Ties with potential: nature, antecedents, and consequences of social networks in school teams

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IOUs: The Favor Bank

‘What is this Favor Bank?’

‘You know. Everyone knows.’

‘Possibly, but I still haven’t quite grasped what you’re saying.’

‘It was an American writer who first mentioned it. It’s the most powerful bank in the world, and you’ll find it in every sphere of life.’

‘Yes, but I come from a country without a literary tradition. What favors could I do for anyone?’

‘That doesn’t matter in the least. Let me give you an example: I know that you’re an up-and-coming writer and that, one day, you’ll be very influential. I know this because, like you, I too was once ambitious, independent, honest. I no longer have the energy I once had, but I want to help you because I can’t or don’t want to grind to a halt just yet. I’m not dreaming about retirement, I’m still dreaming about the fascinating struggle that is life, power, and glory.

I start making deposits in your account – not cash deposits, you understand, but contacts. I introduce you to such and such a person, I arrange certain deals, as long as they’re legal. You know that you owe me something, but I never ask you for anything’.

‘And then one day…’

‘Exactly. One day, I’ll ask you for a favor and you could, of course, say “No”, but you’re conscious of being in my debt. You do what I ask, I continue to help you, and other people see that you’re a decent, loyal sort of person and so they too make deposits in your account – always in the form of contacts and nothing else. They too will one day ask you for a favor, and you will respect and help the people who have helped you, and, in time, you’ll have spread your net worldwide, you’ll know everyone you need to know and your influence will keep on growing’.

(From: Paulo Coelho, The Zahir, pp. 34-35)