

Weakest Links Are Our Best Bets

Alex Marinov, 05/07/09
Icebreaker Speech, Wry ToastMasters

1. Hi everyone, my name is Alex and this is my first speech, the Icebreaker. My icebreakers is called “The Weakest Links Are Our Best Bets”.
2. And today I would like to share not only I little bit about myself and what I do, but also
3. HOW I got here. And it seems to me that I got here MOSTLY through the weakest links in my circle of friends and acquaintances. The people who are NOT my closest friends or relatives. I’d like to share the idea of how people who we barely know, can REALLY influence our choices in life. And I’d like to do this in the context of 3 stories.
4. **The first story** goes back to 2001 when I first came to America. I had been accepted to a couple schools – one in Connecticut and one San Francisco. The one in Connecticut offered a scholarship and the one in San Francisco didn’t.

I decided to come to San Francisco because my parents and my brother were living in the Bay Area. But now I had to pay high international student fees. Without scholarship, I had to find a way to work part time, go to school full time, and pay my way through school.

The problem was, that international students can only work on campus, where they paid a little over the minimum wage. I had no idea how I was going to get through this.

Then I met Vania through a friend of mine I played soccer with. Vania heard about my problem and mentioned that at San Francisco State University they would allow me to work off campus, as long as my work was related to my major. So I transferred to SFSU, passed the real estate license state exam, got a real estate license, completed the paperwork at the Business Department, showing how my work was related to my major. Then I went on to sell real estate in San Francisco for the next three years, which put me through school and helped me build my first business, sales and communication skills in the US.

What’s interesting about this story is that I’d met Vania only *once* through a guy a played soccer with once a month.

5. **The second story** is from 2005. I already had a green card, I was almost done with school and I was the number 7 real estate agent at a Prudential office of 60 people. But I was really bored with real estate! After 3 years I thought I had nothing more to learn and the business was simply too local.

So, I started talking to some of my friends – what should I do my life? What would be good for me. Then I met Aneta, through her husband, whom I’d met at a happy hour of the International Diplomacy Council in San Francisco. Aneta said I should email my friend Nina at BearingPoint

and go into consulting. I did and I was hired 2 weeks later and spent 2.5 years with that company on system integration projects. That's how I became a management consultant. And I had met Aneta only once before that.

6. **The third story** is from 2006 when I was working on a project at T-Mobile up here in Seattle. I was flying between San Francisco and Seattle every week for about a year and flew to a new city almost every weekend. Life was great, especially during the weekends. However, after a while I realized that the rain in Seattle just *wouldn't* stop. I was desperate to find something to do during the week outside the office.

Then one day I met George, who was a tester on the T-Mobile project and invited me to play tennis at the Bellevue club. I hadn't played tennis in a while, but I really liked the Bellevue Club and decided to pay the hefty fee to keep me out of the rain. I got so involved with tennis that I ended up winning a 3.0 tournament at the club.

2 years later, I was living in Miami Beach and was looking for a local tennis players. I joined a tennis ladder at the Flamingo tennis center in South Beach and asked the front desk clerk for a print out of all the 12 people in the ladder. They were out of printouts!

7. So, I asked about their website. But they didn't have a website! And so I decided to build one. And now with the help of a few friends I've started building a tennis portal for connecting tennis players and helping them participate in tournaments.

But notice where it all started. It started with someone I had never met before. Someone, who just like Vania and Aneta from the first 2 stories was one of the weak links in my sphere of friends. One of the people that were not *that* close to me, but ended up shaping the choices that I make in life.

8. Notice the pattern in the 3 stories. It seems that the people who are closest to me and share the same interests as mine did not seem to offer any ideas that were that much different than mine.
9. Perhaps because we're too much alike? And because we live in the world, the same circle of friends, with whom we have very strong links.
10. The thought I'd like to leave you with today, is ... that connections, networking and relationships are not really about numbers – that the more people you know, the better off you are in terms of career opportunities and social life. But more about the weaker links in our networks. We should pay more attention to them as they can be the best bets in our lives.