Everyone who uses LinkedIn has a connection philosophy, though some people would probably have a hard time describing their philosophy in words. Maybe you’re one of those people who aren’t sure what your connection philosophy is. Since you sell for a living, we want to suggest that you make a conscious choice to adopt a connection philosophy that supports both you and your organization.

There are three dominant connection philosophies that Sandler has seen on LinkedIn. Most people fall into only one of these three categories. The problem is, only one of these philosophies – the third one – works best for professional salespeople. We are hoping you will choose to adopt that philosophy for yourself.

PHILOSOPHY #1: THE OPEN NETWORKER

People who adopt this philosophy look at LinkedIn contacts a little like dedicated baseball fans look at baseball cards – the more you can get, the better. You can’t have too many!

These people are pretty easy to notice because they amass a whole lot of contacts. If they were to put their connection philosophy into words, it might sound like this: “I am an open networker. I will connect with anyone and everyone under the sun. My goal is to have 50,000 connections on LinkedIn.” Many of these folks view their total number of LinkedIn connections as a kind of status symbol, a marker of their social standing.

PHILOSOPHY #2: THE CLOSED NETWORKER

People who adopt this philosophy look at handing out LinkedIn contacts about the same way they look at handing out hundred-dollar bills. You don’t give them to just anyone!

The philosophy of the closed networker sounds something like this: “I’m not going to connect with you on LinkedIn unless I sit down with you, order a good meal at a nice restaurant, shake your hand and decide that I like you.” You’ve probably run across your share of people on LinkedIn who have adopted this philosophy.
PHILOSOPHY #3: THE VALUE NETWORKER

We think sales professionals need to find the middle-ground between these two extremes. It doesn’t need to be dead center, of course, but it should be somewhere in the middle. Salespeople need to be able to articulate why they occupy that middle-ground.

The middle position that works most often for salespeople is based on a very simple question: “Can I as a sales professional, add value to you?” If the answer to that question is “Yes,” you should probably add that person as a contact. You may or may not get a lot of value from this person, at least right away, but if you’re certain that you could conceivably add value to this person’s world with what you and your company offer, you’re going to be open to the possibility of adding him as a contact. Of course, you should add people from whom you know you will learn or receive other kinds of value.

Whatever you decide to share on LinkedIn should ultimately relate to the value you deliver to your clients and customers. It should not be about what a great person you are, what your kids are up to, what new piece of trivia you found or what funny video you just saw. LinkedIn focuses on business. Stay focused on what you provide for the people who keep your company afloat – your customers – and try to find more people like them. Work from the context of their expectations and the outcomes they want. That’s why you’re on this platform.

This is an excerpt from LINKEDIN THE SANDLER WAY: 25 Secrets That Show Salespeople How To Leverage The World’s Largest Professional Network.

Since 1986, David Mattson, CEO of Sandler Training, an international training and consulting organization headquartered in the United States, has been a trainer and business consultant in the areas of sales, sales management, business development, corporate team building, and strategic planning. For more information please visit www.sandler.com.