

Building a Community From Scratch

I met Bruce Seidman, the former president/owner of Sandler Training Global HQ and the son of founder David Sandler, in 2007. I'll let Bruce tell the story and he does it so much better than I, but suffice it to say, I HAD to have Bruce share how he has built up this amazing community from literally nothing.

HOW I MET MIKE O'NEIL

Before I share with you the birth of the Breakfast Club (which at its core, was birthed through my highly valued business relationships I've nurtured in real life, not digital life, since 1983, when I first entered my father's business, "Sandler Sales Institute."), let me tell you how Mike O'Neil and I met:

Mike cold-called me! (...and if he hadn't, you most likely would not be reading this chapter right now!). It was 2007, and I was president of the world's largest sales training company, Sandler Training. My father, David Sandler, had passed away on September 13, 1995. We spoke on the phone, Mike was living in Denver at the time, and he convinced me immediately to sign up for this new sales database networking job-seeking thingy, LinkedIn (I'm not technical, I'm SALES!).

My intention for signing up was simple: to show the 500 or so Sandler Trainers (back in 2007) that LinkedIn was good and when they saw my new LinkedIn profile (whatever that meant back then, in 2007), they, too, would follow suit and put their information up on the web in cyberspace on LinkedIn.

They didn't need a job, so they needed to see someone they trusted post first. Well, they followed suit!

HOW I met Mike O'Neil (continued)

It also helped that when Mike and I spoke on that very first cold call, he was doing what Mike O'Neil does, which is giving really amazing technical help in everyday common language. I liked what he said, I asked him right then and there if I could record the call; he agreed, and I interviewed Mike O'Neil for 30 minutes and he shared with the entire "Sandler Family" (the "Sandlerites, the name I affectioned badged my 2nd family for 30 years) killer LinkedIn marketing tactics in 2007, not to seek a job but to attract new clients.

The audio was an instant "ESPN Classic" and may even still be circulated around the Sandler Network today, 13 years later! (I was bought out involuntarily at the end of 2012...the equivalent of a hostile takeover in corporate-speak).

And Mike O'Neil and I remained in contact over the years (phone versus LinkedIn), and, like so many business relationships, we re-engaged because of Covid.

The big take-away for you, the reader of this book is: (a) maintain phone relationships through your future (now ZOOM), and (b) in your psyche, hard-wired in your nervous system, is a yearning to chase many passions and projects, not just the one thing that

earns income and provides security for your family. Be a people-magnet, and chase these “new” passions with others also passionate about the same thing (that truly is the net net story of my adult life, right there in that last sentence).

BIRTH OF A NATION (well, more like, A COMMUNITY)

We started the Breakfast Club on 4-20-2020, even before it was a community, for one easy reason: “Connection during Quarantine.” It was the third week in April, 2020, and it was then that the general public had just begun to realize the true depth of “stay at home” (depending on where you live, of course).

So, because my skill set was entrenched in leading people, (30 years), training on all kinds of topics, and, quite literally, simple articulation, I just.. started. I had never been on a zoom call, and thought Zoom was a sister company of Zoom Info (the “sell names” database similar to Dunn & Bradstreet). The whole point, again, was to “just start.” My friend in Chicago started his own Breakfast Club two weeks before I started mine in Pawleys Island, South Carolina. He came up with a simple formula, which I’ll write about shortly..

GIVE BACK

People were sowing masks, driving groceries in trucks all night long, volunteering in Covid hospital units, etc. **What could I do to give back?** How could I use my God’s gifting and my generous and eclectic life experiences to help people in “lock-down?” Start a virtual networking group... why, of course! Stimulate sales locally inside the group. Connect people together early Monday morning.

Give people something to look forward to beyond Sunday since no one was leaving the house any time zoom (soon...did you catch that pun?) It was a hit from the very beginning! Early Monday morning, April 20, 2020 I had my first Breakfast Club group: I

had four folks, including me: two people I knew well and a woman I had found through LinkedIn the week before.

One of the people was a longtime friend who owned four BNI franchised countries, the networking company. The other was an old friend I knew back in the mid-1990s and we stayed in touch sporadically over the years (as we all can attest, one of the many silver linings of quarantine is old friends reuniting!). Well, that very first Breakfast Club was a complete disaster! The woman “took over” the microphone, my two friends tried to jump in, and it was awkward, to say the least. The following Monday morning, it was much better (the woman never returned).

I started with people I knew. Let that sink in: I started with people I already knew: I dialed the phone. I sent out a form email. I dusted off my LinkedIn profile. I did Facebook Lives 1X a week out in nature ...all the time extolling the many “takeaways” the Breakfast Club offered (I was really selling myself on how powerful the “near future” Breakfast Club could become). I still do Facebook Lives once a week, even though, three months after the first episode, as of this documentation, the Breakfast Club has begun to grow “almost geometrically.” My next “Lives” will be conducted over LinkedIn. LinkedIn allows you to do live videos now.

Birth of the West Coast Breakfast Club.

I met a woman in San Diego in someone else’s zoom hosted in Kansas City who liked what I had to say, and we zoomed a few days later, just the two of us. We just clicked! I shared with her about our 8:00 AM EDT Breakfast Club; she suggested I start one for people out West who definitely were not going to get up at 4:30 AM to attend a 5am PDT zoom meeting. So I came back with, “I don’t know anyone out West.” Mary offered to help. She found a person and I found a person and then that was that! 4 people (including me again), in the very first West Coast Breakfast Club. Preparation was a breeze! I simply repeated the topic I just talked about three hours ago!

So now we’re running, on average dozens in the East and also dozens in the West! Two completely different groups! Some in the East repeat the Breakfast Club in the West! Why? More networking! Repeat the sales lessons. Simple. Two awesome meetings every Monday morning. What a fantastic way to kick off the week! One of the people who always comes to both says, “The Breakfast Club is the most important meeting of the week!”

The Format:

So my friend in Chicago came up with this formatting: It’s very simple: First everybody goes around the horn and tells everyone what they do, and who their best prospect is, and also what they have been grateful for in the last 24 to 48 hours. So simple. My friend is a genius: Community first thing Monday morning. Strangers become friends. Like all organic events, things evolved. People began typing their commercials into the Chat line. Then they began pasting urls, emails, and cell numbers into the Chat line. Some people pasted different commercials throughout the hour (they still do). The chat

line is this invisible “second meeting,” with networking info, with AH HA Best Practices, and, even more importantly, private chat between two people. Everyone SAVES THE CHAT throughout the hour, and especially right before they sign off. The Chat has evolved into this robust work product, complete with LESSONS LEARNED, and everyone emails it to themselves (enabling all urls and emails to become “click-able.” Some even print off the SAVED CHAT and work the document all week long, getting referrals, prospecting, and making new relationships outside The Breakfast Club morning.

Then I teach a topic, with slides. During the training (enter-ainment), I weave in two breakouts (smaller rooms where people can really get to know each other quickly). After the early feedback, it was unanimous: 3 Breakouts! This is the evolution of the Breakfast Club. I can’t believe it’s only been three months since we started this thing; we’re in such a rhythm now it’s truly quite amazing! From new idea, to live meetings, to now, an entrenched Community; a sense of belonging. Every Monday morning (Invite your friends: <https://tiny.cc/luvtheclub>)

The Breakfast Club After-Party

Some people didn’t want to end at the top of the hour, they really wanted to stick around to keep the momentum going. Some people just remained “hanging out” afterwards. I don’t mind, because for me, the pressure’s off. I’m no longer the host, I’m no longer “enter-training,” now I’m just another Community member, just like everyone else. It’s quite cool, for them...and for me as well.

Zoom Props and Your “Zoomatorium”

First, I built my zoomatorium (and you should, too). I don’t believe in virtual backgrounds because I hate the way it ghosts me out, even with a green screen.

I never ever used the virtual defaults; I just put up signs behind me. They have evolved in the first three weeks as well. I even have 2 sets and by simply sliding my desktop monitor over very slowly, I undergo a complete set change just like that. I have all kinds of props, I mean an entire slew of “at-the-ready” items I hold up in front of the camera in a micro-second. People love how I use the props and how easily I fold them into the dialogue, in real-time.

(Mike, I will take pictures and insert them here)

Spinoffs from the Breakfast Club.

“Expand the brand.” A few people have created their own Breakfast Club. Tony T. started the Healthy Breakfast Club on Thursday mornings from 8 to 9 AM EDT. Lauren R started the Bloom Room which is a 30 minute meditation Tuesday afternoons.. Imitation is the finest form of flattery. I love that other people are taking the concept and using it in their own world to construct their own community. I never considered that just three short months ago.

Technology by a non-technical person (me!)

A Landing Page:

<https://thebreakfastclub.net>

This is a simple page with testimonial videos and some “sell copy” showing what’s in it for people if they come to a Breakfast Club. Then, in plain view, are the RSVP buttons to register. I use Google Forms for a simple registration process. In fact, the early feedback was, “Bruce, why do I have to enter my info all over again every week?” So I created a second RSVP form for someone returning. Simple. I’m happy, because I know who is coming and I can send “CONFIRMATION” emails as soon as I see their registration. New attendees fill out the FIRST-TIMER RSVP where I ask them to share email, city, state, and cell. This page is really the backbone of everything to spread the word digitally.

