

# Never Eat Alone Summary

By Keith Ferrazzi

Meaningful relationships are critical to our success, and forging strong networks allows us to thrive.

*Never Eat Alone* encompasses the idea of, 'It's not what you know but who you know.' What distinguishes highly successful people from everyone else, is that they use the power of relationships in a way that's positive for everyone. *Never Eat Alone* lays out the process and mindset we need to connect with colleagues, friends, and associates.

Author and avid networker Keith Ferrazzi, believes that the secret is to reach out to people if you want to get ahead in life. Who you know matters. To some, networking is a dirty word, but Ferrazzi's take on it gives a different view. Networking is based on generosity. It's about helping friends connect with other friends. His networking approach is the opposite of the brash business card exchange, and desperate "glad-handshake," that's often associated with the term.

We'll briefly explore why our ability to connect with others is one of the most essential business and life skills we can learn. We'll also find out what Ferrazzi advises us to do, to build and maintain relationships based on trust and reciprocity. By the end of the summary, you may discover that the best kind of investment is the social one.

# Form Relationships That Encourage Collaboration

If someone phoned to offer you a free and all-inclusive ski-weekend, would you go?

You might wonder what the catch is? Well, over a warm drink, you might just be asked to share some sage business advice with a young up-and-coming entrepreneur.

Here's a story that's used as the finest example of *Never Eat Alone's* principles in action. At the age of 22, Elliott Bisnow had been hustling successfully as an ad salesman for his father's small email newsletter business. So successfully that the company's growth exceeded their ability to manage the incoming work, Elliott knew he needed answers, but he didn't think business school was the way to go.

After reading *Never Eat Alone*, Elliott reframed his problem: what he really needed was access to a network that could provide him with mentorship and advice. He needed to grow his business rapidly, but it wasn't a knowledge problem; it was a people problem that needed a people solution. As the book suggested, Elliott created a **relationship action plan**. This involved making a list of all the prospective people he thought might share the reasons for their success. He then picked up the phone and did some 'warm-calling,' as Ferrazzi calls it. He offered an incredibly generous all-expenses-paid ski weekend, and the prospective mentors couldn't refuse this. He charged \$15,000 to his credit card, and provided them with an opportunity to rub shoulders with like-minded, successful people, and mentor the young and upcoming entrepreneurs. The idea wasn't just geared to financial success, but rather on making a positive social impact. What started as a free ski-weekend, turned into a thriving business called Summit Series, with both for-profit and nonprofit

outcomes. To date, Summit isn't just in the business of launching careers; it's also in the business of creating community.

Networking is about forming intimate supportive relationships, that spur collaboration. It's also about satisfying our human need for connection, belonging, and meaning. The past decade of social science research, tells us that meeting these relational needs isn't just a soft notion of the good life. Our bonds with others are the prerequisite for creativity, innovation, progress, and at the end of the chain... profit.

Connecting with others is a fundamentally important life skill. Why? People do business with others they know and like. Networking is vital for career success. There's a classic study where, of 282 people surveyed, 56% had found their jobs through personal contacts. On the other hand, only 19% had found theirs through job advertisements, and 10% through applications they had initiated. However, the strength of our bonds also links to our health and happiness. Our well-being, both personally and on a work front, comes down to the support, guidance, and love we get from the community we build around us.

So what's the first principle we can take from this story? The answer is that networking requires a little audacity on our part.

## **Audacity is Crucial, and Don't Be Afraid to Ask for Help**

Keith Ferrazzi's father Pete, was a first-generation American, a Merchant Marine sailor in the Second World War, and an uneducated steelworker. His world consisted of hard hours and low wages, and he wanted more

for Ferrazzi. He tried to help his son find a way out of their working-class environment, but Pete didn't know how he could do this. He had never been to college and knew nothing about country clubs or private schools. The one man who had that sort of pull was his boss. The two men had never met, but his dad had a clear sense of how the world worked. The boss agreed to meet Pete and his son, Keith, after which he decided to help enroll the young Ferrazzi in a nearby private elementary school, where all the wealthy families sent their children. Ferrazzi maintains that education was a crucial factor in his later success. Moreover, the critical lesson he learned from his father's audacious action, informed all that he's done since then.

