

Give Thanks. (A Story)

My practice of writing over 30,000 thank you notes during my tenure as CEO of Campbell Soup Company is somewhat well known. But this important ritual of giving thanks began way back when I was working to find a new job in the Spring of 1984 “ after being suddenly fired from my job as the Director of Marketing for the Parker Brothers Toy & Game Company. I was devastated — I had two small children and one very large mortgage and I felt every bit the victim. I’ve written a lot about the many lessons I learned from this experience but one of the most crucial was the community-building power of **honoring others**. I learned this from one of the most influential people in my leadership journey “ an inspiring outplacement person assigned to me after I was fired, named Neil MacKenna. Neil was a spirited, crusty New Englander who wouldn’t let me inhabit the role of the victim for a second. With Neil’s guidance, I learned that in business, as in life, we can’t make it alone.

You see, early in my career, I was shy and reserved. Diligent, hard-working, driven to succeed, yes “ but I kept my head down and did my work quietly. I isolated myself. As a result, I was sadly disconnected to the business world when I lost my job, and lacked the skills to build a network. Neil honed in on this and began equipping me with the tools to build a **community**.

Applying Neil’s advice, I got the name of every single person with whom I interacted, from the head of the company to the receptionist. Even after I secured my next job, I kept in touch with all the people I’d met along the way, maintaining thoughtful relationships, and vigilantly trying to be helpful in return. Through the practice of connecting with people, honoring them, and thanking them for their contributions, I found myself with an ever-growing group of people who genuinely wanted to help me, and who knew I would do the same for them. Over the years, I’m happy to say I’ve had the opportunity to repay their kindness many times. And, I’ve developed a life-long habit of giving thanks, which has helped me immensely in building productive communities of people as a leader in the corporate world. **The harder you work to make people feel valued, the harder they will work for the enterprise.** And, when you thank people for meeting or exceeding agreed upon goals, you are also reinforcing the high standards of your organization in a thoughtful way. Meaningful gratitude is at the heart of any effectively thriving community!

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<https://conantleadership.com/3-things-leaders-must-build-meaningful-communities/>