



THE VALUE OF RELATIONSHIPS & The Concept of Mutual Support

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Many years ago at a relatively early point in my professional career, I was asked to make a \$20 donation to the American Cancer Society (ACS). I had not been "touched" by cancer in my family, had no other connection to the ACS and did not have any particular relationship with the person who asked that I make the donation, so I politely declined. Several months later, I was asked by a fellow Delta employee who was also my neighbor, to attend an event for the benefit of the ACS. The cost of the tickets was \$100 each and I was asked to buy two. While I still had no connection with the ACS, and the price

was quite a bit steep for me, I bought the two tickets and attended the event.

So why in a relatively short period of time did I give ten times as much money to an organization that I still had no particular connection to? Well the answer is fairly obvious. I had a relationship with the person who asked. More specifically, my neighbor had been a great mentor to me as a new employee at Delta and she and her husband had been very helpful as I settled into the neighborhood. Because my neighbor had been such a supportive friend, I felt an obligation to be supportive of her in her challenge to sell tickets for the affair. I went to the event and it literally changed my life.

I didn't know that my friend was one of

the co-chairs of the event, and because of her role, my guest and I were seated at a table that included; Jim Palmer, the Hall of Fame baseball pitcher, the TV hostess of PM Magazine and the Executive Director of the local branch of the ACS. As a result of conversation that evening with the Executive Director, I was invited to serve on the local board of directors of the ACS and accepted the invitation.

Over time, the Executive Director and I developed a close relationship and, because of my strong support of her efforts, I was nominated by her to the state board of directors. At the state board, I developed a relationship with the Chairman, a prominent Boston businessman, who, in time and because of



my support for his initiatives, became quite a mentor to me. Stanley appointed me to key ACS positions and, I believe, laid the ground work for my becoming Chairman of the state board a few years later. He subsequently went to serve on and become Chairman of the national board of directors and, yes, I followed him to the national board a while later. I should also note that Stanley was instrumental in getting me appointed director of a Boston bank, a position that came with quite handsome director fees. Additionally over time, we did several business deals together worth tens of millions of dollars.

So what does any of this have to do with the Air Force Academy or the graduate community? It's a story I shared with a

cadet and a graduate OIC who were in my office recently seeking support from the AOG for an upcoming function. When we began the discussion about their event, I had no idea that our talks would lead me on a somewhat nostalgic journey down memory lane of some key lessons learned in my own professional career.

The take-aways for me from that long ago experience were three:

1. There can be great value in developing relationships but they come with responsibilities.
2. There is an obligation to support those who support you even when the price seems a bit high.
3. While the price of support may initially seem high, it often proves to be miniscule compared to the benefits you receive from the relationship over time.

I told the story after I asked the cadet and the graduate whether they were members of the AOG. They both were not. I then explained how the AOG provides numerous opportunities to build and strengthen relationships with both classmates and other grads. Those prospects exist through reunions, functions at Doolittle Hall such as our recent wine tasting event and the Founders Day celebration, or through our growing Chapter network around the world. I also explained some of the many ways the AOG supports the Academy, cadets and the graduate community and how member-

ship helps provide that support. We also discussed the impression created when one has the opportunity to support someone (or in this case the Association), chooses not to, and then comes seeking support from that very organization.

Well needless to say, they got the message. After all, our cadets and grads are pretty smart folks. They only need to be "enlightened" at times. And the end result was that we now have two new members of the AOG.

This scenario with the cadet and the graduate unfortunately is not an isolated occurrence. I have met with grads looking to do business with the AOG who were not members or donors. Grads have called the AOG seeking assistance or to complain about some issue at the Academy and investigation shows that they are non-members. I have had a graduate faculty department head who has a lifetime giving record of less than \$100, ask for tens of thousands of dollars of support for a program. I couldn't help but ask him, "Where do you think the funds for these programs come from?" There is a basic lack of understanding among some of our graduates about **the value of relationships and the concept of mutual support**. This is an area we will continue to work on so as to better inform and educate the graduate community. In the words of that old American Express slogan, "Membership has its privileges" and our graduates should understand that applies here, as well. Go Falcons! ▣