Ferrazzi says he always remembers his father's bravery, when he starts to set limits on what he feels he can or can't do. This is more acute when he experiences the fear of approaching strangers. Networking requires a willingness to ask for help or advice, irrespective of the situation. Sometimes boldness of this kind will fail. Ferrazzi has an equally long list of people he's attempted to befriend during his networking, who weren't interested in his overtures. Audacity does not come without its pitfalls, but it also brings opportunities to collaborate with others.

It's essential to reach out and ask for help. But it's equally, if not more important, to ask how we can help others.

## **Temper Audacity With Authenticity and Generosity**

Always be mindful of how you can help others.

Ferrazzi learned early on during his career networking days, that nobody likes a schmooze artist. You know the type: they have a martini in one hand, a business card in the other, and a pre-rehearsed pitch. It's the insincere, ambitious glad-hander that we don't want to be.

Instead, we can learn from the late Katharine Graham. Tragedy transformed Katharine overnight, from wife to publisher. She took over the *Washington Post* in 1963, after the death of her husband Phil Graham. Her quiet and shy demeanor seemed unfit to deal with the demands of the most important newspaper in the United States. But she proved everyone wrong. She helped build one of the most influential newspapers and one of America's most successful businesses. Her lasting legacy as a leader, was one of compassion, kindness, and sincerity. She had a unique ability to treat everyone from the highest echelons of society, to the lowest, with a sense of dignity and respect. She made friends with everyone, not just those who could assist her with the newspaper or augment her position. Those who attended her funeral were celebrities like Bill Clinton and Bill Gates, but what's noteworthy was the extensive list of non-celebrity attendees.

Her legacy and character reveal an inner truth: when it comes to the skill of reaching out and helping others, those who are the best networkers don't network - they make friends. Networking is about cultivating meaningful relationships based on sincerity, trust, and reciprocity, and doing this with everyone.

This means dropping the urge to hyper-connect, and to foster meaningful connections instead. It's better to have meaningful dialogues with fewer people in a one-hour get-together, than to engage in the eye-wandering routine, that immediately breaks the connection with the person you're talking to. Secondly, as with Katharine, be mindful of how you treat each

person, irrespective of where they fall on the so-called "ladder of success." When it comes to adopting the right attitude towards networking, Ferrazzi's advice is simple: to be a good networker, never ask, 'How can others help me?' Instead, always ask, 'How can I help others?' If we abide by this principle alone, he says, we'll be just fine.

## **Define Your Why and Know Your Mission**

Before you search for who can help you, you need to define your "why," and know your mission.

There's no such thing as a self-made person. We rely on others to get where we want to. But before you reach out, you need to look inwards. To find those who'll support your passion, you first need to decipher precisely your passion, and then translate it into a concrete goal.

To understand where your passion and purpose might lie, the following exercise might be helpful. Start by creating a list with two columns. In the first column, write down your dreams and goals; what you want to do or achieve, no matter how preposterous they may sound. In the second column, write down everything that brings you joy and pleasure—the things that excite or move you. Step back and look for the intersections between the two columns. It's a simple exercise, but it can reveal your mission or your "Blue Flame." In addition to this, ask trusted friends and family members, what they think your strengths are, as well as areas that still need to be developed.

Next, set goals. Ferrazzi says, 'a goal is a dream with a deadline.' Goals must be specific, believable, and challenge you to step out of your comfort zone. But as we know, goals aren't achieved alone; once you

have a plan in place, you'll need support to stay focused.

What sets this advice apart from other goal-setting strategies is that we're told that we need to create a "relationship action plan." Think about who can help you fuel that Blue Flame. Make a thorough list of the people who can help you achieve your goals. Create your board of advisors. These are people who can hold you accountable to your goals. Find mentors—people who can advise you on the experience and skills you need to achieve your goal. And also, seek out those who can provide emotional support when things go wrong, and celebrate with you when things go well.

Now we move onto ways we can act on the relationship action plan.

## **Build Your Network Before You Need It**

Don't wait until you *need* help before you reach out.

