

The Power of Professional Relationships

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Kelly Kozisek with staff at Oregon State University.

Imagine what life would be like as a procurement professional if you didn't have working relationships with your clients, colleagues, executive leaders, and suppliers. Would you be able to fulfill your duties or support your institution's mission? Would you even be a procurement professional? Highly doubtful. It may sound cliché, but relationship building is a critical skill, especially in today's rapidly changing landscape in higher education. My boss used to constantly advise that it's all about the relationships

and that it was through those relationships that a university professional could build a foundation for success.

Those of us who have worked in the higher-education procurement setting for more than a decade have witnessed a vast transformation. Technology, business practices, and the cultural climate have changed dramatically. The procurement professional must evolve and stay ahead of the game in order to position himself or herself as a leader. No longer

are we the "procurement police" focused primarily on lowest cost, compliance, and opportunistic business relationships. Today, we are value-driven, collaborative, solution-oriented, and adept at navigating the complex network of technology. As I read Oregon State University's (OSU) Strategic Plan and listened to our President's messages, it's clear that the top priorities focus on providing an affordable high-quality education, generating revenue, and finding innovative ways to expand OSU's

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footprint in order to make a positive impact locally, nationally, and globally.

Strong professional relationships are what help us to stay engaged and successfully navigate this continuously changing environment.

Effective Communication

It all begins with effective communication. It sounds simple, but in reality it can be complicated. Applying mindfulness, listening to what isn't said, and understanding that people are different in the way they observe things can make good communication a real challenge.

“To effectively communicate, we must realize that we are all different in the way we perceive the world and use this understanding as a guide to our communication with others.”

Tony Robbins

Let's look at mindful communication. Do you really understand your customer's needs? Are you sought as a go-to person at your organization? People appreciate approachable professionals who are open-minded. They seek subject matter experts who share their ideas, information, and solutions clearly and understandably. There is no secret key to becoming a mindful communicator. It takes a balance of sometimes-contradicting techniques. There are ways to essentially say “no” without cutting off further conversation and collaboration. Identifying and offering alternatives keeps doors open to an unobstructed path towards a solution. You can be the most knowledgeable person in your department, but if you are seen as someone who only voices concerns without offering solutions then people are going to avoid you. Attitude is everything, and maintaining a helpful one will bolster the effectiveness of your communication.

It's not only how you communicate, but the

method you apply given the situation. Twenty years ago, procurement professionals had few vehicles for communication. Think about how frequently we now communicate and the variety of ways: email; meetings; instant messaging; video conferencing; blogging; texting; or person-to-person. We need to master all forms of communication and use the method that best suits the circumstances. Bottom line: The more effective our communication, the better our relationships.

Value Diversity

Those in higher education procurement operate in a diverse environment. There is a wide range of ages, backgrounds, cultures, and expertise among faculty, staff, students, local communities, and suppliers. Add to that the fact that the institutional functions we support are also diverse. Procurement has an impact on technology, student learning, research, international programs, revenue streams, facilities, student activities, housing, dining, and entertainment. Procurement touches every organizational unit at one time or another. We must build relationships with the subject matter experts in these areas and share that knowledge. On countless occasions, our procurement staff has been the conduit to connect these stakeholders. Taking the time to get to know our stakeholders and build good relationships is critical to the success of procurement professionals and their departments.

NAEP Can Help You Build a Meaningful Network

Meaningful networking is an art that takes time; it must be well managed. It doesn't always make sense to participate in every opportunity to network, and those opportunities should be focused on naturally connecting with someone. Focusing on quality rather than quantity is important. Know what you want, and develop a plan to get there. But keep in mind that it's not all about what's in it for you.

“It's better to give than to receive. And never keep score. If your interactions are ruled by generosity, your rewards will follow suit.”

Keith Ferrazzi, author of

Never Eat Alone: And Other Secrets to Success One Relationship at a Time

Your Membership in NAEP offers myriad opportunities to network and develop meaningful relationships and to share and gain from one another's experience. Through your contributions, you can make natural connections with procurement professionals, enrich your experience as an NAEP Member, and at the same time, strengthen the association. Serving on a committee, running for office, participating in NAEP forums, writing an article for the Journal, or offering suggestions are just a few actions you can take to ignite productive and long-lasting relationships and enhance NAEP's value to us all. You'll find that the experience will lead to further opportunities that multiply your meaningful relationships. This will help you build a strong network that will strengthen your value proposition and add more relevance to your organization. Best of all: You'll make friends. The very first person I met at my first NAEP Annual Meeting is someone who has become a great friend, and today our relationship is stronger than ever. Amazing! It really is all about the relationships.



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