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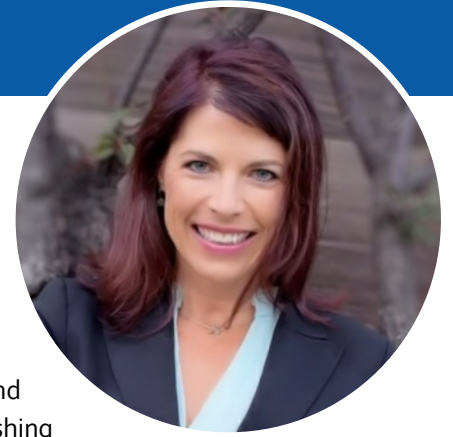


The Engagement Factor
Quick Tips for Accelerating Success
through Relationship Building

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*Helping
executives and
entrepreneurs
achieve results
through a
people-centered
approach*

Who Am I and Why Can You Trust Me?

I am Sara LaForest, an entrepreneur, consultant, coach, instructor, and author with comprehensive experience in the private, nonprofit, education, and government sectors.

I am on a mission to empower entrepreneurs, executives and leaders to grow their businesses and help them create flourishing workplace environments. If you share this mission, these articles will introduce my approach. I believe you will find them helpful and pragmatic.

For more than a decade, I have grown, managed, and nurtured my own companies specializing in leadership consulting, organizational development, and executive and performance coaching. My focus is on the critical—yet often overlooked—interdependencies of strategy, branding, culture, and talent necessary to foster and propel growth. My high-touch, personalized approach helps leaders improve company performance and team functioning at all levels, while facilitating a positive and productive workplace culture.

How am I different? What new perspective do I bring? My strength is combining company growth with an emphasis on the personal growth and well-being of the people with whom I work and serve. My deep-rooted commitment to human advancement is my advantage.

This article, along with many other national and international published works, was co-written with my retired partner, Tony Kubica. Our book, *Organizational Gravity: A Guide to Strategically Growing Your Company's Brand, Culture, and Talent*, is available on [Amazon](#).

To learn more about my services, publications, and speaking engagements, please visit [LaForestConsulting.com](#). You can contact me directly at Sara@LaForestConsulting.com or via [LinkedIn](#).

"The Engagement Factor" does not refer to an agreement to marry. Instead, it has a broader and more subtle application—engagement for personal and business success. Sub-definitions in the Encarta Dictionary define engagement as a commitment to attend, an arrangement to be present, an act or condition of being activated. In Wikipedia, as a marketing and advertising term, engagement refers to a meaningful interaction.

We have about 30 seconds to make a first impression, and that first impression (positive or negative) is generally lasting. Why then, in a world filled with steady demands, multiple urgencies and corresponding ripe opportunities, do so many continue to act like jerks or be lost in their own world, not recognizing the valuable asset standing right before them?

Based on our own less-than-humble experiences, we believe that the majority of folks are simply more distracted than being truly uncivil. However, we all know that real jerks exist, and we can each likely name several! Unfortunately, in this blur of distractions, we are losing many tangible benefits from new relationships and fresh, which create "low-hanging fruit" opportunities.

Perhaps you have experienced meeting someone new, say on an airplane or waiting in line, who has turned out to be a fabulous new friend or, even better a new client or referral source. For you to get this result, people have to get that you are genuine—authenticity rings true. Think about it: don't you want to know that people you are doing business with are sincerely interested in you, your company and your family? According to marketing and consulting experts that I have had the privilege to train under, Alan Weiss, The Million Dollar Consultant®, and Patricia Fripp, award-winning executive speech coach, "People do business with people" not companies. Aren't we much more likely to do business with someone we know and like, or at least someone who is known and liked by someone we know and like? Absolutely. So, it's simple: BE someone they know and like. Take advantage of the ocean of opportunity to form new relationships everywhere you go—the bank, the airplane, the bus or the train, even the elevator! Remember, you have 30 seconds to make a positive impact. The more you practice, the easier and more fun "engaging" with others becomes.

Seven easy tips to get you started

1. **Unplug!** The more you are on your cell phone or blackberry, the less available you are to those around you. You are missing opportunities.
2. **Look up and at those around you.** Assuming you are in a safe place, be willing to smile at others and look them in the eyes.
3. **Be interested (more than interesting).** You don't have to be an amazing conversationalist to talk with others and form new relationships, you just have to be interested in them. Do this by asking meaningful questions and then acknowledging that you're hearing and understanding them. For example, "Hmm, tell me more about that" works wonders to learn more.

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4. **Make sure to exchange business cards or information.** How can you follow-up if you have no contact info?
5. **Consider your personal presentation/self-image.** This may seem to be an odd tip, but remember, when we look good, we feel better about ourselves, and when we feel better about ourselves, we exude more confidence. When we are more confident, it seems easier to extend ourselves to others.
6. **Ask yourself, how can I help?** If there is anything, however small, you can do to assist your new acquaintance, to add value now or in the near future, this is almost certain to seal the deal on a return favor. This helps ensure the start of a great new relationship that can benefit you both.
7. If you are attending to and are present and activated with those around you, you are creating a meaningful interaction and you will benefit.
8. **Engagement.** The simple start to promising relationships that will help you succeed. Don't believe me? Try it out.

Best wishes in your relationship-building endeavors.

Note: For a great read on how to recognize and deal with rude, mean-spirited and hostile workplace behavior, I highly recommend a quick, humorous and valuable read: *The No Asshole Rule, Building a Civilized Workplace and Surviving One That Isn't*, by Robert Sutton Ph.D.