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Proven Techniques for Relationship Building

By Debra L. Rhodunda

Relationship building is a simple marketing concept, yet critical because everyone prefers to conduct business with people they know and like.

Establishing long-term trust and loyalty with clients takes time, not necessarily a large budget. Because your current and former clients already have an awareness of and a relationship with you and your firm, traditional marketing resources can be allocated elsewhere.

The key to relationship building is repetition and consistency over time — getting to know your clients intimately. It takes being sincerely interested in the lives and careers of other people. It means volunteering to help without expecting something in return. More than anything else it involves making an effort to follow up with people, getting to know them and then maintaining that relationship.

For practitioners looking for proven relationship building techniques, consider the following ten best practices:

- **Be disciplined:** Starting in January, go through your Rolodex or contacts file and systematically make calls starting with “A” and continuing one letter per week. Set aside specific blocks of time to make calls. By the end of the year you will have contacted each person twice.
- **Multitask:** While you’re on the phone, browse through your contact list and consider whom you haven’t spoken with in awhile.
- **Plan ahead:** Use a calendaring system to create automatic reminders to check in with your clients.
- **Keep it personal:** Send *handwritten* notes with items of interest to your contacts.
- **Have a reason:** Browse through recent client files, or review notes you’ve made on client’s family or personal interests before calling.

- **Do your homework:** Monitor relevant developments at your client’s organization so you can make contact that is current and specific.
- **Don’t push:** When you call or visit, just have a conversation. Don’t try to sell; instead, *listen* and think about solutions for the client’s problems.
- **Consider the client’s agenda first:** Most clients’ time is at a premium. While it’s great to send an article that’s relevant to their needs, don’t waste their time with generic or peripheral information
- **When you travel:** Plan to meet with former clients, potential clients, or other contacts in the same city. Add a day to your trip, or extend your day to have additional meetings or meals with contacts.
- **Invest in their success:** Go the extra mile during a project and after to demonstrate your commitment to the client.

If you think about it, building relationships with clients also makes the time together a bit more tolerable or even pleasant — and, satisfied clients are the best proponents of you and your firm. Whatever time you invest in relationship building will be worth it. ♦

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