share our struggles and challenges and, yes, even fears and vulnerabilities. This is the pinnacle of intimacy, the basis for all great, deep, lasting, and loyal business relationships. My earliest customers knew how critical they were to my company's survival. I asked for their advice on how to improve when I failed, and I discussed openly and with intimacy my fears and appreciation for their faith in me and my company. They are still my customers.

The second half of the ERM mindset is generosity--our outward focus on helping others achieve their goals. What of value can you give to others, based on what you know about their needs, dreams, passions, and fears? Basic generosity is

offering clients great products. The next level is providing great solutions around a product. And the highest level of generosity, making others feel or be successful, evokes the vertex of Maslow's hierarchy of needs where the fully self-actualized person is altruistically compelled to help others.

Put the ERM process to work to achieve your personal and professional goals with the right mindset in place:

Focus: Know what you want, personally and professionally. Think of this as personal strategic planning over a multiple year horizon.

Target: Bring those into your life who are important to your goals. Who are they? Create a map to clearly identify the appropriate groups and specific individuals.

Define: After identifying and prioritizing the individuals, define what you can do for them (generosity) and create appropriate messages to reach out to them.

Align: Align internally and externally. Prepare, train, and align those inside your company necessary to execute your plan. Externally, align your friends at key accounts and anyone else who can help. Is everyone you know aligned with your goals? Does everyone know your goals?

Outreach: Reach out to targeted individuals through a combination of meetings, events and something we call ping-pong, quick, casual greetings done in any number of ways, both reactive to important events, of others' lives and proactive to planned events like holidays. Establish regular contact with key people in your network to stay front and center in their mental Rolodex. Never again should you hear that a past client went with a competitor that was on the client's doorstep when a decision was being made. Remember, out of sight is out of mind.

Renew: Your goals and plans are dynamic and must refresh and renew at least twice per year in an ongoing process.

ERM allows you to create an automatic process to scale intimacy, focus on building deeper real relationships with key influencers who will help you succeed, and achieve the full potential of your network. But we never let our clients forget that building better relationships will bring each of us more joy in our long and demanding days and ultimately in our lives.