



The term 'Relationship GPA' had not yet been coined when I was in college, yet I might have been a little ahead of the game. I wasn't a 4.0 kind of student, but I always made sure back then to develop good relationships with my classmates and professors. Who knew in the end that would serve me so well?

In June 2016, 35 years after I graduated college, the book "*Your Relationship GPA: Lessons from Harvard students on how to make time for what matters most*" was published. Following the lives of Harvard students, authors Stephen Turban and Greg M. Foster focus on what matters most in college—relationships—and further explain why relationship skills are really the key to success. Who knew Harvard wasn't just about grades?

In their book, Turban and Foster highlight what they refer to as '*The Cinderella Skills of College*', but I think these skills are even more relevant years after we graduate:

1) *Take initiative*

2) *Listen well*

3) *Be vulnerable*

4) *Make rituals*

5) *Give often*

Having the above honed social skills and a high Relationship GPA is what opens doors and keeps them open.

Nowhere is this concept more evident than within the [Wall Street Dead Ahead Networking \(WSDaH\) Family](#).

Founded in 2012 by Portfolio Manager Deborah Solomon, WSDaH exemplifies why having a high Relationship GPA is the 'ticket' to success. Deb was running into many of her Wall Street colleagues at Grateful Dead shows and while chatting during set breaks, had an aha moment. She wanted to expand her business network, she connected well with these people and they respected one another—why not bring them all together to create a stronger force?

And the rest is history.

Deb refers to members as 'Family'—you go out of your way to help (most) of your family members—so why not have that translate into a professional environment? And as Deb likes to say "the word 'work' is in networking for a reason". But the return on your investment comes back tenfold and strengthens your Relationship GPA as well.

While our Family is a mix of professionals with the common denominator of loving the Grateful Dead, it runs much deeper. Deb, without even knowing it, follows 'The Cinderella Skills of College'. She nurtures us as she guides Family members into building relationships with one another using the tools provided by WSDaH. Throughout the year, we are encouraged to step out of our comfort zones, meet new people, and foster relationships with one another.

Speaking of Family members, I recently spoke to some and they shared with me how their Relationship GPA was put to the test being part of the Family and how it has made a pronounced difference in their professional lives:

*"I've been a member of WSDaH for less than a year, and have already forged numerous solid relationships—both personal and professional. I was never a big fan of traditional networking and am amazed at how seamless it was to call WSDaH members who were not only very welcoming, but who also referred me to clients of theirs. I've found on a personal level that taking the time to develop relationships from the ground level up has really benefited me on numerous fronts. I'm looking forward to what the future holds as I continue to get to know additional WSDaH members".*

Eric Meisner, Managing Partner – Fractional Finance LLC

*"I'm a social person who prefers to spend time with familiar friends and never considered myself a "networker". When I heard about WSDA, it resonated with me so much that I had to join. I was introduced to Deb by mutual friends and discovered a unique way to meet fellow industry colleagues. Being the first to call to initiate a meeting was out of my comfort zone and I am pleasantly surprised to have found new business relationships as well as some new friends. This improved my Relationship GPA without a doubt".*

Michelle Lindenberger, Chief Marketing Officer – Aplomb Strategies

*"I learned through WSDaH that relationship building is the key to your success. I recently contacted one member who works at a search firm to help us recruit some legal talent. It was reassuring because I had gotten to know this member, could trust him, and knew that he had our best interests at heart. I've gotten to know other WSDaH members in the brokerage industry who I can leverage information from regarding best practices which has also been invaluable. On a personal note, I witnessed first hand the outpouring of love and support from the members when a friend's father passed away. There is a camaraderie within this group that makes it clear why relationships are really the glue that holds us together, not our professions".*

Jack McGuire, Deputy General Counsel – Oppenheimer & Co. Inc.

*“Networking has always come easy to me but when I joined WSDaH, I noticed that they really focused on building relationships and trust with members, something I had not experienced with other networking groups. I found myself raising the bar on my own game as a result. This proved time and time again, that it wasn't so much about the particular industry I was targeting, but more about the people I wanted to do business with and vice versa. Building this trust and respect with the members has proven to be a winning strategy for me”.*

Craig Jacobson, Senior Managing Director – GlassRatner Advisory & Capital Group LLC

It's human nature to desire doing business with people that you like, trust and respect. As a WSDaH member, I've witnessed many professional relationships developing over time where family members (including lawyers, fund managers, accountants, investment bankers, Investor Relations and artists—to name a few) build a natural camaraderie with each other, bringing something to the table for one another—be it a referral, a piece of advice or a new business lead. I love being a part of it!

And it all began with strangers stopping strangers just to shake their hand...

Thinking back to college, did you have a 4.0 GPA and make the Dean's List every year? That might open the door for you, but once inside, you've got to prove that you can relate well with people. Because what really gets you on the road to success is being able to connect with people and make people feel comfortable with you, as you seek to maintain those relationships. Remember to be authentic, genuine, trustworthy and credible. The rest should flow from there.

What is your Relationship GPA going to be this year? We'd love to know!

References:

Stephen Turban and Greg M. Foster, *Your Relationship GPA: Lessons from Harvard students on how to make time for what matters most* (New York: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016)