

editor's note



WHEN I WAS BORN, MY DAD WORKED FOR A SMALL MISCELLANEOUS STEEL FABRICATOR IN THE WILLIAMSBURG SECTION OF BROOKLYN. Not too long after, he and my mom started their own firm, manufacturing and installing steel door frames (along with the doors and hardware).

It was a fascinating business for a child to see, not in the least because the warehouse full of frames provided a fertile playground for games of tag or hide-and-go-seek. But beyond a ready source of materials with which to build elaborate clubhouses, my parents' work provided me with some interesting business lessons.

First and foremost, my dad's success was dependent on his ability to provide something his competitors didn't. I don't think his frames were better than anyone else's, and his doors and hardware were purchased from the same suppliers his competitors used. What made his business special was my dad. He didn't just bid on projects. Instead, he got in before his competitors and provided a free specification service. He would take the blueprints and create the hardware schedule from which the project would be bid—by both his company and his competitors. And since he knew the requirements better than anyone else, he was often able to provide the most competitive bid.

My dad also knew the success of his business was based on relationships. It wasn't unusual to see Jack (one of Long Island's largest office park developers) at the house. Or to visit my dad's best friend, Mickey, who also was a vice president at the firm from whom my dad bought most of his door knobs, locks and hinges (even to this day, Mickey's youngest son is my best friend).

Many of these types of relationships are formed and fostered at industry meetings. Sometimes they're huge annual events such as NASCC: The Steel Conference (www.aisc.org/nascc); sometimes they're smaller specialty events such as the upcoming AISC Town Hall Meeting (www.aisc.org/townhallmeeting). And there are plenty of other opportunities to develop new relationships and reinforce existing ones as well: Join your local SEA. Participate in your regional fabricator association. Attend conferences and conventions.

But when you participate in these groups, don't just think of them as furthering your professional ambitions. The connections you make aren't just for work; they're also personal connections that help enrich your life. When you see me at the Steel Conference, don't just think about *Modern Steel Construction*; also think about my son's piano recital and your daughter's hockey game. These are the conversations that will be remembered and the connections that will make a difference in your life.


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