

“So much time and so little to do. Wait a minute. Strike that. Reverse it.”¹

Using LinkedIn - The Busy Person’s Guide
to Enhancing Business Relationships in Less Than 20 Minutes a Day

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I joined LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com) in 2005 and quickly found it to be a valuable tool for connecting and reconnecting with people important to me and my business. Compared to other social networking sites that cater more to personal and family relationships, LinkedIn is geared to business connections and that appealed to me.

When it comes to business relationships, most people have limited time or patience to deal with the non-business chatter that seems to flow at an ever increasing rate from friends and followers on Facebook (www.facebook.com), MySpace (www.myspace.com) and Twitter (www.twitter.com). LinkedIn has, thus far, avoided this trap.

This article illustrates how I use LinkedIn to communicate and build relationships with my clients, business associates and key centers of influence. It is aimed at new LinkedIn members and those who are not yet sure how to use LinkedIn in their business. To help casual LinkedIn users become active participants, I have included a series of Practical Tips that will encourage good habits and save valuable time and resources. Also, for the record, I have no interest in or affiliation with LinkedIn, other than being a free member.

As I enjoy watching classic films, I thought I would mix things up by weaving in some famous movie quotes that pertain (albeit loosely) to some of my suggestions. Can you guess the ten films? Don’t peek, but I have provided citations at the end of this article.

A. Inviting Contacts & Handling New Connections

*“It happens sometimes.
Friends come in and out of our lives, like busboys in a restaurant.”²*

Customize Your LinkedIn Invitations: When inviting people to join me on LinkedIn, I always customize the invitation. LinkedIn has a one-line default invite, but that is impersonal. My invitees are informed that I use LinkedIn to stay in touch with people, to make introductions and to refer business. I often add a personal touch in the invite (such as commenting on a recent meeting or conversation with the individual) so that the recipient does not feel it is a canned invite.

Practical Tip – Create an MS Word document that contains templates of customized LinkedIn invitation emails and add a shortcut to the document on your desktop. Open the document and

copy and paste the email template into your LinkedIn invitation and customize it further as desired.

Keep Your LinkedIn Connections List “Open”: When I first joined LinkedIn, I was concerned that people could see my LinkedIn Connections list and that they would have easy access to these Connections. I wanted to make sure that my privacy and that of my Connections was protected. This fear was unfounded for two reasons:

First, while my LinkedIn Connections can see who I am connected to, they have no idea of the nature of that connection. As my friend Bob Glazer of Acceleration Partners, LLC advised me, *“Your Connections list is simply a roster of people you know. No one knows how you know them or what your connection is, unless you tell them.”*

Second, even if someone wants to contact everyone on my Connection list, their only access to information on these individuals is through the LinkedIn public profile for each person, which typically does not contain email or telephone references. Because the whole purpose of LinkedIn is to allow others to see your Connections (so that new Connections can be made and shared Connections can be identified), my LinkedIn Connection list is, and will remain, “Open”.

Practical Tip – Encourage new Connections to review your Connections list and tell you who they know or who they might want to know. You can then make appropriate introductions that put good people together with good people.

Adopt a “Relationship Threshold” When Accepting LinkedIn Invitations: When someone invites me to connect on LinkedIn, the primary question I ask myself is whether I know the person well enough that they would recognize and respond to an email or telephone call from me. (I call this my “Relationship Threshold”.) If the answer is “no”, then I either do not accept their invitation or send them a cordial email asking them if they would like to begin a relationship by scheduling a call or a meeting. In many instances, they do not respond, which means they are likely collecting names and are not interested in cultivating and building meaningful relationships. If I do not wish to accept an invitation, I do nothing more than archive the request in my LinkedIn mailbox without accepting it. You do not need to affirmatively reject an invitation.

B. Building Your LinkedIn Profile & Integrating LinkedIn Into Your Daily Life

“This is business, not personal!”³

Make Your LinkedIn Profile All About Business: LinkedIn profiles should be prepared to be found and viewed. Don’t hide. LinkedIn profiles should be more of an online resume than a personal billboard (such as a Facebook profile). If filled out properly, your LinkedIn profile will rank high on a Google search of your name. My profile describes where I attended school and where I have worked,

along with the dates at each institution and organization. I have also include a brief description of my business law firm and the areas in which we practice.