The most significant mistake people tend to make, is that they only reach out when they need help. They have to reach out before this.

Relationships require trust, generosity, and reciprocity. It's a two-way street that takes time to build. However, we shouldn't become a "network nuisance," and come across as insincere, or be seen as exploitive, only reaching out when it suits.

Be like Bill. Bill Clinton lived by the build-it-before-you-need-it rule, long before he was President. As a young college student, he had a regular habit of writing down the names of people he met. He ensured that he built relationships based on trust and mutual understanding, creating his future network at the same time. Many attest that Clinton is always

friendly and approachable. He doesn't just remember your name but shows genuine interest when talking to you.

This leads to the next point; aim to make friends, avoid formal business-card exchanges, and the usual networking trends.

## **Establish Friendships and Break Traditional Networking Trends**

Your first meeting doesn't have to be the traditional kind. Meetings can be informal and take place over a coffee or a meal.

However, think out-of-the-box and see if you have a shared interest. Based on what you know about this person (or after a little background check), decide on the best place for a meeting. For example, if you both love soccer, go to a game together. To build trust and a sense of connection, doing something you enjoy helps to make both of you feel comfortable and relaxed. Ultimately, getting to know others doesn't come down to how much time you spend with them, but rather how you spend that time with them. This is called "relationship glue."

When you're arranging a potential meeting, think about why you want to connect with them in the first place. It's not just about what you can gain, but also about what you can offer in return. It's also useful to clarify what you'd like to say during a conversation, which brings us to the next issue: avoid small talk.

## **The Best Small Talk is No Small Talk**



You must have been to a job interview, or placed in a similar situation, where you've been asked to name five people you'd most like to have dinner with. Who did you choose?

You probably chose them because they're dazzling at conversation, or incredibly insightful and engaging. It's almost certain that you didn't pick someone who is known for their small talk.

So the message here is to avoid small talk at all costs. Small talk is trivial and generic and won't make for a memorable conversation. Talking about the weather or how nice the food tastes won't help to foster deep connections. Instead, strive to be attentive, honest, and open, and find something unique to say.

Put in a little homework: try to understand your contacts' interests and be sure to talk about those. Second, think about what makes you unique. Avoid talking too much about yourself, but when you need to—be sure to bring up interesting facts about yourself. Is there a unique experience you've had? Or an unusual place you've visited? Sharing these surprising facts about yourself can help to keep others engaged in conversation.

So far, we've explored why social bonds matter and how to start building your network. But *networking* requires you to keep *working* on those relationships.

## **Follow Up and Look for Ways to Help**

The key idea to keep in mind isn't how others can help us; it's how we can help others. Maintaining relationships is crucial. Follow up with

people, and always look for ways to help.

If you've made contact for the first time, be sure to follow up within 12 to 24 hours. Write a brief email or handwritten note that expresses your gratitude for their time. To add a personal touch, reference a specific part of the conversation that you particularly enjoyed. It may sound like a hassle, but people tend to forget about us if we don't follow-up quickly. Many professionals meet plenty of new people each week, and it's nearly impossible for them to remember the names and faces of everyone.

## **In Conclusion**

The book's title is *Never Eat Alone* for a reason. Ferrazzi urges us to dedicate time to follow up with our contacts. Organize to meet friends and colleagues over lunch breaks, or arrange an early morning coffee or a post-work drink catch-up before heading home. Following up means regular check-ins, even if it's just by phone or email. Continually track what's going on with them personally and professionally. Just show that you care and that you want to spend time with them. Listen closely during a conversation and see if there are any ways in which you can help. Ferrazzi suggests three key areas where people always appreciate help or advice: health, wealth, and their children.

*Never Eat Alone* teaches us how to build and maintain a social network. It suggests how we can find people who can help us to achieve our goals, and more importantly, how we can help others achieve their goals.

If you're the type of person who wants to learn how to develop beneficial professional relationships, then this book is for you. Ferrazzi says, 'Success in life equals the people you meet plus, what you create

together. The most valuable form of capital is social capital—the expertise, trust, and value we gain from the relationships we have.'

So, what do you plan to do during your next lunch break?