

# NETWORKING AS<sup>™</sup> MEATBALLS

by Megan Burke Roudebush

with

Kate Salley and Scott Salley

keepwith Founder Megan Roudebush has known fellow Bryn Mawr College alumna Kate Salley since they both attended Bryn Mawr College. The two have stayed in touch over the years, both through volunteer efforts at the College and as they have become friends. Kate and Megan are also text accountability buddies for early morning workouts. When Megan learned about Kate and her husband Scott's Monthly Meatball gatherings, she knew that keepwith needed to interview and feature Kate and Scott for this issue of Networking As<sup>™</sup>.

This edition of Networking As<sup>™</sup> focuses on Networking As<sup>™</sup> Meatballs. That is, the power of what happens when a couple invites people into their home to share a Saturday night meatball dinner once per month. Kate's and Scott's tradition started over four years ago, and the two have hosted 50 Monthly Meatball Dinners ("Meatballs") to date. Gatherings that focus on bringing people together to share a meal are a great way to foster authentic relationships. Replicating Kate and Scott's approach is very easy to do (and you definitely do not need to host dinners monthly, nor serve meatballs, to reap the networking benefits).

# NETWORKING AS™ MEATBALLS

At keepwith we know the importance of having a reliable network, the importance of leveraging one's alumni networks, the positive relationship building that happens when you bring people together to share a meal, and even the importance of working with members of your network to hold you accountable for your goals. Kate Salley is a fellow Bryn Mawr College alumna of mine. She and her husband Scott host what are now iconic Monthly Meatball Dinners at their home. The dinners, affectionately referred to as "Monthly Meatballs," bring up to 10 people of all ages together at the Salleys' home each month for dinner and conversation and an all around authentic good time. The first "Meatball" took place in January 2015 and as of June 28, 2019, 50 Meatballs have occurred.



## Kate and Scott Salley

Hosts of Monthly Meatball Dinners (aka "Meatballs")

Kate is Assistant General Counsel of a clean energy company, focused on securities compliance, corporate governance and mergers & acquisitions. She also serves on the Executive Board of the Bryn Mawr College Alumnae Association and as a Trustee of Summit Montessori School. Scott is a stay-at-home dad and community theater actor, having starred in four plays since November 2017. He also serves on his church board and is a dedicated volunteer for Summit Montessori School. Kate and Scott live in Massachusetts with their seven year old and three cats.

### Networking Defined

MBR: How do you define networking? What does it mean to you?

KS: Networking is just building relationships. It took me a while to get there.

I worked at a large law firm and it always felt like it was very transactional...a tool for getting business. At some point, I worked with a business development coach and it taught me to think more broadly about networking.

SS: Networking is similar for me. It can be easy to think of networking as a business thing, but once I made the leap from potential clients, leads, and coworkers, to something I can do anywhere in my life, it became a lot easier.

I also thought networking was something that needs to be a part of your job and that I was not good at it. It was something that did not come naturally to me to put myself out there and it became a roadblock for me. Through Meatballs, I have learned that networking can just be a normal conversation. It does not have to be a regimented meeting at a coffee shop with bulleted notes. It can just be conversation, which I can do.



As we think about the Salleys' Monthly Meatball gatherings and the relationship building magic that the gatherings create, here are three things to consider:

1. Bringing small groups of people together, to sit around a table and share a simple meal is an easy and replicable way of fostering authentic and meaningful relationships.
2. You can create your own regularly scheduled mealtime gathering. Whether you host events monthly at your home, or quarterly at a restaurant, and whether it is meatballs or barbecue or ice cream Sundays or a weekly meal prep party, bringing people together regularly (weekly, monthly, quarterly or every third Thursday) is a great way to network.
3. You can host regularly recurring get togethers that are not food focused: a monthly book club or movie outing, a quarterly exercise class with friends or a monthly meet-up at which attendees all volunteer together for a great cause.



### The Networking/Meatball Magic

MBR: Tell me about your Monthly Meatballs—what are they? How did they come about? Why do you host them?