Practical Tip – To keep your LinkedIn profile fresh for visitors and search engines, schedule a task in your Outlook calendar to update your LinkedIn profile once a month. Also, keep your profile picture professional or business casual and update it once or twice a year.

Open Your LinkedIn Homepage to Start Each Day: Each morning, I open my LinkedIn homepage and leave it open but minimized on my taskbar. This allows me to see when my Connections have added new Connections, posted questions or answers, updated their status, made recommendations or modified their profile. I return to my LinkedIn homepage a few times throughout the day to check these changes. Since there are far fewer updates on LinkedIn than on Twitter or Facebook, checking LinkedIn takes little time out of my day.

If I see that one of my Connections has connected to someone else on my Connections list, I send them both an email to confirm our mutual connection. Similarly, if one of my Connections connects to someone I know and who is not on my LinkedIn Connections list, I will invite this person to join my Connections list. I have been amazed to discover that the degrees of separation among Connections is far fewer than the six degrees of separation made famous by actor Kevin Bacon.

Practical Tip – Be proactive in your communications with your Connections by periodically reviewing your LinkedIn Connections list and sending an email to someone you have not contacted in a while. This is easy and garners immediate goodwill.

Take Comfort - LinkedIn Does Not Generate Spam: Before joining LinkedIn, I was concerned that by subscribing I would be inundated with spam emails. This fear has proven to be unwarranted. The only time spammers (or anyone else for that matter) are able to find my email address is if they are on my Connections list or if I post it on my LinkedIn public profile. Furthermore, LinkedIn subscribers who want to contact me through LinkedIn and who are not connected to me must upgrade to a LinkedIn premium platform or go through someone connected to them who knows or is connected to me. These protections eliminate unwanted LinkedIn invites and unsolicited emails.

C. Communicating Tips & Making Introductions

“What we got here is ... a failure to communicate.”⁴

Generate Emails Directly from Your LinkedIn Connections List: LinkedIn is helpful when I want to email a Connection. Opening my LinkedIn Connections list, I can click on the email address for any one Connection and my Outlook immediately opens a new email window addressed to that person. This feature is fast, easy and convenient. That said, one thing I do not like about LinkedIn is that it does not allow me to choose more than one person at a time from my LinkedIn Connections list to generate an email in my Outlook. It would be helpful if LinkedIn permitted this capability.

Practical Tip – To allow email recipients to access your LinkedIn profile quickly and easily, add an electronic link to the bottom of your standard Outlook email signature that connects to your LinkedIn profile.

Use Constant Contact to Email Your LinkedIn Connections: Constant Contact (www.constantcontact.com) is an online email marketing site. A subscription costs approximately \$30/month and the site offers easy ways to send emails to a large number of recipients. The site also offers guidance on email campaigns and has the capability to help you generate and manage customer surveys.

Practical Tip – To keep all your email addresses in one place, download your email addresses from both LinkedIn and your Outlook address book and combine them into one Excel spreadsheet which can then be easily uploaded to Constant Contact for broad based email campaigns.

Make Introductions Through LinkedIn: When reviewing my LinkedIn Connections list, I often see two people who should know each other. When that occurs, I send them each an introductory email suggesting they get to know each other. Such introductory emails are easy to coordinate and go a long way to fostering and maintaining solid business relationships.

D. **Staying Current & Using LinkedIn Tools**

“My! People come and go so quickly here!”⁵

Keep Your Contact Information Up To Date: One of the primary benefits of LinkedIn is the ability to stay in touch with people if they change jobs or their email address. Always remember to update your LinkedIn profile when your circumstances change in your business life.

Practical Tip – When using Constant Contact, you will receive notices when an email address bounces or is nonexistent. If any of these emails are from people on your LinkedIn Connections list, take action by contacting them and suggesting they update their LinkedIn profile. If you are unable to find them or the relationship is not strong, delete them from your LinkedIn Connections list.

Investigate the LinkedIn Outlook Toolbar: LinkedIn offers a free Outlook Toolbar that enables LinkedIn to scan your Outlook contacts to see who might be a LinkedIn member. The tool creates a list within LinkedIn of all your Outlook contacts that you can use to send LinkedIn invitations.

