

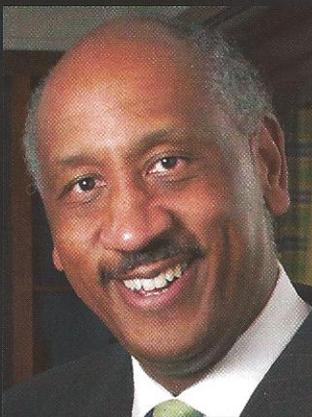
# STRONG TIES

How developing business relationships can help grow your company

INTERVIEWED BY GREGORY JONES

**Edgar** Smith Jr. has more than 25 years of sales and marketing experience with *Fortune* 500 companies and more than 13 years experience in the commercial printing and paper business. It is through his experience that Smith, founder, chairman and CEO of World Pac Paper LLC, has developed his business.

The nearly \$30 million paper company has been thriving because of Smith's ability to form important business relationships within his industry.



"When I started the company, I wanted to be sure that it was a company that had the foundation to be competitive and the insights into the industry," Smith says. "It was important that I built the company from the ground up with industry experts. I wanted to combine the best entrepreneurial management with top industry leaders to create a very dynamic company."

*Smart Business* spoke to Smith about how he has developed relationships over time to keep his business cemented in the industry.

**Look for relationships.** It was critically important for me that I had other invested principal, executive-level company officers with significant experience, knowledge and expertise within the company management to really assist with the daily operations of a paper business. What I was looking to achieve there was that I wanted to ensure that I had as many paper company mill relationships as I could because I knew that it was a very competitive environment.

There's always a relationship in most things that are done in the world. Relationships are developed over time. You have to really understand human nature and the human condition to understand relationships. They oftentimes occur when you least expect it, and it's through shared experiences that relationships will come about. We all bring the talented expertise that we bring, but you have to have confidence in yourself and your ability to do what you do and to add to the value equation. It's about getting others to work with you, appreciate what you do, and take the journey with you.

You have to first allow yourself to consider the possibility for relationships. We all know what we know; we don't know what we don't know. It's sitting down and understanding others and what their goals and objectives are in this world. You have to understand yourself and understand others and look for possible connections. But also value experiences that you have not had and see how those experiences can augment some of the things you are trying to achieve. When

people believe in you and are willing to go on a mission with you, that's real power.

**Build the relationship.** One of the things that's always been important to me in building relationships is trying to maintain communication. It's very important that people have conversations. Things happen and don't happen as a result of conversations. You've got to have conversations before you can start the building process in whatever you do. You have to get to know one another and spend time with one another because that is very important. You have to be reliable and dependable and be someone that is trustworthy.

**Get value from relationships.** The other thing that's helped us is that we are customer-centric. We understand that the customer is at the center of everything that we do. We've got to have the high-quality products and high-quality service. Quality means that we work to achieve total customer satisfaction by understanding and committing ourselves to our customers' needs while embracing a philosophy of continuous improvement. There is always more that you can do.

In order to be customer-centric, you really have to understand your customer and as best you can, you have to understand their industry in which they

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You have to bring value to the relationship. Oftentimes, I'm looking for what I can do for others, not what I can get out of the relationship. You have a lot of folks that run around and they wonder, 'What can I get from someone else?' and that shouldn't be your approach. You should look for how you can add value to someone else's situation. Those are some of the things that I think are necessary, but it's really about gaining that understanding and taking time to listen to others. It's not about you; it's about them.

operate. You have to be able to identify what their needs are and what the opportunities are with a particular customer. As best you can, understand the overall situation. You have to see opportunities as your customer sees those opportunities and try to align with them on those situations. You have to work alongside them to generate possible solutions to their challenges. A big part of that is having open and honest communication, being transparent and operating with excellence and being very consistent in what you do. <<

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