KS: I read a blog post back in 2013 or 2014 about a woman who hosted a dinner every Friday night, I'm not sure how she managed that (and we had a 2 year old at the time) but I thought it was a cool idea. At the end of 2014, I had another friend who was doing something similar: a third Thursday party. I knew we could find a way to do something similar so Scott and I launched our first event and invited all of our Facebook connections, about 500 people. 25 people RSVPed and showed up to our first dinner.

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KS (con'd): Our Monthly Meatballs are always on a Saturday and feature 2 key ingredients: 1. Cast a wide net; and 2. Sit down together at the table to eat.

1. Cast a wide net: The people who came to the first dinner are not a group of people that we would have thought to bring together around the table. It has been really interesting to see who comes, and there are some people we would have never thought to make an effort to see every month, but they show up to almost every dinner.

2. Sit down together at the table to eat: We put up simple folding tables in our kitchen, make one big long table, and enjoy each other's company.

At one point we were renting chairs and I was struggling with turning people away. I reached out to the woman whose blog post inspired our meatball dinners and she said it was ok if you host a dinner every month; if people miss one month, they can attend the next. This is how we came to the number of 10 attendees including children for each dinner, and most months we have a mix of new people and people who have been before.

In addition to our Facebook events, we have also created an email invite list. We include current coworkers, prior coworkers, friends from college, neighbors, people from our church, Bryn Mawr alums from the 1980s-2000s. It has been really wonderful to watch everyone make connections. Our son was almost three when we had the first meatball dinner. He is now 7 and enjoys it too. We always cook the same thing. It's easy. We make good use of slow cookers and could prepare a meatball dinner in our sleep. Scott preps the meatballs during the week, we always make sure to have appetizers, salad and bread, pasta and meatballs, vegetarian sauce, and a dessert. Sometimes people bring things, sometimes they don't. We also started out doing it at a time that was kid friendly. People start to arrive at 4:00 pm and we sit down to dinner at 5:30 pm. For anyone with small kids, they can get them to bed and get ready if they have anything to do later on. We keep it flexible and low key.

Our 40th birthday parties were both held at meatball dinners.

SS: Meatball dinners have been one of my favorite things for the past 4.5 years. I love that every month we have new and returning people. I love that it speaks to the fact that people enjoy it, and other people hear how much fun they are. If we got to a point where new people were not excited and interested, I could start to lose interest as well. We had one where there were just 6 of us, about a year and a half ago. We have had them upwards of 20 - 30 people. Now we are generally about 12-15 people. It is a nice size that enables us to have good conversations.

MBR: How do the different people in your life connect and network at these Monthly Meatball gatherings?

K: Earlier this month there was a woman from Bryn Mawr that went on a hike and a friend she met at a meatball dinner commented on her post. I love seeing those connections. Our regular folks get to know each other and have their own friendships. A handful of friends have met and forged friendships of their own. No weddings or amazing business deals so far...

Networking is a long game. You never know what kind of advice or information will get passed around the table.

### Make Your Own Meatballs

MBR: I talk frequently in presentations that I give to clients about your Monthly Meatballs; what advice would you have for someone looking to up their networking game, who wants to start a similar type of gathering?

KS: Just try it and see where it goes. If you had asked us how many of these we would have in January 2015, we went into it not knowing. If you asked us now...

SS: Once a year, we have a ten second conversation when we decide if we are going to keep it going. Just try. No one will hold it against you.

KS: Having a flexible date helps; we just look at our calendar and make it work.

SS: The repetition of doing it, makes it much less daunting. For the first couple I got up early and prepping dinner was my only focus. I had 10 hours to get our house and lives ready. Now I start the sauce after breakfast, prep the tables, and know that we will be ready when everyone shows up.

KS: It can be anything. The key is the self selected invite list and sitting down to eat together. You order pizza, or host a potluck. There is something about sharing a meal with people that is universal.

SS: Making it something you are comfortable doing and not a lot of pressure allows it to stick. If we were doing something different every month, it would not still be going on.

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## Networking as Meatballs?

MBR: Other than it being the tongue in cheek title to this month's Networking As article, What does the term Networking As Meatballs evoke for you?

