

Insight

The thinking behind our work

Bridgewell Partners applies a systematic approach to moving relationships forward and to dealing with the barriers to relationships.

Bridgewell Partners applies revolutionary new insights about relationship building to business. We help companies fully benefit from the relationships they have and can create. Our unique approaches and processes make relationships easy to build and capitalize on.

Business success requires meeting both business and relationship needs

Business success depends on good relationships. In a successful business interaction, both parties advance their business goals in the context of a satisfying relationship. The trust created within the relationship facilitates an exchange of information that leads to the best problem definition and solution. The enjoyment of working together motivates the parties to look for more ways to do business together.

A few people are natural relationship builders. But most people rarely create deeply satisfying or exceptionally productive relationships. They want good relationships, and try their best. But most people struggle because 1) they don't recognize the normal but counterintuitive patterns relationships follow, and 2) they don't know how to consciously build relationships in ways that adjust for these patterns.

For many companies, focusing on building and maintaining relationships opens a new door. They can convert unsatisfying encounters into profitable ones that are rewarding for all. As a result, salespeople become more effective, customers are happier, and leaders and teams perform much better.

To keep a relationship moving forward, you must deal with people's ambivalence about relationships.

Relationships follow consistent patterns

Relationships reliably follow certain patterns. Typically, a successful relationship follows a pattern of "two steps forward, one step back." Almost all relationships have long plateaus and backsliding. These patterns result primarily from the interaction of two people who are each ambivalent about relationships.

Relationships, handled properly, evolve from being one-sided to being mutual. Your commitment to the success and development of your relationship partners stimulates them to also want you to succeed. Customers, for example, will want you to succeed. Teammates will become much more supportive. The results of such relationships may far exceed your expectations.

People are ambivalent about relationships

Recent research shows that most people are of two minds about relationships. They want to be with others, and they are afraid to be with others. This ambivalence flows from a person's earliest experiences with relationships, as children. On the one hand, most people want to get close to people who will respect them and respond to their needs (people are born with this social orientation, and most maintain it). At the same time, most people, based on their experience, are wary of letting down their guard as a trusting relationship requires. They fear they will be disappointed.

Most individuals are totally unaware of this ambivalence—though when the behaviors that result from it are pointed out, they can usually see them.

Therefore most relationships don't naturally keep getting better and better

Because of this ambivalence, when people are presented with a relationship in which their needs will be met, they are torn. They start out enthusiastically (because they find it appealing to have their needs listened to, respected, and responded to). But sooner or later they back away—either because something bad happens (justifying their fears about trusting others), or because something good happens (raising their concerns about whether they can trust this positive experience to continue).

Building great relationships requires the right frame of mind, simple steps to move the relationship forward, and the ability to deal with inevitable relationship barriers that will arise.

How to build great relationships

First, consciously adopt the frame of mind that lets relationships grow. Commit to making the success and development of the other person your priority.

Second, move each relationship forward with repeated simple, specific actions.

- Listen deeply for what the other person is trying to accomplish. Reflect back what you hear, so the person knows that you are listening, and so they can correct any misunderstandings by you or any misstatements they may have made.
- Take specific, concrete actions that benefit them but have no apparent payback for you. These goodwill actions demonstrate your commitment. For example, if the other person would benefit by being introduced to someone you know, then introduce them.

Third, learn to recognize the barriers that will develop because of people's ambivalence about relationships, and learn how to respond to them. The core of your response is to not get distracted by this attempt to derail the relationship, and to remain focused on helping the other person achieve their goals.