

“Never Eat Alone”

Keith Ferrazzi

with Tahl Raz (Doubleday – Division Random House – March 2003)

Summary by Bob Littell, Chief NetWeaver

Foreward – Why I believe this work is so significant – **Bob Littell**

Just as last month’s book, “*How to Get Control of Your Time and Your Life*” by Alan Lakein was a continuation of the previous month’s book when we covered Greider and Levinson’s “*Following Through – A Revolutionary New Model for Finishing Whatever You Start*”, this month’s book, “*Never Eat Alone*” hits upon some of those same themes which truly determine success in business and in life.

I first came across Keith Ferrazzi after reading an article in *Inc. Magazine* almost a decade ago. The article by Tahl Raz featured Keith as the world’s greatest **networker**. In the article I saw several ‘germs’ of similarity between his brand of ‘networking’ and NetWeaving, and so I called Tahl Raz who was nice enough to give me Keith’s number. At the time, Keith was CEO of YaYa a software gaming company, and we had a nice conversation about NetWeaving and some of the similarities of our thoughts.

Later, after the book, “*Never Eat Alone*” came out and a number of people indicated that some of the book reminded them of NetWeaving, I was pleased that maybe our conversation might have influenced some of Keith’s writing and hope we’ll continue some of our parallel thought course and direction far into the future. I also hope to help him promote his new book, “*Who’s Got Your Back*”, even possibly with making Atlanta one of the stops on his book tour as he rolls it out this Spring.

Much as we’ve been talking about the importance of “**Following Up**” and “**Following Through**” in our book club sessions, some of the key themes in Keith’s new book include *accountability* and how to make commitments which result in real positive and sustained change.

Here’s a quote from the new book, “*Who’s Got Your Back*” which I especially like:

Look at it this way: success is the ability to create the results in life we truly seek and not, say, just the amount of money you make. Those who have a clear picture of what makes them tick, who know their true inner motivations and priorities, simply don’t get in their own way. They can focus with energetic intention on their goals. It’s what allows ordinary people to live extraordinary lives.

“Never Eat Alone”

Keith grew up in a small town in southeastern Pennsylvania in the heart of steel and coal country. His father worked in the local steel mill and moonlighted in construction for extra income. Through sacrifices his parents made, as well as his own tenacity he was able to attend a private school, then Yale undergrad, and Harvard Business School. In each, he felt something of an outcast – contrasting his humble beginnings with the affluent past of the majority in each of these upper-crust institutions. Nevertheless, he learned important lessons in life about the ‘club’ and what hanging around the right people at the country club, where he caddied for and was mentored by the wife of the owner of the big lumberyard in town, taught him,

To achieve your goals in life, I realized, it matters less how smart you are, how much innate talent you’re born with, or even, most eye-opening to me, where you came from and how much you started out with. Sure all these are important, but they mean little if you don’t understand one thing: You can’t get there alone. In fact, you can’t get very far at all.

It was in his second semester at the Harvard Business School, watching the overly-competitive behaviors of many, when he began to change his attitude and actually jokingly began to wonder, “How on earth did all these other people get in here?”

What many of my fellow students lacked, I discovered, were the skills and strategies that are associated with fostering, and building relationships. In America, and especially in business, we’re brought up to cherish John Wayne individualism. People who consciously court others to become involved in their lives are seen as schmoozers, brown-nosers, smarmy sycophants.

Over the years, I learned that the outrageous number of misperceptions clouding those who are active relationship-builders is equaled only by the misperceptions of how relationship-building is done properly. What I saw on the golf course – friends helping friends and families helping families they cared about – had nothing to do with manipulation or quid pro quo. Rarely was there any running tally of who did what for whom, or strategies concocted in which you give just so you could get.

Over time, I came to see reaching out to people as a way to make a difference in people’s lives as well as a way to explore and learn and enrich my own; it became the conscious construction of my life’s path. Once I saw my networking efforts in this light, I gave myself permission to practice it with abandon in every part of my professional and personal life. I didn’t think of it as cold and impersonal, the way I thought of “networking”. I was, instead, connecting – sharing my knowledge and resources, time and energy, friends and associates, and empathy and compassion in a continual effort provide value to others, while coincidentally increasing my own. Like business itself, being a connector is not about managing transactions, but about managing relationships.

I believe this last line is very important and for the same reason why I believe NetWeaving is so powerful and so productive, is that when you realize that you are truly doing it just with the other person's Needs, Problems, and Opportunities in mind, you can do so unabashedly and with all the energy you can muster. As Keith says,

*I learned that real networking was about finding ways to make **other** people more successful. It was about working hard to give more than you get. And I came to believe that there was a litany of tough-minded principles that made this softhearted philosophy possible.*

Don't Keep Score

Perhaps for me personally, this was one of the most eye-opening parts of the book and a reminder of one of my greatest weaknesses.

Addressing a group of students he said,

By the time I was your age, I tell students, I had been afforded one of the best educational opportunities in the world, almost purely through the generosity of others.

But, he continued, *Here's the hard part: You've got to be more than willing to accept generosity. Often, you've got to go out and ask for it.*

Now I get that look of instant recognition. Almost everyone in the room has had to reach out for help to get a job interview, an internship, or some free advice. And most have been reluctant to ask. Until you become as willing to ask for help as you are to give it, however, you are only working half the equation.

That what I mean by connecting. It's a constant process of giving and receiving – of asking for and offering help. By putting people in contact with one another, by giving your time and expertise and sharing them freely, the pie gets bigger for everyone.

Keith is always frustrated when he gets this response from someone he's trying to help:

Sorry, but I can't accept the favor because I'm not sure I'll ever be able to repay you, or . . . I'd rather not be obligated to anyone, so I'll have to pass.

Keith says this is precisely how a network functions - because of mutual need and why one-percenters (i.e. the ultra rich) understand this – they themselves used the power of their network of contacts and friends to arrive at their present station.

I also really like what Keith says about relationships – *“relationships are more like muscles – the more you work them, the stronger they become.”*

There’s a great chapter entitled **“What’s Your Mission”** and I encourage you to read it especially to help you recognize your **“blue flame”** – what Keith defines as – **where passion and ability come together**, but for the rest of this summary, I’m going to focus on the philosophies, strategies, and skill sets which Keith highlights as secrets to relationship-building success.

Perhaps for these tough economic times we’re facing today, Keith’s chapter – **“Build It Before You Need It”** may be one of the most important, and once again very much in line with a series of articles I’ve written over the past several months recommending what people – especially persons in sales and marketing, and leaders at all levels should be focusing on.

In a conversation with George, a friend seeking advice in developing his new PR firm, Keith took issue with George’s reluctance to start meeting with potential clients until he could do so in more *‘credible’* manner and with his own PR firm.

“You’ve got it totally backwards. . . You’re setting yourself up for failure.”

My advice was to start finding future clients today. Had he thought about what kind of industry he wanted to specialize in? Had he thought about where the top people in that industry hang out? Once he could answer those questions, the next step was to go hang with this new circle of people.

“The most important thing is to get to know these people as friends, not potential customers.” I said. “Though you’re right about one thing: No matter how friendly you are, if the people you approach are any good at what they do, they won’t hire you right off the bat to do their PR. Which is why you should offer your services for free – at least at first.

One of the biggest mistakes that people make and of which I was certainly guilty during the early part of my career was being too insulated within my own company with few connections on the outside. In today’s world, if you are building healthier relationships both ‘internally’ within your company (assuming you work for a company), as well as developing relationships ‘externally’ through friends, involvement in the community, etc. Follow Keith’s advice:

*So don’t wait until you’re out of a job, or on your own, to begin reaching out to others. You’ve got to create a community of colleagues and friends **before** you need it. Others around you are far more likely to help you if they already know and like you. Start gardening now. You won’t believe the treasures to be found within your own backyard.*

The Genius of Audacity

Another area in which Keith and I are totally in synch is in the area of ‘**audacity**’ – being a bold outside-the-box thinker and doer. . .not afraid to try something different even when the chances of failure are great – each failure to be looked upon as just one step closer to success.

After all, it was Keith’s father’s audacity at securing a meeting with the CEO of the company for whom he worked, to pitch his son’s potential – winning an interview for Keith to meet him which resulted eventually in a scholarship to a private elementary school.

And yet there’s ‘risk’ in audacity as Keith says about some of the unsuccessful attempts he has made to meet people – especially high level ones.

Sometimes I fail. I’ve got an equally long list of people I’ve attempted to befriend who weren’t interested in my overtures. Audacity in networking has the same pitfalls and fears associated with dating which I’m not nearly as good at as I am the business variety of meeting people.

For many people, the fear of meeting others is closely tied to the fear of public speaking (a fear that consistently beats out death as the one thing we dread most). Some of the world’s most famous speakers admit to feeling similar anxiety. As Mark Twain said, “There are two types of speakers: those that are nervous and those that are liars.”