I like the fact that the LinkedIn Outlook Toolbar pulls all my email addresses from Outlook and organizes them alphabetically in LinkedIn. However, I have not taken advantage of other features of the LinkedIn Outlook Toolbar, such as the ability to update my Outlook contacts with their LinkedIn profile

information and seeing LinkedIn “mini-profiles” for everyone that emails me. There is also a LinkedIn Browser Toolbar and a mobile LinkedIn tool that I have not yet investigated.

Explore LinkedIn’s “People You May Know” Section: The upper right hand corner of the LinkedIn homepage lists “People You May Know”. This is “Big Brother” on steroids and is at first a bit frightening. Once you get over the initial shock of seeing names on the list and asking yourself how in the world LinkedIn figured out that you might know these people, you will find it to be a valuable way to add people as LinkedIn Connections.

E. Coordinating Recommendations & Managing Connections

“This is my corn. You people are guests in my corn.”⁶

Give and Receive Recommendations: I have had the good fortune of receiving a number of unsolicited recommendations endorsing work that I have done. My rule (quirky as may seem) is not to ask for recommendations, but I will accept recommendations when offered.

On the other hand, when I am asked for a recommendation, I will almost always provide one. Any recommendation must be accepted by the recipient before it can be posted. This prevents someone from posting a “negative” recommendation about you without your permission and allows you to ask the writer to edit the recommendation if you wish it to read differently.

Practical Tip – Prepare an unsolicited recommendation for one person on your Connections list each week. Such a recommendation will make the person’s day, as it is an unexpected and flattering gesture.

Find Old Friends and Research New Contacts: I sometimes search LinkedIn for business contacts or friends with whom I have lost touch. More frequently, I use LinkedIn when I want to learn more about someone I have met, such as a potential client or referral source. If an individual has a LinkedIn profile, it is easy to find them. I recently found someone that I had not heard from for some time and discovered that she had been experiencing some health issues. LinkedIn enabled us to reconnect. If not for LinkedIn, it is unlikely that I would have found her.

Delete Connections Comfortably: There are different reasons for deleting Connections. In addition to deletions due to the death of a Connection or as the result of a change in the relationship, I will delete Connections if it falls below the “Relationship Threshold” standard articulated above, or if the Connection seems to be inactive on LinkedIn. Some people delete anyone who does not maintain an “Open” list. I have chosen not to do that.

The most important thing for new LinkedIn users to know is that when you delete a Connection, no email or other notice is sent to the Connection informing them of this action. Remember, in the world of

social networking, you cannot take things personally if someone declines to link with you or deletes you from their Connections list. It is just the way it is.

Practical Tip – Be aware that if you delete a Connection, LinkedIn will not allow you to add them again later unless the person sends you an invitation to connect to them. Deleting Connections should therefore be handled carefully.

F. **Posting Status Notices & Joining LinkedIn Groups**

“Oh really? I had heard that “Commentary” and “Dissent” had merged and formed “Dysentery.”⁷

Periodically Post Status Notices: LinkedIn allows users to post notices regarding their activities. I use this feature from time to time to announce things about my business or the law. For example, I have posted announcements on seminars we have given, articles we have published and upcoming changes in the law. All my status notices have a business purpose, and I am careful never to provide anything that could constitute legal advice. I try not to post more than once a week, and I refrain from making personal or trivial statements (as is common with postings on Twitter and Facebook.)

Find and Join LinkedIn Groups: LinkedIn allows people to create Groups that others can subscribe to. When you join a LinkedIn Group, you will be able to see the profiles of others in the Group and you can contact them through LinkedIn. Examples of Groups that I have subscribed to are alumni groups from my undergraduate university and law school, local town groups and groups dealing with business law and entrepreneurship. Periodic updates of Group postings are shown on my LinkedIn homepage

Practical Tip – When joining a LinkedIn Group, choose the settings for “Daily Digest Emails” or “Weekly Digest Emails” instead of “Individual Emails”. Otherwise you will find your email box overloaded, especially if you are in an active Group. These settings can also be applied to receipt of other emails or notifications from your Connections list or from others within the LinkedIn community.

