

NETWORKING AS™ FRIENDSHIP

by Megan Burke Roudebush

with

Dana Maselli, Monique Misrahi, Sue Nicholas,
Alan Deitch, and Lauren Lacey

At keepwith®, we understand the important role that friendships play in our lives and the important role that networking plays in establishing key friendships. As we mentioned last month, research has shown that when we spend dedicated time building and maintaining our most important relationships, we experience health benefits.

When we let life get in the way of our effort to make time for our most important friendships, those friendships suffer. What we know is that when people network with their friends, whether it is to further a career related goal, to find the perfect child care provider, to have a friend provide a second pair of eyes on a personal project you are pursuing, or to get some validation and perspective on something that you are experiencing, networking with your friends is different than networking with professional colleagues or acquaintances with whom you are not as close. All five friends featured in this piece were once strangers, but now they are all people whom I consider close friends (and with whom I network).

At keepwith®, the connection between networking and friendship is clear. That is why we are thrilled to include friendship as the topic of our second *Networking As™* article and to feature friends who exemplify the link between networking and friendship every day.

Many people think about networking in a way that only focuses on professional development, or more specifically, as something that only matters when we are looking for a new career opportunity. By thinking about networking this way, some often forget about the role that friendship plays in our networks. keepwith® often talks to people about the importance of talking to strangers, even if doing so is outside one's comfort zone. Each of the close friends featured in this article started out as strangers and years later, I am thrilled that each one of these remarkable human beings is both a friend and a valued member of my network.



Dana Maselli

Director, B2B Product Marketing
(Publishing Industry)



Monique Misrahi

Senior Director, Digital Content Strategy
& Experience (Hospitality Industry)

How We Met

I first met Dana Maselli and Monique Misrahi in May 2002, when I joined a large publishing house in my first out-of-college job, did not know how adults made friends, and joined the company softball team to find out. Our team was not very good at softball, but we were very good at being friends and 17 years later, we remain very close.

How Do You Define Networking?

MM: To me, networking is just finding your people who have a common interest and then having a relationship with those people in some way around something that is common. Whether work or friendship or a hobby, whatever it is, the interest is what binds you in the middle and what happens around the interest is the networking.

DM: I define networking as trying to exchange ideas with people or groups and making connections through a series of interrelated ties or contacts. To me, networking means leveraging and optimizing the connections with the people you know, your connections or connections of connections to help you achieve the personal or professional.

MM: It is leveraging something...taking the value of that network of people to do something with it that you want. A network does not help you unless you use it in some way: to get a better idea about something, to learn something new, or to make a connection. It is one's use of a network that makes it valuable.

What Role Does Networking Play in Friendships?

DM: My friends are my sounding board for pretty much everything anyway so it is natural that friendship plays a role in networking...when a friend reaches out and I know someone who can help.

MM: For me, I think I didn't realize until recently that networking was even a part of your friendships. The older I get the more I realize that. The role it plays for me---everybody has some consistency of things happening in their lives with their friendships. Why not collectively figure stuff out together?

Your friends are the people you trust the most. You ask your friends the things that you don't ask other people, because you would not be comfortable and you are not sure you will receive an honest answer. Networking with friends is a way to really get a truthful answer to some aspect of your life... friendships or marriage... or work.

How is Networking Different Among Friends?

MM: The biggest difference is trust. You trust your friends. With more distant acquaintances, you have to be "on" all the time...mindful of not embarrassing yourself... With friends, there is no judgment, whereas in many other networking contexts, judgment is at play.



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Sue Nicholas

Database Administrator (Higher Ed)

How We Met

Often it is our hobbies that help us to connect with new friends over a shared common interest. That is exactly how I met Sue Nicholas around the knitting table at our favorite yarn shop in the North Center neighborhood of Chicago years ago. Yes, that's right, folks. Sue and I met on a Wednesday evening knit night at the yarn shop.

How do you define networking? What does networking mean to you?

SN: I define networking as sharing information or ideas for social or professional purposes. I think it is important.

I am trying to change my views on networking. I feel intimidated by it, but I would like to change my point of view on networking...and I would like to think of it more as supporting friends and the community or my team at work, rather than how it directly benefits me...if I have that outlook, I find it less daunting.

What role does networking play in your friendships?

SN: I don't think I would have ever met you or Bianca or Christina without knit nights....and then meeting you, I get networking advice and to go to your events... Another way that networking and friendships has overlapped is that our friends told us about the house we recently purchased. My friends are pretty awesome, so I feel comfortable with them. It seems more relaxed than meeting people in a professional setting.