Some hints which Keith gives include:

- *Find a role model* – follow someone around who is gregarious, outgoing and by watching them, you’ll pick up some of their behaviors.
- *Learn to speak* – join Toastmasters
- *Get involved* – get a hobby; join a club – take a leadership position and as Keith says: “*Being a leader in life takes practice – so practice! The possibilities for making new contacts and reaching out to others will grow and grow.*”
- *Just do it* – Make a goal of meeting with one new person a week.

There’s other great practical information in this chapter which comes from DeAnne Rosenberg – “The Madam of Moxie” which you should read.

The Networking Jerk

I love that I keep finding NetWeaving parallels with so many of Keith's points but I think that this quote of his also fits me in my earlier days:

If you knew me as a younger man, you may not have liked me. I'm not sure I liked myself that much. I made all the classic mistakes of youth and insecurity. I was pretty much out for myself. I wore my unquenchable ambition on my sleeve, befriending those above me and ignoring my peers.

In my earlier days, I pretty well fit the description of that classic Networking jerk Keith describes – *a hyper-Rolodex-builder and [business] card-counter*.

Today in my NetWeaving talks, I poke fun at those persons who at networking events tend to carry on a conversation with you just long enough to determine if you are a prospect – immediate or semi-immediate – for whatever it is they have to sell or offer. If the answer to that question is '**no**' or '**probably no**', the direct eye contact begins shifting to over your 'right shoulder' . . . then 'left shoulder' searching for his or her next 'landing spot'.

But the good news of which Keith and I are also living proof – you can change. You can grow out of that stage, and the most important point is that the earlier you recognize that changing to a mode of operation focused on helping others, not only is more effective and productive, but it's also a whole lot more fun.

Keith offers several rules for avoiding being or becoming a Networking Jerk:

1. *Don't schmooze* – When you speak, make sure you have something to say and say it with passion.
2. *Don't rely on currency of gossip* – In the long run, even though people seem to lap up on it, sooner or later it will come back to burn you as someone who can't be trusted.
3. *Don't come to the party empty-handed* – you're only as good as what you give away. The most in-demand people today are bloggers with something powerful to say.
4. *Don't treat those under you poorly* – What goes around – does come back around and as Keith says, some of your underlings will become "overlings" and mistreatment memories are some of the strongest.
5. *Be transparent* – We want our super-heroes to all-powerful but we most admire and are drawn to people who are 'genuine'. Keith says, "*People respond with trust when they know you're dealing straight with them.*"
6. *Don't be too efficient* – In today's word, mass mailing of almost any kind is greeted with some question of sincerity. I love this statement: "*If you're not making friends while connecting, best to resign yourself to dealing with people who don't care much about what happens to you.*"

The Skill Sets

Do Your Homework

In quoting Winston Churchill, Keith stresses how you decide how you should meet someone so that as an aftermath, they will have been impressed:

“Preparation is – if not the key to genius – then at least the key to sounding like a genius.”

Before meeting with anyone to whom he’s been thinking of introducing himself Keith will research *who they are and what their business is. . . what’s important to them: hobbies, challenges, goals – inside their business and out. Before the meeting I generally prepare, or have my assistant prepare, a one-page synopsis on the person I’m about to meet.*

*Trust me, **all** people naturally care, generally above and beyond anything else, about what it is they do.*

*The idea is to find a point of common ground that is deeper and richer than what can be discovered in a serendipitous encounter. Armed with knowledge about a person’s passions, needs, or interests, you can do more than connect; you’ll have an opportunity to bond and **impress**.*

Take Names

Who are the people whom you really need to meet - who can help you get to where you want to go?

Do you know who are the most important people within you own industry, field of study, profession? They should be the people Keith refers to as the ‘*influentials*’. They are the ones who are highly respected but they are the ones who can *spread the initial buzz* about a product or service you’re trying to launch or promote. And these lists of key people are everywhere magazines – newspapers – online.

In addition to these influencers and people who might be able to help, Keith also main- tains a list of ‘*aspirational*’ contacts. These are just interesting, successful people, or both.

Keith suggests you always carry this list with you including phone numbers and when you get a chance, try to make a connection. And I might add what I always try and do is to first find a way to help that person. You *give to get* which is another key concept Keith and I share in common.

Warming the Cold Call

Here's a hypothetical phone call which demonstrates some important points Keith makes to 'warm' a 'cold call'.

Hi, Serge. It's Keith Ferrazzi. John's talked highly of you for some time, And I've finally got a nice excuse to give you a call. I'm calling for my friend Jeff Arnold, the founder of WebMD, who has a new, very powerful way to distribute digital content. With some of the new products you'll be launching this quarter, it could make for the perfect partnership. I'll be in New York next week. Let's get together. Or, if getting together this trip isn't convenient, I'll make room in my schedule for whenever it's more convenient for you.

