

# Friendly Woodworker

by Ben Blackmar

When I was a young kid in school, I had one major problem. I was a cut-up, and I was usually more interested in talking with my friends than focusing on my schoolwork. As a business owner, I am starting to think that those traits are not the set-backs that I once thought they were.

In business, relationships can make or break you. Especially when getting business, maintaining old accounts, and dealing with your suppliers. The longer I go, the more I believe this to be true. No one likes to be anonymous, and most people respond well to a friendly face. Small things can also help, such as remembering names, sincerely asking how someone's day is going, or going a little out of your way to do something nice for a client or a supplier. Here is a short list of "friendly" rules that I use regularly.

1. Always smile and step in for a good warm handshake.
2. Remember names- it goes farther than you think. If you are bad with names, remember something about them or a topic you talked about and ask about it next time you see them.
3. Bring something memorable- For regular clients, suppliers, and contractors, a box of freshly made cookies or a cup of coffee every now and then will go a long way. It doesn't cost much and will give them something nice to say about you when you're not around.



4. Go beyond business - When you see or talk on the phone with someone, ask them how their day is going- it's a good step to get beyond the regular chit chat.

5. Say something nice about them- something you like, and it must be something that is true.

Dan Faia, a teacher and mentor of mine at the North Bennet Street School always reminds me to "bring a box of pastries to the wood yard guys". The point is, you do something nice for them, and then they will go out of their way for you- They might not even remember your name, but they remember there is something in it for them if they give you a little extra hand.

These opportunities are all around us- every day, and it is easy to let them slip away, as our days are rushed, or someone does not return our warm greeting. It's okay to be intentional about this though- and you may find that after a few trips to the wood yard, bank, or architect's office that those cold, stiff individuals you were facing before are softening and more glad to see you coming.

To me, my work is more than a daily grind. And my network is a lot more than just a list of names with numbers beside them. They are a group of associates and peers- extensions of me who I have built trust with, shared myself with, learned personal details about, and who I know I can count on when I need them. I value these relationships because my job becomes easier because of them. And this has brought me new jobs, privileged information, great leads, and opportunities that would not have opened up without them. And if nothing else, I can go to work, and know that I have a whole web of allies, or at least smiling faces waiting for me each day.

*About the Author: Ben Blackmar has more than 11 years of experience in the woodworking industry, and is passionate about continually honing his skills in both business and woodworking. His experience includes studio furniture making, custom residential cabinetry, production woodworking using lean manufacturing and CNC technology, furniture touch-up and repair, and decoy carving. He is an artist as much as technician, and has loved designing and creating for as long as he can remember.*

*Ben Blackmar owns his own business making furniture and custom woodwork, and is also a student at the North Bennet Street School in Boston, MA. He currently resides with his wife Angie and dog Fender in Malden, Massachusetts. [www.blackmarstudio.com](http://www.blackmarstudio.com) Ben has been a member of the Cabinet Maker's Association since 2009 and is currently studying at the North Bennet Street School in Boston, Massachusetts, where he is perfecting more of the finer, time-honored techniques of woodworking. ❖*