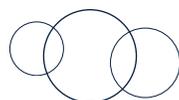
I feel more at ease meeting people with friends around... like last year there was a fundraiser for the park and we were at a bar...and because our friends were there and I was familiar with them, we got to talk a bit more in that setting than we did bumping into each other in the neighborhood. I ended up meeting some great people and I have taken classes with a bunch of people, a soap making class and a salsa canning class... this has led me to try new things that I would not have done before.

We met at a yarn shop and now we have been friends for over 8 years. How did that happen?

SN: We met at an awesome store with awesome people....Knit night is where a bunch of knitters or crocheters come together, drink wine and snack, knit items and get help on projects and feedback, but mostly just chat...and talk about what is going on in our lives... what is going on in the world...it is really fun and I miss it.

What does the term Networking As™ Friendship evoke for you?

SN: An opportunity to have fun and meet people... mostly just have fun. It seems like a fun way to see people, learn more about what is going on....in the community.



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Alan Deitch

Software Engineering
(Technology/E-Commerce)

How We Met

I met Alan on the platform of the 7:03am Metra (commuter rail) train platform, because we both incorporate talking to strangers as part of our approach to networking.

How Do You Define Networking?

AD: I was thinking about it. For me it is a proper computer term. Two or more nodes or items or people that have either a one way or a multi-directional exchange of data or information. Sometimes the information is across one to one or one to many nodes. It is the communication between two or more parties.

Without networking, we would all be individualized isolated beings...So what is it? It is the core building block of communication. Without it, there would just be people walking around not knowing anything.

What Role Does Networking Play In Your Friendships?

AD: Up until recently, I didn't think of networking and friendship as correlated, but it is the ability to get to know someone; the foundation of learning about other people; becoming part of a community; how we are social...not social network as in Facebook proper...but how you know that there is an event happening in town...or that there is an opening on the softball team.

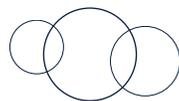
How we communicate between people in the community. That is how I think about networking and friendship now. Before, I mostly thought of it in the computer term of networking... until you started your company, keepwith®. Now, I consider networking as a 'Social verb', instead of a computer verb.

As I have learned about networking and thought about how one computer communicates with another; networked by wire; protocols, I realized that networking is no different for people, who communicate by text or voice or email or sign language.

How do your friendships help you to network better?

AD: Unlike a computer network, where one node requests information...networking over friendship is an equal 50/50. What does this person need and what do I get? what do I need and what do they give? It should be 50/50. Networking with friendship...what does this one person need. Store it. Maybe eventually I can help... and then maybe eventually I can tap that person for help. Networking as friendship requires a deeper understanding of the person.

Hopefully this understanding will trigger a reaction, if and when something down the line; some sort of signal happens; triggers a reaction...I remember when my friend said that...and I can communicate about it or connect the two people to have an intelligent conversation.



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Alan Deitch

We met on the Metra platform for the 7:03 train several years ago and are still friends. How did that happen?

AD: So knowing us, what probably happened was you said “hello.” I then took my earbuds out and said “excuse me, what?” and then you introduced yourself and then we started talking.

How did our friendship continue? We just had so many things in common professionally and personally that it was easy to have conversations. It didn't hurt that we aligned and had similar thoughts on parenting and business. Not having journaled it at the time, that is how I think of it retrospectively.

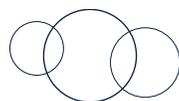
How does talking to strangers impact your ability to network?

AD: It is still a skill I am working on; I fall more into the initially introverted person category, but it has helped in that I have learned so many new things and have thought about other topics that I don't think I would have otherwise thought about had I not met new people. Meeting working moms has taught me a lot and I think differently now as a manager of a mom-to-be or a returning mom how I should be thinking about things....Talking to strangers [on the 7:03am platform] has helped me to learn different perspectives and to be more inclusive when thinking about people that do not work, or sound, or act, or look like me.

How does talking to strangers impact your ability to network?

AD: You never know what a hello will start, so take your ear buds out. Be present, asking questions gives you so much information which could end up being powerful, or may round you off more than you were before. My wife and I always have this conversation. Don't assume the answer is no.

Empower the person with whom you are talking to say no. Ask a question. Never assume someone does not want to talk to you or does not want to help you. Let the other person own the “yes”s and the “no”s. Nos are powerful and you can learn a lot from “no thank you.” Go outside your comfort zone. Be present when people are around. You never know what you might learn.