KS: For me, it is a reminder that networking can just be a conversation. It can be a meal with someone. Networking does not have to be a big scary thing. For the Meatballs, it is consistency. If we just did one dinner or once a year, people wouldn't have the connection... none of us would build relationships. Again, it is about consistency and sharing a meal. It is effortless and accessible. You can do anything.

SS: We have made it so easy for other people to come to because we don't rely on our guests to bring anything. It is great if they want to bring bread or a dessert, but we plan to have everything covered. It means rolling into a friend's house on a Saturday night; a whole different world than a 10:30 am coffee downtown on a Tuesday.

MBR: People often differentiate between networking for personal and professional reasons. Do you view those differently? What is your approach?

SS: My view on that has changed drastically, largely because of Monthly Meatballs and being out of the workforce right now. Networking professionally is not much of a focal point for me, but it is amazing to see the connections and how those connections can lead to other connections. All politics is local. All networking can be professional and no idea when it is going to go professional.

KS: I don't separate personal and professional networking anymore.

MBR: What else would you like the world to know about what networking means to you, about these special dinners that you host, or about how you both have benefited from hosting these awesome Monthly Meatball gatherings?

KS: It is embracing the serendipity of networking, because you never know what connections will be made. We are both at a stage where we are in the giving mode of networking and while we don't know how we are going to connect people, we are always thinking broadly about where people are, what they need, and how we can be helpful. Monthly Meatballs just gives another opportunity for those kinds of connections to happen.

SS: This is almost a forum of evangelism for kindness. Bringing people into our home and feeding them is one of the most basic elements of hospitality and the hospitality that leads to friendships and relationships and networking connections grow organically. It all starts with the basic tenet of wanting to be kind and help friends.

# NETWORKING AS™ MEATBALLS

At keepwith, we know the importance of having a strong network. We also know that not everybody feels comfortable attending formal networking events that involve dressing up and standing in a large ballroom with a drink in your hand. We often speak with clients about non-traditional, outside-the-box ways to network. Kate and Scott Salley's Monthly Meatball Dinners are a wonderful example of just that. Step 1: Make simple and delicious food. Step 2: Invite fun people over. Step 3: Enjoy watching the networking magic happen.

We hope that you all will take the meatball and run with it, creating your own authentic and recurring gatherings.



## About

### Networking As™

Networking As™ is a recurring series of articles, blog posts, and videos highlighting how networking is integral to a particular topic (for example, Networking As™ Wellness). Networking As™ publications may be accompanied by real-life networking events. Future issues will include Networking As™ Mentorship, Networking As™ Business Development, Networking As™ Parenting, and Networking As™ Global Assignment, among others.

**Have an idea for a future Networking As™ publication? E-mail [megan@keepwith.com](mailto:megan@keepwith.com)**

## Why

### Meatballs

At keepwith, we see the interplay between networking and power every day. The impact from what happens when people activate their networks to connect and help one another is a powerful thing. We know that empowering people to network well leads to strong relationships that make things happen. Now more than ever, it was important to talk about Networking As Power during Women's History Month. We hope this is only the start of the conversation.

## About

### keepwith®

We are a company that teaches people how to network well. We provide tailored advice and education that empowers people to form relationships that matter. Said more simply: we teach networking.

Founder Megan Burke Roudebush values authentic relationship building above all else. From New York City and now based outside Chicago, she enjoys volunteering, mentoring and most of all, networking well.



Megan Burke  
Roudebush

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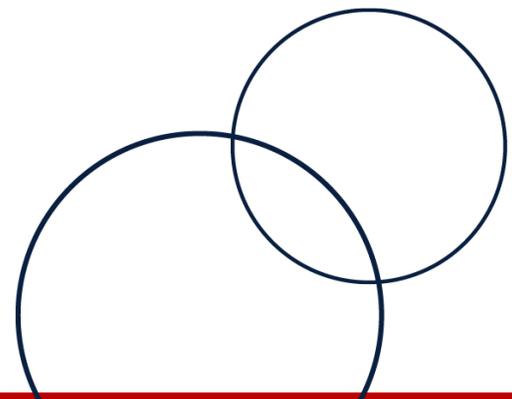
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Please contact Megan Roudebush ([megan@keepwith.com](mailto:megan@keepwith.com)) to schedule a brainstorming call to figure out how we can help.



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