

Insight

Using a conscious approach to building relationships

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

A conscious approach begins with commitment

Your approach begins with your commitment to help your relationship partner succeed, grow and develop. That commitment, and the patience, openness, trust, hope and courage to act on that commitment will provide an unassailable foundation for the relationship you are going to build.

Moving the relationships forward

A relationship moves forward when a person has the experience of being listened to and supported. As these experiences repeatedly occur, trust grows.

Listening reflectively involves listening for what the person wants to accomplish. It also involves listening to how the person wants to be treated in the relationship with you. And it involves reflecting back what you have heard, so the other person knows that you are listening and hearing them. Ultimately, it means that, for a limited time, you focus more on the other person's needs than your own.

Trust grows when you respond to the unique needs and wishes of the other person, without the expectation of getting something immediately in return. Trust building requires taking helpful actions (e.g., providing a topical article, a referral) that are both meaningful for the other person and practical for you. These goodwill actions demonstrate your commitment to support the client and give the client the chance to experience the unique nature of your involvement. The other person has the experience of your support for him/her without expectation of immediate payback.

Listening and consciously building trust lay the groundwork. The big steps forward in the relationship happen when you engage in real work together towards mutually advantageous solutions.

Push-aways often cause relationships to go off-track. But these negative responses to a developing relationship can be predicted and managed, if you are aware of them.

Dealing with barriers to relationships

Relationships can stall due to a number of causes. The most common (and least recognized) is the push-away, which is the response caused by a party's ambivalence about relationships (one party in some way turns away from the relationship). However, oversights or mistakes can also cause relationship setbacks.

When the relationship stalls or backslides, you need to diagnose the cause. Is it a push-away, or was there an oversight on your part or your company's? Or does your offer not match the other person's needs? If the cause is a push-away, you respond by reengaging the other person in a relationship with you. Until that relationship is reestablished there can be no progress within the discussion. You reengage by reminding the other person of your commitment to help them, and then turning the person back to the business at hand in a way that supports the relationship. In a single sales call you may need to do this many times; in a long-term relationship you'll need to reengage repeatedly.

Push-aways are why most relationships don't get better and better. Rather, even in the best situations, most relationships go forward two steps and back one step.

However, push-aways can be predicted and managed. To manage them, though, you have to be watching and ready to appropriately respond. Once you recognize these relationship reactions, you can take charge of managing your relationships. Without this awareness, relationships can go off track.

You want to minimize the frequency and magnitude of push-aways. Remembering that you have a human relationship as well as a business relationship; you will focus on how meetings begin and end, on how much you try to accomplish at one sitting, and on what you plan between meetings. Your approach to making cold calls, or warm calls, or to holding team meetings may change.