

## Not taught in school

Robert L. Dilenschneider

# How to Be More Powerful Without Putting People Off

**M**any people have a mistaken idea about what constitutes power. True power is not the same as running roughshod over other people or getting ahead at any cost. This form of power is temporary. People see through it and look for ways to undermine it.

Power comes from turning superficial connections into a network. That network opens doors that might otherwise be unavailable. How to strengthen your network...

■ **Make personal gestures.** Pick up the phone instead of relying only on E-mail. Look for opportunities to thank people—and do so with handwritten notes. Or send an appropriate gift when someone has gone out of his/her way to help you. In an age dominated by technology, the human element has great impact.

■ **Do your research.** One of the most valuable aspects of technology is that it allows you to do exhaustive research on important contacts. You can learn about schools attended, professional history, hobbies and other information that makes building rapport easier.

*Example:* Before a meeting with a prospective client about a multimillion-dollar project, my colleagues and I reviewed all references to him on Internet search engines. We learned that he liked a particular rock band so much that he hired the group to play at his birthday party every year. At the beginning of our meeting with the client, I asked him how the band was doing. He warmed up to our ideas immediately. As we left, I gave him two of his favorite band's CDs. The meeting ultimately led to his engaging our services—and to a valued business relationship.

■ **Prioritize your contacts.** As your network grows, it will be impossible to stay in constant touch with everyone. Remain in frequent contact with people who currently are essential to your goals, but don't drop anyone from

your list completely. Keep contacts alive by writing or calling everyone in your network once or twice a year.

■ **Respond to individual requests for help.** Be willing to brainstorm or help someone else think through issues that he/she is grappling with. Make suggestions that could help a colleague's business. Offer access to your contacts. At the very least, forward information that could be useful or let people know about resources that might help them.

*Example:* Whenever anyone writes to me in search of a job, I always respond. One such person, a graduate of Harvard Business School, had written letters to 400 potential employers, and I was the only one who wrote back. This man has since become highly successful—and he now is a friend of mine.

I didn't respond to him because I thought he might be a client someday. I did it because it was the right thing to do. He still remembers that I was the only one who offered support when he needed it. My willingness to help empowered us both.

■ **Put society ahead of yourself.** Identify local, national or worldwide causes that you can help by contributing money, time, ideas or contacts. Give back to institutions that have helped you and broadened your life, such as schools and arts organizations. If you put others ahead of yourself and really mean it, many will see that you have a unique quality and respect it. That is a key ingredient of power.

*Bottom Line/Personal* interviewed Robert L. Dilenschneider, one of the world's foremost communication experts and leadership counselors. He is founder and principal of The Dilenschneider Group, Inc., a public relations firm in New York City, and the former president and CEO of the public relations firm Hill & Knowlton, Inc.

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