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Finding Balance

PART 2: PERSONAL CONNECTIONS

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Perhaps the thing I have missed most over this last year is connecting with our customers in-person. One of the values that Clientek (and I personally) hold is that to run a successful business and deliver high value to your clients you must evolve from being a vendor into a partner.

Partners create relationships with their customers. They understand the personal motivations of the individuals as well as the business objectives and drivers. Partners evoke trust from their customers because those customers know that the partner also has a personal, vested stake in their success.

To create this type of relationship, you must go beyond simply providing resources and delivering project output. It takes time, effort, and personal investment to build this type of connection. While business discussions can largely dominate most conversations with customers, I've found over the years that breaking away from those discussions and learning more about the people that you interact with is the quickest and best way to create the type of relationship that garners trust.

Prior to this last year, this was done by taking business trips, breakfasts, lunches, dinners, happy hours, and special events such as football games and summer BBQ's. With all that screeching to a halt last March, many found ourselves in a situation where those activities were abandoned.

Networking - perhaps the most important thing any professional can do - was paused. The typical activities we used to engage in for this activity were no longer available. Quickly into this forced isolation I found myself becoming more and more listless. Networking, one of my favorite parts of work, had been replaced by just more work. Again, I started to look for ways to find the balance and regain the personal connections that had abruptly been removed.

Initially, it began with simple catch-up video conference calls. I started working through my connections, setting up short calls with each of them with no agenda. A unique thing about this past year was that it was not an isolated situation to any

specific group or geography. We were all in the same boat, and thus all had individual stories to relay and updates to provide.

Catch-up calls evolved into virtual lunches and happy hours. A group would schedule lunch and one person would order food to be delivered via delivery service to each location. A drink recipe would be sent to each person who'd then attend the happy hour with their new cocktail in hand.

As we head into summer, the population becomes further vaccinated and the restrictions begin to lift, we have more opportunity to get out and begin to see people in-person. Networking will begin to take some new (and some old) forms and people will reconnect to find the balance these important interactions provide. I, for one, am greatly looking forward to it.

Clientek will be ramping up our monthly summer BBQ's in just a few weeks. These informal social gatherings are just one way that we look to continue building long-term, value-driven, personal relationships. If a small outdoor networking event sounds like a good time to you, reach out! I'd be happy to make sure we get you on the invite list.

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