



Inspiring Trust

Have you ever received business from a client who doesn't trust you? As you may have guessed, that is a rhetorical question. