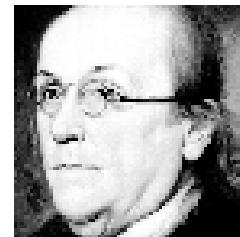


☛ Social Networking Secrets of Benjamin Franklin ☚

By Jim Walker
Publisher in the City of Philadelphia
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I imagine a time when opening a moveable-type print shop was akin to launching an *Internet Company* – a leading edge, high-tech communication business requiring financial support from trusted backers, top flight technical skills, attention grabbing content, and an agile distribution network. Welcome to Philadelphia, circa 1723 - when an adventurous and ambitious young printmaster from the City of Boston arrived on Market ST. carrying little more than a friendly smile and a Dutch dollar. His ride along the Northeast Corridor had taken several days, and by his own account he made quite an awkward and ridiculous Appearance strolling up the central thoroughfare in the Capital City of the New World.

☛ So it was from these humble beginnings that sprang one of the first and greatest of American success stories - Benjamin Franklin: Printer, Writer, Civic Leader, Scientist, Global Statesman, and Founding Father. Such, my Dear Reader, is the stuff of legends – a wise and witty entrepreneurial genius woven into the very fabric of our American creation mythology.



☛ Seen in another Light though, just beyond the mists of history, one glimpses something altogether more remarkable – a prodigy of social networking who by the very force of his Revolutionary networking talents helped give birth to an entire Nation. In fact, even before setting foot in the Quaker City, Franklin had begun to build what would arguably become the most influential social network of the 18th century (and perhaps one of the most influential social networks in all of American History). In his Autobiography, Franklin recounts that during the journey from Boston, he first went to New York seeking employment with a printer named William Bradford. Bradford was not in a position to hire Franklin, but referred him to his son in Philadelphia. Thus began the first of countless referrals that would eventually place Franklin in contact with all the great leaders of both the New and Old Worlds.

☛ Franklin's rise to prominence in Philadelphia was marked by his brilliant and entertaining writing, hard won business success, and most especially, by his genius for social organization. The first of his so called "Junto" gatherings occurred in 1727, when Franklin invited 12 of his most "ingenious acquaintances" to join together for "mutal improvement".





We met on Friday evenings. The rules that I drew up required that every member, in his turn, should produce one or more queries on any point of Morals, Politics, or Natural Philosophy, to be discuss'd by the company; and once in three months produce and read an essay of his own writing, on any subject he pleased.

Not only providing each other with business tips and personal wisdom, this small band of ingenuous acquaintances became incredibly influential across the entire range of Philadelphia's civic life. While Franklin rightly gets credit for founding a variety of innovative organizations including the Free Library, Pennsylvania Hospital, and the University of Pennsylvania, without the Junto and their close-knit support it is unlikely he would have been as nearly as effective in the actual execution of these ambitious and wide-ranging projects.



64 The Colonies were truly a Small World at the time, and it is not surprising that Franklin's energy and talent soon took him far beyond Philadelphia. His publishing business served as the foundation for his growing personal network. In 1733, Poor Richard's Almanack debuted in Philadelphia. One of the earliest and most successful media franchises in North America, Poor Richard's was published annually until 1757 by "poor" Richard Saunders (a.k.a. Benjamin Franklin). This annual collection of witticisms, weather reports, recipes, homilies and interesting predictions not only made for great reading, but provided Franklin with both an ongoing revenue stream and a trusted media platform by which he could inspire, inform, and influence citizens up and down the Atlantic seaboard. He also was one of America's first franchisers, opening up print shops in several cities throughout the Colonies.



Another driver behind Franklin's growing network of contacts was his appointment as Deputy Postmaster General in 1753. Tasked with mail delivery in all the northern colonies, he began to travel frequently throughout the system – meeting with other officials and suggesting improvements. In fact, he even developed an overnight letter service between Philadelphia and New York that even today would make FedEx proud. As his business and travels continued to expand, Franklin was one of the first Americans to begin to develop a truly intercontinental viewpoint, as well an intercontinental network of friends, colleagues and acquaintances.