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Lauren Lacey

Senior Director, Associate General Counsel
(Consumer Products)

How We Met

I was fortunate enough to sit at Lauren Lacey's table at a women's conference years ago. I am lucky enough to still call her my friend.

How Do You Define Networking? What Does Networking Mean to You?

LL: Networking is creating opportunities to establish, develop and leverage connections across your community, whether for personal or professional purposes. Networking is a skill to develop, not a hurdle to clear when you are in need. Effective networking is a necessary skill for everyone and even more so as you ascend to broader leadership roles in any organization.

What Role Does Networking Play in Your Friendships?

LL: Networking is an integral element of friendships, both existing and developing. There will undoubtedly come a time when you need to rely on a friend for advice or feedback, so why not rely on a friendship for an introduction to expand your network?

I have needed networking in my professional life, but I have needed this more in my personal life to help with child care, education and general parenting sounding boards. I have been fortunate enough to develop real and close friendships through such networking.

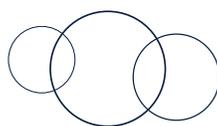
How do your Friendships Help You to Network Better?

LL: I have made new friends through networking because I allowed myself to be open to expanding my network simply by having brief follow-up coffee meetings or phone calls. These newer friendships have helped develop me as a person and professional in ways that I did not previously envision.

The more I network, the easier it becomes because my network is broad and I have embraced it as personal development instead of a chore.

We Met By Sitting at the Same Table at a Women's Leadership Conference Several Years Ago And Are Still Friends. How Did That Happen?

LL: Megan is how it happened. We certainly found ourselves leading the table exercise and sensed some level of similarity between us, but Megan really created the foundation for our friendship, by following up with a dinner invite with certain of her existing contacts in the community. Our friendship has evolved organically and the key is keeping in touch, offering support through lending an ear, providing guidance or helping to better the other.



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Lauren Lacey

How is networking with your friends different from networking with others whom you know?

LL: Networking with friends is simply easier because there is a comfort and safety that generally does not exist in a networking scenario where you do not know anyone. One is generally less hesitant to ask for an introduction when there is already an established relationship, so I would argue that you should always start with your friendship network when you are in need of a connection.

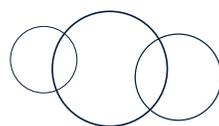
People often differentiate between networking for personal and professional reasons...do you view those differently? What is your approach?

LL: Until you accept that in both situations, you can receive personal benefits, one will likely feel like a chore. My approach is to rely upon my personal networking comfort when I am in a professional networking situation. I have found that it has not only made me more comfortable reaching out to others, but it also eases the other person: a win-win.

What else would you like the world to know about what networking means to you, what the connection between networking and friendship means to you or how we have benefited from ending up at the same table at that conference?

LL: My entire mindset has expanded with a more mature and practical understanding and approach to networking. Too often, we treat networking as an un-delegable task that we think about only when we have a need...looking for a new role...needing to learn more about a connection with another person, etc.

I realized that routine networking to create new connections and, more importantly, nurturing established relationships, is the key to success and overcoming the feeling that networking is a chore. Just like any other skill, networking skills must be exercised enough to decrease networking anxiety and increase chances of success.



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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™ Friendship*). *Networking As™* publications may be accompanied by real-life networking events. Future issues will include *Networking As™ Power*, *Networking As™ Mentorship*, *Networking As™ Business Development*, *Networking As™ Parenting*, *Networking As™ Meatballs* and *Networking As™ Global Assignment*, among others.

Have an idea for a future **Networking As** publication? E-mail megan@keepwith.com

Why Friendship

We trust our friends and are able to be comfortable and authentic around them. What's more, our friendships are some of our most important trusted relationships. Yet we sometimes think of networking as being only for business. The friends featured in this article explain how valuable they find networking with friends and how much fun it can be to establish new friendships as a results of networking.

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

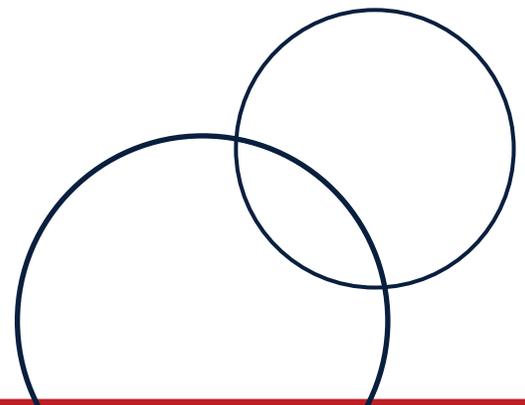
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Know an organization or team who would benefit from networking education and advice?

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



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