Participate in LinkedIn Questions & Answers: LinkedIn has an active Question and Answer database where users can post questions and other users can answer them. This is free to all LinkedIn users. The site also contains a searchable database that enables you to search this section by key words. In addition, questions are often posted in Groups and these will show on your LinkedIn homepage for Groups that you belong to. I try and answer questions once or twice a month.

Practical Tip – Share your expertise and knowledge by randomly answering questions that relate to your business. Similarly, if you need help on a topic or issue, posting a question can help you get good feedback. In either case, posting questions and answers will increase your visibility within LinkedIn.

G. Dealing with LinkedIn Changes & Evaluating Upgrade Options

“Say, Lou, did ya hear the one about the guy who couldn't afford personalized [license] plates, so he went and changed his name to J3L2404?”⁸

Prepare for Frequent LinkedIn Site Changes: LinkedIn changes its features and settings regularly, often without notice. While some of these changes are improvements, that is not always the case. For example, I used to be able to keep a list on LinkedIn of just the invitations that I had sent and that had not yet been accepted. LinkedIn changed this one day so that all accepted invitations were in the same database as those that had not been accepted. This cluttered my list and made it less valuable. LinkedIn never provided a meaningful explanation for this change.

Tell LinkedIn What You Would Like Changed: In addition to the other recommended changes that I referenced above, I would like LinkedIn to allow me to sort and group individuals within my Connections list. Currently, my Connections list is sorted alphabetically and there is no way to customize or reorganize the list. If I could group and sort my Connections list and have the ability to download these group names into Excel, that would be very valuable to me when sending group emails through Constant Contact. If this feature were made available for a reasonable upgrade fee, I would strongly consider a paid subscription. I have notified LinkedIn of this request, but to date have not received a response.

Consider Upgrade Services Carefully: LinkedIn has several premium fee-based upgrade options which are designed for people who want the ability to contact people who are on LinkedIn but who are not connected to them on their Connections list. The primary benefit of upgrading is if you are looking for job candidates and/or if you are interested in reaching out to individuals within a particular business or company to promote your goods or services. Since I do not use LinkedIn for either of these purposes, I have chosen not to upgrade. Also, for the record, I have no interest in or affiliation with LinkedIn, other than being a free member.

H. Self-Promotion & Editor Acknowledgements

“I couldn't believe that she knew my name. Some of my best friends didn't know my name.”⁹

Review My LinkedIn Profile: Here is my LinkedIn profile: www.linkedin.com/in/colinc.

Contact Me With Ideas, Feedback & Suggestions: I am the Managing Partner of Coleman & Gagnon, P.C. in Needham, MA. (We will soon be changing the firm name to something entirely different. Stay tuned!) We are always looking for innovative clients who want to work with innovative

business attorneys. We would also welcome any feedback on this article. We can be contacted through our web address below.

Some People to Thank: Thank you to my colleagues Lawrence J. Sheh, Esq. and Richard S. Creem, Esq. for reviewing this article prior to publication.

And remember, whenever you are involved in social networking activities:

*“Everyone has the right to make an ass out of themselves.
You just can't let the world judge you too much.”¹⁰*

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- ¹ Willy Wonka (Gene Wilder) to his Guests in *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* (1971)
 - ² The Writer (Richard Dreyfus) in *Stand By Me* (1986)
 - ³ Tom Hagan (Robert Duvall) to Sonny Corleone (James Caan) in *The Godfather* (1972)
 - ⁴ Captain, Road Prison 36 (Strother Martin) to Luke (Paul Newman) in *Cool Hand Luke* (1967)
 - ⁵ Dorothy Gale (Judy Garland) to the Munchkins in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939)
 - ⁶ Ray Kinsella (Kevin Costner) to the Ballplayers in *Field of Dreams* (1989)
 - ⁷ Alvy Singer (Woody Allen) to Robin (Janet Margolin) in *Annie Hall* (1977)
 - ⁸ Marge Gunderson (Frances McDormand) to Officer Lou (Bruce Bohne) in *Fargo* (1996)
 - ⁹ Ted Strohmann (Ben Stiller) in *There's Something About Mary* (1998)
 - ¹⁰ Maude Chardin (Ruth Gordon) to Harold Chasen (Bud Cort) in *Harold and Maude* (1971)