LinkedIn events to Promote The Breakfast Club:

If you go to “Bruce Seidman” on LinkedIN, you’ll notice a trail of EVENTS down the left-hand side of your page. Each Breakfast Club Week (Both East & West Coast) gets its own LinkedIN Event, with the date in the title (this is extremely important). This is a relatively easy way to INVITE my LinkedIN first Connections to the Breakfast Club. My next goal is to get a template out to each member and ask them to CREATE EVENT in their LinkedIN page, and easily invite people in their first connections. <https://www.linkedin.com/events/breakfastclubcommunityjuly13-2020eastcoast/>

Email Trickle Campaigns, just like everybody else.

As a true “non-technical,” I cranked out emails manually for three months before I started using an automated email. Next up for me in my learning curve is creating automated campaigns that don’t rely on me. One layer of technology at a time, that’s my motto.

Podcast to attract even more members to the breakfast club community

I am starting a podcast as another means to promote the Breakfast Club using another medium.

Video Testimonials

At least once a month, during the Breakfast Club After-Party, me and 5 or 6 people do a 5 minute video sharing why they love the Breakfast Club. I have a backlog of new testimonials to push people to on my YouTube channel, my LinkedIn, my Facebook.

Work product and preparation: the Sunday Monday 1-2 punch!

Condensed and focused work: I love this so much! I spend two to three hours Sunday creating and rehearsing the content I will deliver Monday Morning. Then I spend Monday Morning in front of the Breakfast Club Community. And, now, thanks to technology I have embraced, I spend only a few hours during the week promoting The Community with all the steps I've listed here. I view all work as "project-based." A start, and a finish. Two days out of seven highly focused--very very productive.

Guest speakers are key!

Why? I know people will get bored of just me, plain and simple. Guests are the formula for podcasts, YouTube Videos and so much content (heck, even Mike O'Neil's ebook here has guest experts contributing). It's human nature. We crave regularity and variety all in the same breath (let that last sentence sink in for you, for what your mission is. Please don't miss its significance). Here are a few of our Guest Experts: We had a head coach of the men's college football team in the ACC school. We had a Core strength coach. A Meditation expert. We all meditated in a group and then she taught us all about good-quality water. Mike O'Neil the LinkedIn Rockstar, the author of this book, was on as a guest. We had a Functional medicine expert. We had a ZOOM Presenter expert, too (for my ZOOM presentation tips, please go to <https://brucecoastal.com/zoom>). We had a podcast guru, who teaches other people to start their own podcasts. Plus I have a whole slew of guest experts waiting in the wings.

Soliciting feedback, in writing, using wu foo forms:

I asked for feedback early on. I asked, and gave people permission to hit me hard and tell me like it is. I used email, zoom calls, phone calls, and wufoo forms. I still ask for feedback, and you know what? Our Community loves to give it to me straight, because they want the Club to flourish, too. And they want to see me succeed, because if I succeed, so will our Breakfast Club Community.

If You Build It, They Will Come

I'm actually talking about technology. Everything you have read here, needed tech. And I am not tech. Not at all. Not one fiber of my being. Every person I needed to help me came from within the Breakfast Club. Every single one.

Referrals, and growing The Breakfast Club Community organically from within

As with any new Community, people come once and decide if it's their cup of tea or not. Generally I discovered that people who come only to network don't come back. We are a Community of givers: Our members bring other people into the Club. We have a 3 month track record, and people are doing business with each other inside the Community; now the big push is to generate referrals to each other outside the Breakfast Club that convert to business. In fact, we just started tracking "revenue" and "relationships" both INSIDE and also OUTSIDE The Breakfast Club (all on the honor system, obviously). One of the members showed us all how he's using QR Codes on the back of his cell phone to get people to "view his digital business card." I borrowed his creativity and created two GOOGLE FORMS to track two things: REVENUE inside the Club (people doing business with each other) and also outside the Club. RELATIONSHIPS inside the Club, and also outside the CLUB. Why track RELATIONSHIPS? We all believe this is the key to business and to life: The people that trust you, and that you trust. And I use QR codes as another "prop" during the meeting and ask people to open up their cameras on their cell phones, and fill in the simple form(s) that open up on their phones, in real-time. It truly is genius, it really is. People love the "real-time" productivity they are a part of.