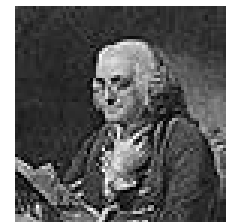


✿ While publishing, civic engagement, and his role as Postmaster helped him to gain widespread recognition in the Colonies, it was his efforts in Science and Politics that brought him into direct contact with the core networks of European culture and power. After his “discovery” of electricity, Franklin’s visits to Europe became something of an extended press tour in which he was introduced to dozens of leading scientists and statesmen throughout the continent. Nowhere was he more celebrated than in France, where he became one of the leading figures of the time. There, as in Philadelphia, he thrived in the company of friends and ingenious acquaintances – this time in a salon hosted by a vivacious French woman named Madame Helvétius. Although a world away from the Philadelphia Junto of his youth, all of his extraordinary social networking skills – now honed over a lifetime, came into play as he charmed, entertained, and most importantly, lobbied for the cause of his homeland. Another French aristocrat, the Comtesse d’Houdetot, served as a “political networker” for Franklin. The Comtesse was a great supporter of the American cause, and hosted gatherings at her estate where Franklin was again successful in rallying support among the French.

🌀 Franklin’s leadership and social influence in France for the American cause helped ensure the outcome of the War. After signing the Treaty of Paris and negotiating other European treaties, he returned to Philadelphia in 1785 at the age of 79 where he was given a heroes’ welcome. In the few remaining years of his life, Franklin enjoyed his so-called retirement by becoming president of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and serving as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention where he played an active and decisive role.

Upon his death in 1790, eulogies poured forth on both sides of the Atlantic, but it is perhaps the French National Assembly that best captured Franklin’s unique qualities:

The name of Benjamin Franklin will be immortal in the records of freedom and philosophy; but it is more particularly dear to a country, where, conducted by the most sublime mission, **this venerable man knew how very soon to acquire an infinite number of friends and admirers**, as well by the simplicity and sweetness of his manners, as by the purity of his principles, the extent of his knowledge, and the charms of his mind.





Benjamin Franklin's Social Networking Secrets



In examining Franklin's life, some key principles emerge that guided the growth of his social network from his earliest time in Philadelphia until the very end of his days:

- 1. A true friend is the best possession.**
Often social networking is positioned as the means to some other end – like finding a job or generating sales. However, a strong social network and the friendships it yields is in fact our most valuable and enjoyable possession.
- 2. Meet often with your ingenious acquaintances.**
The power of a close-knit Junto of advisors and supporters is simply invaluable, not only in terms of the results it brings, but also in terms of the trusted friends it cultivates.
- 3. I will speak ill of no man, and speak all the good I know of everybody.**
There is no shortage of money, goods, services, or criticism in the world today, so if you want to differentiate yourself like Franklin, deliver what is absolutely the rarest commodity on our planet: sincere and friendly appreciation.
- 4. Voice-mail and eMail stink after three days.**
Take a moment to respond to the people in your network, even if just to say you're too busy right now to give the matter your full attention but will get back in touch soon.
- 5. Well done is better than well said.**
Your social network is constructed through links and associations, but it is fueled by actions. The more thoughtful actions you take for the people in your network, the more your network will deliver back to you.
- 6. If a man empties his purse into his head, no man can take it away from him. An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest.**
The more you learn, the more you have to share with your both your city and your extended network. Franklin's curiosity led him into literally dozens of topics from the Gulf Stream, to electricity, to music, to wood stoves, to democracy, and more. In the process, Philadelphia, and indeed the World, were made all the richer.
- 7. Take time for all things: great haste makes great waste.**
Our communications networks are more powerful and faster than ever, but social networks still take time to grow and develop. Take the time to nurture and grow your network.





About the Author

Jim Walker is a lifelong resident of Philadelphia, where for more than a decade he has been busy riding the Internet boom and bust (and boom?). He is Director of Business Development for MyMedwork, founder of Mind Palace, and is also author of Ready, Aim, Inspire! Jim is also the proud father of four ingenious children, all of whom were born at Pennsylvania Hospital.

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