

15 Traits of a Good Client Relationship

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First of all, I want to say that customers are excellent in my books and I am grateful for every single one of them through the years. When we are selling price to people we are vending. The win-win relationship for both parties is to have a client relationship as opposed to a customer relationship. Customers are price driven and look at your services and products as commodities that can be bought for the lowest bid. Having a client is far more beneficial, but it takes time and trust to be able to call a person one of your clients. The ultimate goal is to become a Partner.

I was reading some [notes](#) the other day based on Mack Hanan's book, *Consultative Selling, 7th edition: The Hanan Formula for High-Margin Sales at High Levels*. [Consultative selling](#) is a way of thinking that Mack Hanan started writing about and articulated in several books and within many companies in the Silicon Valley.

1. Cure Me - Get things done, respond to my needs. Produce results fast because I need more

Thought: I always thought this one was hard, it is only hard if you lead your Client to believe you can effect a change faster or more efficiently than you are actually able to produce. Once a trusting relationship is in place where both parties know what and when to expect results can you begin to make each other happy.

2. Talk my language - Speak to me in profit improvement language. Show me that you identify with me and that you know my business.

Thought: Don't bluff or fake, you'll mess up the entire relationship. Do read the industry literature, Blogs, email lists, websites, and be constantly on the lookout for every single profit improvement activity you can think of and anyone else in the business can think of. If we don't spend at least 25% of our day just thinking about profit improvement for our chosen industry, we are not taking the industry personally or seriously, we don't deserve to have Clients.

3. Don't surprise me - Install a control system so I can be comfortable. Let me share in evaluating our work together.

Thought: Communicate even over-communicate so your clients feel they are "in the know". [ERP](#) is specifically designed for to develop an accurate [data warehouse](#), put [KPI reports](#) in place, and generally include all the stakeholders in all the business.

4. Level with me - Tell it like it is. Criticize constructively. Tell me what's wrong, but let me know what's right, too.

Thought: A Vendor hesitates to deliver the Truth, especially when it might hurt the chances of making the sale. A Partner never fears the Truth but embraces it because a Client always deserves the Truth whether it is easy to swallow or if it is difficult.

5. Get into my business - Become a part of my team. Be around, ask questions. Don't be disruptive.

Thought: A Partner spends time at each other's offices; usually the larger Partner provides an workspace for their partners to work from. This fosters participation and true partnership.

6. Be reasonable - Give a premium value in return for your premium price; superior profit makes price justifiable.

Thought: Don't be greedy. The partner has welcomed you into the inner-sanctum of business and expects to pay more for your participation, but the increased amount will deliver value that wouldn't be forthcoming from a vendor to customer relationship.

7. Be competent - Give me the best you have. Be a real professional

Thought: Often this is you. You might be the CEO, President, or COO, but if you are serious about becoming a Partner then if you are the best in your company to provide services, then you are the chosen one.

8. Teach me - While you sell or perform, teach me how. Share your experience and expertise with me and my people.

Thought: This is easy to do if you have the proper tools in place. Keep writing up to date documentation and continuously offer free training by using tools like WebEx, GoToMeeting, or Unyte. You may be an expert in your field, but if you keep it to yourself you are not collaborating, sharing, or becoming a partner.

9. Take Leadership - Get out in front of my problems. Roll up your sleeves and get your hands dirty in my operations

Thought: If you take #5 seriously this will put you right into the thick of things. Particularly if you bring a system that permeates through the entire enterprise. There shouldn't be any task that is too small for a Partner to work on if it helps to make more profit in the resulting partnership.

10. Worry about me - Think hard about my problems. Let me know what you think even without me asking. Give me immediate access to you when I am worried; be available. Put my needs first.

Thought: You may have more than one Partner, but ever mention it to your Partner, unless these Partners can become Partners. If there is no potential for partnership between your clients, then don't even cross reference them. A true Partner has the other on his or her mind a high percentage of the day. A true Partner drops everything and focuses on the partnership if there is a worry or a problem. Partnership problems are #1 priorities.

11. Innovate - Give me something that's better than you give anyone else. Make me preeminent; make me stand out. Apply yourself in a way that transcends normal boundaries. Offer me options.

Thought: Being a true Partner is a lot like being a magician. To the general audience the magician would never give away the trick, but to the chosen few, the magician will reveal a few of the tricks in exchange for seeing some of their tricks. A true partnership has tricks, tips, proven processes, contacts, ideas, and patents that are shared, traded, and exchanged. This is how businesses can make extraordinary breakthroughs and this is how the phenomenon "Synergy" occurs.

12. Be faithful - Keep our business confidential. Make your relationship with me personal; don't pass me along to others.

Thought: This is something that some of us learn the hard way. Just because you make a sale doesn't mean your involvement is over and you pass the relationship off to someone else in the company. Before anyone else can work with a new partner (if it ever can happen) you have to be sure the Partner considers the new person part of the partnership and even wants to work with someone else other than you. The part about keeping business confidential just goes without saying and decent people shouldn't even have to sign a confidentiality agreement, but that is just good business and shouldn't be taken personally.

13. Be motivated - show desire to achieve our objectives. Be genuinely interested in my problems. Don't leave a single stoned unturned in looking for solutions.

Thought: Don't look for payment for each step of the way, sometimes you have to run down a dead end (on your own and at your own expense) to prove that you have looked at all the "perms and mutes". A true partnership shares in risk, solution investigation, and knowledge transfer. A true client will already be paying a bit more for your partnership, so they deserve a higher level of commitment and motivation.

14. Be flexible - Compromise with me once in a while but don't give in on what you know is vital.

Thought: This is much like #4 above. It is important to give and take on ideas and opinions, remember this is a true partnership with each party have a vote. But be careful that you don't give in on points that you are the expert and genuinely have the wherewithal.

15. Treat me like a person, not just a client - Treat me like an equal; deal with me one to one. Don't talk down to me. Throw in a few extras every now and then. Advice me on closely related matters even if you're not being paid for them.

Thought: Much like #13 this is an important relationship builder. If you are doing something for another colleague and it would benefit the partnership (and it doesn't cause a conflict of interest) by all means pass it along to the partnership and use it to build equity in the partnership. This is pretty much the **Golden Rule**, "do unto others as you would have others do unto you".

Thanks to Mack for his words of wisdom. After reading this I was profoundly influenced to try and be a better partner and try to find more Clients instead of simply looking for Customers.

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