Keith's four rules for **warm** calling:

- 1) *Convey credibility by mentioning a familiar person or institution*
- 2) *State your value proposition – and how it will help the person or company*
- 3) *Impart urgency and convenience – be prepared to do whatever it take to meet the other person on his or her own terms*
- 4) *Be prepared to offer a compromise that secures a definite follow up at a minimum.*

Managing the Gatekeeper – Artfully

As Keith says, “Half the difficulty in reaching out to others is actually reaching somebody at all. It's even more difficult when that somebody is a Big Kahuna with a thicket of protective voice mailboxes, blind e-mail addresses, and defensive assistants running interference.”

Keith's first tip is a great one to remember. Don't think of the gatekeeper as the 'secretary' or the 'assistant'. Think of her or him as ***their bosses' minority partner***.

I've found personally that winning over the 'gatekeeper' can call for as much creativity and satisfaction as making a major sale and in some cases, it's the most important step. Getting Arthur Blank to agree to allow his testimonial about my book, ***“The Heart and Art of NetWeaving”*** was really all accomplished through building rapport with more than one gatekeeper and with whom I still thank any chance I can get.

After describing a very long and involved process of winning over the gatekeeper, Keith concluded the chapter saying,

Situations that call for this amount of maneuvering are, unfortunately, not rare. It's real work and it takes a finesse that only practice, practice, practice can master. But once you recognize the importance of gatekeepers, and turn them into allies with respect, humor, and compassion, there will be few gates that aren't open to you.

Never Eat Alone

When I first heard of the book, “*Never Eat Alone*”, I’m sure I’m not alone in thinking that this was going to be a book mostly about making sure that at every

breakfast, lunch, and business dinner meeting, you should always make sure to have someone else there, as a way of building relationships.

As you can see from what we’ve covered just up until now, it’s far more than that and in this chapter, the ‘chapter’ title primarily revolves around the idea that you should “*constantly be looking to include others in whatever [you’re] doing. It’s good for them, good for [you], and good for everyone to broaden their circle of friends.*”

Keith will occasionally ask a few employees to share a car ride with him to the airport. He’s always trying to figure ways to multi-task while connecting people from different parts of the community. “*The more new connections you establish, the more opportunities you’ll have to make even more new connections.*”

Follow up or Fail

For those of you have been part of one or more my **NetWeaving/Pay It Forward “Don’t Need to Read the Book”** book club events, you know how much emphasis I put on “**follow up**” and “**follow through**”. It shouldn’t surprise you that Keith considers this chapter to be especially important as well.

In fact, if I’m correct, on page 106, there’s one sentence which I believe is the only one in the entire book in which he capitalizes the entire sentence:

FOLLOW-UP IS THE KEY TO SUCCESS IN ANY FIELD.

He also suggests, as you know I do, to include in the follow-up email something about which you talked during the conversation. He also likes to put a reminder to himself in a month or so to drop the person another e-mail.

Be a Conference Commando

Look at a meeting or a conference to “*meet the kind of like-minded people who can help you fulfill your mission and goals.*”

I love this quote, “*Those who use conferences properly have a huge leg up at your average industry gathering. While others quietly sit taking notes, content to sip their free bottled water, these [conference commandos] men and women are setting up one-on-one meetings, organizing dinners, and in general, making each conference an opportunity to meet people who could change their lives.*”

Keith suggests that one of the best ways to maximize your results from the meeting is to get involved in the planning of the meeting. Not only will you then know who will be coming but often you'll get invited to some of the 'invitation only' sessions with real 'poobahs'.

One of Keith Conference Commando ideas which might not exactly be very popular with the official Meeting Planners, but which would be very effective, is to schedule your own 'conference within a conference'. For example, invite a small group of influential people to 'play hooky' from the official dinner in order to go to a smaller more intimate restaurant. *"The more active you become in playing host of your own conference within a conference, the better you'll be at helping other people make connections, making you a center of influence."*

Draft Off a Big Kahuna

Keith explains: *"If you get to know the most popular person at a conference – that person who knows everyone – you'll be able to hang with them as they circle through the most important people at the conference."*

He stresses to meet an important speaker BEFORE his or her session and before they have gained 'celebrity status'. Stand near the door before the session and even better have one of the meeting organizers point them out before they even are ready to go on.

