How to systematically build strong relationships

You can systematically build strong relationships (e.g., with prospects, clients or customers). Relationships will develop when you:

- Commit to the success and well-being of the other person
- Consciously move the relationship forward
- Acknowledge and respond to the inevitable barriers to forward progress

You can do all this unilaterally and succeed – you can cause the cooperation of the other person!!

Begin by committing to the success and well-being of the other person

It's not a matter of chemistry. You don't have to like the person. Rather, you have to decide, as a professional, to use your talents and resources to help them achieve their goals. Your commitment drives you to learn as much as you can about them and about how best to work with them.

Systematically move the relationship forward

The two key tools are reflective listening and concrete trust building actions.

Reflective listening means listening to understand the other person, their environment, and the implications for them of what they say. It also includes observing their (perhaps unconscious) relationship preferences -- how they interact with you, and what brings them closer or drives them away. And it includes reflecting back what you have heard; this reflection lets them clarify anything you didn't hear correctly and lets them experience your commitment to hearing them fully.

Concrete trust building steps are actions you take that are valuable for the other person and which have no immediate benefit for you. These steps demonstrate your commitment to their success. Your actions are based on (1) your unique situation, i.e., who you are, and what and who you know, and on (2) their unique situation (which you have learned about by listening).

You will typically choose concrete trust building actions that are easy for you because of who you are, and are quite valuable for the other person. Perhaps you can introduce them to a contact of yours who can help them solve a pressing problem (that is outside of your own expertise). Perhaps you can send them an article they'd find valuable. Or you can volunteer to review and comment on something they are preparing. Concrete trust building actions are always free-of-charge, to demonstrate your commitment.

Acknowledge and deal with inevitable relationship barriers

Virtually every relationship is challenged by the participants' ambivalence about relationships. Most people like close relationships, but also find them threatening. If you listen and concretely build trust, you will often make great progress. But sometimes you will not get the response you expect. Rather than moving closer, your relationship partner will move away. This "push-away reaction" could come in many forms, such as a snide comment, a hostile or distancing behavior (such as showing up late for meetings), or even a complete cut-off of communication. You can learn how to minimize these push-aways, diagnose those that occur, and respond in ways that ultimately leave the relationship even stronger than it was.

Something to try this week

Identify a relationship you would like to make stronger. Think about what concrete trust building step you could take with that person -- something that you can do because of your situation that would be valuable for the other person. Then do it, and watch what happens.

What are these tips?

These monthly tips are intended to help professionals create more business and enjoy their work more. We focus on how to start relationships, how to build relationships, and how to convert those relationships into sales.

Can you answer my questions about business development?

We'd be delighted. Please send any questions you have to questions@bridgewellpartners.com and we'll do our best to help you out. Or call us at 312-863-3489. Or visit www.bridgewellpartners.com to learn more about how we coach and train professionals to be better at business development and to enjoy it more.