

Title:

Successful Business Relationships

Word Count:

693

Summary:

Build your business relationships – and your future – by focusing on these critical elements of Value, Competence, Trust, and Propriety.

Keywords:

sales, business, relationships, customer, selling, customer service, training

Article Body:

Successful business relationships are based on Value, Competence, Trust, and Propriety.

Value

Value: The customer's perception of your worth, excellence, usefulness, or importance. Value addresses the customer's question, "What can this person or company do for me?"

Value can be articulated by explicitly answering these questions throughout the sales cycle:

- How much? (what the customer can expect to gain by doing business with you – in increased sales, lower costs, etc.)
- How soon? (when the customer will be able to receive the value)
- How sure? (proof that the customer will in fact attain the value stated)

Provide norms for the customer so that there is little question of what the customer can expect from you: "We have a track record of providing a 15% cost savings and 90% product availability within 2 days of order."

What are norms that your customers can expect you to live up to?

Remember, it is YOUR job to tell your customers what value they can expect – customers shouldn't have to work to figure out the value themselves. If you

don't explicitly quantify the value your customer can expect to receive – and your competition may be doing this work for your customer – who is going to win the sale?

Competence

Competence: The customer's perception of your skill, knowledge, and experience with respect to them or their business. Competence addresses the customer's question, "Can this person or company do what they say they can do?"

Competence is demonstrated by the following:

- Completing and implementing an organized and logical sales approach
- Conveying an understanding of the customer and their business
- Demonstrating research and knowledge
- Substantiating your capabilities
- Involving team members appropriately and on a timely basis

The perception of competence is gained over time. As you work these guidelines into your approach to your customers, you will gain credibility and enhance your business relationships.

Trust

Trust: The customer's confidence in your integrity, ability, and intent. Trust addresses the customer's question, "Do I trust this person?"

Trust is demonstrated by the following:

- Using third party introductions
- Providing a letter of recommendation (objective references help build credibility)
- Displaying honesty, candor, empathy, and respect (show that you've done your homework, show a concern for their time and issues)
- Conveying win/win intent (concern for positive outcome/success for both parties)

- Above all, substantiate with action:
 - o Establish a track record of follow-through
 - o Set new norms (guidelines for expected behavior that are agreed to and that can be counted on)

Propriety

Propriety: The customer's perception of the appropriateness or properness of your actions with respect to them or their business. Propriety addresses the customer's question, "Is this person behaving properly or appropriately?"

Part of exhibiting propriety is in the way you present yourself. Over half of others' perceptions of you is based – at least initially – on your appearance. Therefore, take care in your physical appearance, mannerisms, vocabulary, and business etiquette. If your first "appearances" occur on the phone, pay special attention to your tone, enthusiasm, and vocabulary.

A second, critical part of demonstrating propriety involves your adaptability to other people. In business, the Golden Rule – "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" – is usually inappropriate. In fact, if you treat others as you want to be treated, you may end up ignoring their needs, wants, and expectations, which may be completely different from your own.

You must be astute enough to recognize others' needs, wants, and expectations AND you must be flexible enough to treat people the way they want to be treated. Relate to your customers in a way that makes them feel most comfortable. This decreases "relationship tension" and increases trust, credibility, cooperation, and the commitment to work with you.

Build your business relationships – and your future – by focusing on these critical elements of Value, Competence, Trust, and Propriety.

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