Be an Information Hub

Great tip here. *"Go beyond memorizing the conference's brochure. Identify information the people around you would like to know and come prepared. This might include information about trade gossip, the best local restaurants, private parties, etc."*

Master the Deep Bump

Of all the weapons in the Conference Commando's arsenal, Keith considers the '**deep bump**' to be the most important. The 'deep bump' means bumping into someone and within only a few minutes, having made enough of a *deep* and lasting impact, that *you have made enough of a connection to secure a follow-up.*

Keith suggests you do this by: *"looking deeply into the other person's eyes and heart, listen intently, ask questions that go beyond just business, and reveal a little about yourself in a way that introduces some vulnerability (yes, vulnerability; it's contagious!) into the interaction. All of these things come together to create a genuine connection."*

Most people think a conference is a good time to market their wares. They rush from room to room desperately trying to sell themselves. But a commando knows that you to get people to like you first. The sales come later – the follow-up discussions you have after the conference. Now is the time to begin to build trust and a relationship."

Know Your Targets

This tip is obvious. Keith suggests you keep a list of the 3 or 4 people you'd like to meet and checks them off after making the connection. He also writes some notes to remind him what they talked about.

Breaks Are No Time to Take a Break

Keith says, “*Determine where most people will gather, or at least pass, and station yourself there. This might be near the food table, the bar, or the reception area.*”

Follow Up

Just to make sure, Keith reminds us again of the importance of ‘following up’. And to avoid the natural tendency to put it off, during speeches, Keith will sit in the back of the room writing follow up emails to people. These emails are meant to remind them of their commitment to talk again.

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Up to this point in the book, I'm sure you've recognized a ton of great tips and advice for being more effective as a Networker and NetWeaver. In our “***Don't Need to Read the Book***” book club meeting, within the smaller breakout groups, we'll be discussing several of the key points made up to now.

Rather than complete the entire summary, I'm going to leave the rest up to you. I wanted to whet your appetite to buy the book and finish the last half of the book which has these key points which you can discover on your own:

- Who are ‘super-connectors’ and why does Keith consider them the “cornerstones to any flourishing network”? (page 128)
- What is the ‘Art of Small Talk’ and why is ‘verbal fluency’ so important? As you've probably heard me say, an important NetWeaving concept is to elevate the conversation to ‘*meaningful dialogue*’. Keith is saying essentially the same thing when he says, “*Shake it [the conversation] up*”. Find out what he means and learn again why he accentuates the power of ‘*vulnerability*’. (page 145)
- What does Keith mean when he says that when you first meet someone, *within a fraction of a second your mind is making a thousand computations – thinking like a caveman?* (page 149)
- What is a *Johari Window* and why is learning how to **adapt** your own to each person with whom you are talking so important? (page 153)
- Here are some of the age-old reminders about the importance of ‘listening’ but with some new twists. (page 155)

- What does Keith mean when he says, “*In my initial conversation with someone I’m just getting to know, whether it’s a new mentee or simply a new business contact, I try to find out what motivations drive that person. It often comes down to one of three things: making money, finding love, or changing the world*”? (page 161)
- In both chapters “**Expanding Your Circle**” and the chapter “**Social Arbitrage**”, – Keith is actually describing some aspects of NetWeaving but I really like the way he terms things like ‘*partnering*’ (page 141) and the idea of “*Start thinking about how you’re going to make everyone around you successful.*” (page 171)
- What is “*Pinging*” and why does Keith say that “*unless you feed the fire of your network, it will wither or die?*” (page 181) What’s a ‘*value-add*’ ping? (page 186)
- What’s an “*Anchor Tenant*” and why does it make sense to ‘*feed them*’? (page 192)
- Why does Keith consider ‘*being interesting*’ one of the most important ways to being, or becoming an effective marketer, and which he points out is all about ‘*building relationships with customers and prospective customers?*’ (page 203) What are some ways he suggests to become ‘*more interesting*’? (pages 215-219)
- Why is the ‘**WOW**’ factor so important today in building your brand” (page 225) What are some ways to do that? (pages 228 –230)
- How to be your own PR Representative, especially as you’re building your business so as to “*Broadcast Your Brand*”? (pages 240-245)
- Why can doing a byline with someone be an ‘*opportunity to shine*’? (page 248)
- Why is our “*Don’t Need to Read the Book*” book club a good example of Keith’s “*Build it and They Will Come*”? (pages 261-262)
- Read the chapter on “*Find Mentors, Find Mentees, Repeat*” and ask yourself who is mentoring you, and who are you mentoring?
- Finally, find what Keith means by “*living a connected life*” and why it’s more like a ‘*quilt*’ than a ‘*quest*’. (page 297)