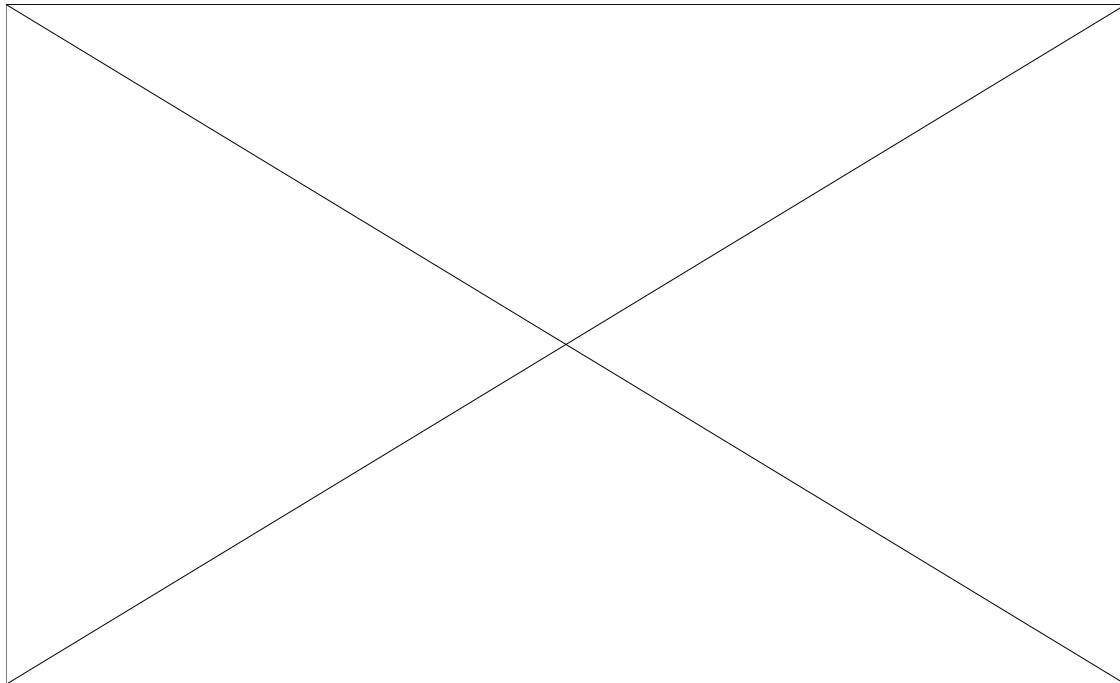


Is Twitter capable of creating the ties that bind?

I keep a close eye on this heart of mine.
I keep my eyes wide open all the time.
I keep the end out for the tie that binds.
Because your mine, I walk the line.
-Johnny Cash



There were two fascinating articles from the past week that made me stop in my tracks. The first, ["Tweet success awaits the savvy lawyer"](#) by Neil Rose who writes for the The Guardian in the UK and the second was ["Small Change: Why the revolution will not be tweeted"](#) by Malcolm Gladwell in the New Yorker.

This first article talks about the power of Twitter to enable sharp lawyers to make new connections and build relationships online. The article didn't include new ideas or insights but was a mainstream article admitting what most of us lawyers in the blogosphere have known for a long time- you can meet some pretty amazing people on Twitter.

In the second article Gladwell describes the types of close knit relationships shared by revolutionaries. In every revolution cited by Gladwell the patriots were more than just acquaintances- they were in fact intimately acquainted with one another. They were tied by real-world bonds. Roommates, family, members of the same clubs- you get the idea.



Gladwell's conclusion is that Twitter is far too passive and the relationships it creates are fleeting. Twitter doesn't have the power to create real revolutions because the loose networks fall short when it comes to creating deeper social bonds. The actual tweets coming out of Iran weren't the cause or inspiration for revolutionaries- how could they be? The tweets were in English when most people in Iran speak Farsai.

Someone that is willing to retweet your article isn't exactly signing up to stand by you in a picket line or go up against armed men in riot gear.

The next questions that follows, the question that Gladwell didn't ask was- can relationships that begin on Twitter progress into something more powerful? Can they progress into something as powerful as the tight bonds that form offline through late night conversations? Can Twitter create a bond strong enough to bring in real business?

We all know individuals that have married people via online dating, but these relationships can only reach a certain point online- they need to eventually move out into the real world. I think what Gladwell is hinting at in his article is not that social networks are useless, but that online efforts alone are a crutch not likely to build the types of strong relationships that have the potential to bring about real change.

The conversations and relationships need to be brought offline.

This is the biggest challenge I come across in working with attorneys, they expect high value relationships to vaporize over the internet. It doesn't work that way. It takes multiple points of contact and often months or years to create high value relationships. Phone calls are good, but face-to-face is best. Remember, the majority of communication is non-verbal: your facial expressions, eye contact and even the way you carry yourself. All of this is missing in the online exchanges.



In the song *I Walk the Line* Johnny Cash sings about a love that is so powerful that it motivated him to stop drinking, whoring and be faithful to June Carter, the woman he ended up spending the rest of his life with. That kind of a love is powerful- and it doesn't come from 140 character conversations. It takes something a little more real.

What do you think? Is Gladwell right? Do online conversations lack the human element necessary to form tight bonds?