

Downstage Center

Go behind the scenes with Kevin Selwyn



We Have Contact

“Relationships are all there is. Everything in the universe only exists because it is in relationship to everything else.

Nothing exists in isolation. We have to stop pretending we are individuals that can go it alone.”

What Margaret Wheatley, writer and management consultant who studies organizational behavior, is saying is that you never know who you are going to meet as you travel along your individual path in life, and you never know which ones are going to prove beneficial contacts in the future.

It is unacceptable for one to refer to himself as a “self-made man,” because there must be a long list of people who helped them get where they are.

A lot of the professional connections made by others have been most

beneficial to students in the theatre program at Shenandoah Conservatory.

Broadway actor and Shenandoah alumnus Aaron Galligan-Stierle visited campus a few weeks ago to work with current students on audition etiquette. Galligan-Stierle is connected to the university as an alumnus of the Class of 2002, but he has another point of connection with Associate Professor of Theatre Jonathan Flom. Galligan-Stierle and Flom were classmates in graduate school at Penn State.

Galligan-Stierle is now a contact for many of the current students he worked with during his long day in the theatre department.

Right before fall break, Shenandoah Conservatory welcomed Doug Shapiro, a voice-over, stage and television actor, who recently played a small role on NBC’s Emmy Award winning sitcom, “30 Rock.” Flom knows Shapiro from a reading of a musical the two did together.

Natalie Weiss, a New York City-based performer and YouTube sensation, was yet another guest Flom helped bring to campus; she knows Flom through college, too.

“My contacts have been immensely important,” said Flom. “They are the reason I have my current job,

and they were the reasons for many of my New York City jobs as an actor and as a director.”

Andrew Wilder, music director of the national tour of the musical “Jersey Boys” currently playing at the National Theatre in Washington, D.C., recently visited the conservatory’s Acting Through Song class and did a workshop with the seniors and several other students.

His connection to Shenandoah? His wife did outdoor drama 22 years ago with Associate Professor of Theatre Kirsten Trump. Trump has maintained this contact over the years and remains good friends with Wilder.

If all of this suggests to you that making contacts is about collecting names and faces and getting people to do whatever you want once you’ve met them, then you are mistaken.

“Contacts are vital in this industry as well as in life,” said Trump. “I never really went about ‘making contacts’ per se. It was more about seeking employment and then doing a good job, delivering the goods, and doing that with a genuine love and commitment to the project.”

“They are friends, not contacts,” Flom said. “I do them favors, they do me favors, and no one keeps score.”

Interestingly enough, “Don’t

Keep Score” is the title of a chapter in Keith Ferrazzi’s book, “Never Eat Alone: And Other Secrets to Success, One Relationship at a Time.” Flom uses this book as a textbook in his Preparation for the Profession class.

At first glance, one might think this text was written by a successful businessman and is geared towards interactions in the business environment. But the things Ferrazzi says can be applied across a wide spectrum of careers.

It is true for any line of work that it’s “who you know.” Anyone can get you a job, or at least help you on your way. But it is not a selfish thing.

Good contacts are genuine ones. Ferrazzi provides a list of possible contacts you can’t help but have. They include relatives, friends of relatives, current colleagues, members of organizations, neighbors, people you went to school with, people you have worked with in the past, people in your religious congregation, former teachers and employers and people with whom socialize.

But what about people who aren’t on this list? How can it be done? How do you forge worthwhile contacts?

“The best way to network is to remain friends with the people you went to college with,” said Flom. “You

keep in touch with people you’ve done shows with.

“Then, you know people from working in the business. I try to be a good connector myself, introducing friends of mine from different areas of my life whom I think would be helpful to each other.”

“Keep an open mind and an open heart,” urges Trump. “Believe in yourself and in humankind. And remember that you are evolving every minute into yourself, and that is as it should be.”

“It gets so that you don’t really even think about it. You just do it,” concludes Flom.

The bottom line is that nearly everyone you meet is a contact. But you should not be seeking contacts; they should come naturally after doing business with someone or working with them or striking up a friendship. The most worthwhile contacts are those who know you well, your strengths and weaknesses, and can recommend you for work or create a buzz about you by spreading your good name.

But this is a two-way street, and favors like this should be reciprocated. Pay it back and pay it forward, but don’t keep score.

Remember, “Nothing exists in isolation.”