

Secrets to Small Business Success: Business Relationships

I think one of the first lessons to learn in business is how to build, maintain, and grow professional business relationships. You can have great products and offer great services, but without successful business relationships, you are cheating yourself from true success.

Building relationships is one thing, but maintaining and growing them is a completely different animal and requires a lot of patience. Respect and trust are key elements in accomplishing this. One key element to remember is that a relationship is and always will be a two way street. Often there are times when traffic will be traveling more in one direction than the other.

Remember: People tend to do business with someone they know and trust.

If I had to choose what I thought the biggest mistake that small business owners make, it would definitely be destroying relationships. We work so hard to develop and maintain our relationships, yet it is so easy to make them crash and burn.

Relationship Breakers:

- Not returning phone calls
- Not following up on referrals
- Missing appointments and not following up
- Not paying vendors on time
- Unreliability
- Constantly “taking” and seldom “giving”

So, how do I start building the perfect relationship? For starters, get to know your client, vendor, employee, customer, or whoever you are starting to develop a relationship with. Get to know them by name and give them your attention, but don't stalk them. I would recommend taking more of a “soft sell” approach than a “hard sell” approach. The soft sell approach is less forceful and establishes an acceptable comfort level. Stay in contact and follow up with them and ask if there is anything you can help them with. When offering your assistance, you must be sincere and not sound like “your going through the motions”. Remember establishing trust is a key element in developing your relationship. Another great relationship starter is to make connections. Find out what the person is looking for and see if you can make a connection to assist them. You want to establish a reputation of being a helpful and reliable resource.

Remember: Attention, interest, and laughs go a long way.

Building your relationship takes effort, but maintaining your new relationship takes even more effort. As with any type of relationship, communication is the critical element here. Without effective communication, the relationship is bound to fail. Relationships need *Maintenance* and the definition of maintenance is “to preserve from failure and to

sustain”. Each client, customer, etc. will be slightly different, so keeping the lines of communication open is a must. Here are a few things that I find to be successful in maintaining your existing and new business relationships:

- Breakfast/Lunch meetings to catch up
- Send informational resources, I.E. articles, websites, etc.
- Send referrals
- Offer ideas and suggestions

If you have done your job in maintaining your relationship, then growing it should be a natural consequence. Although, don't take this for granted. Use your avenues of communications to look for growth opportunities so that your relationship does not become stagnant.

Keep in mind that we are human, mistakes and miscommunications are bound to happen. If for some reason your relationship is not working out and needs to be ended, do so in a professional manner. You never know what the future holds.

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