

The formula for earning others' trust starts with intimacy

Jim Wiley was practically coming out of his chair when he said, "Trust is crucial in my business! Our clients must trust us, and, inside the firm, we must trust one another. We utterly fail without trust."

A lot of business people feel trust is important, but when you're the CEO, as Jim Wiley is, of an investment management and retirement planning firm (Wiley Group in Conshohocken), you tend to be passionate on the subject.

Today we are told that Americans' trust of business people is at a low ebb and that when talented workers have low trust, they don't stay with their employers.

It turns out that trust is profoundly important to business and one can argue that commerce itself utterly depends on it. Take away trust and you lose your most valued employees. Remove trust and your customers abandon you. Eradicate trust and the people in staff organizations are not invited into or avoid the key discussions that can keep a company out of trouble.

But what is trust? Wiley was so intrigued with the definition I've been using for 20 years, that I thought I'd pass it along here. This definition has gotten more clients to say, "Let me write that

Get your own ego and self-interest out of the way.

down" than almost anything I've ever said to them. And I say it a lot. I did not make it up. I learned it from a book I heartily recommend called "The Trusted Advisor" written by David Maister and his associates.

Maister's research reveals that if you are able to build trust, a number of good things tend to follow:

Your ideas are more likely to be valued by others, your skills and expertise are more apt to be sought out by them, and your customers will be more delighted with the value you're creating.

To generate a feeling of trust in a business setting, first you have to get your own ego and self-interest out of the way. Then, you must be credible, i.e., you have to have subject matter expertise, to know what the heck you're talking about. Reduce knowledge and competence to zero, and you have no trust at all. Similarly, to build trust you must be reliable, i.e., to be available and to follow through. No reliability, no trust. Finally, you must be intimate with others. This is a term that makes some squeamish, especially those who think business transactions should be impersonal.

What does it mean to be intimate in a business setting? When I teach my course "The Trusted Partner" or work with service-delivering organizations in creating strategy around building trust with customers, no one hesitates a nanosecond in saying what intimacy consists of. Here are a few examples of what they say: to be intimate means one listens to others, empathizes with them, shows caring and support, and strives to know



Perspective on People

Richard McKnight

what their struggles really are. When pressed, people also say that it's intimate to say "No" at times when requests are

inappropriate or to confront someone in a kind way if their behavior is inappropriate.

Does your firm deliver services for a fee? If you're successful, you know what I'm talking about. You know that as you cultivate trust, your customers move closer to you and want to use you more. Is yours an internal staff organization that gets judged by what the line says about you? You know how frustrating it is to be treated like a cop and left out of key

decisions. If, instead, you want them to seek you out before they get into trouble, learn to cultivate trust. Trust-inducing behaviors are learnable and teachable and spell the difference between the good and the great.

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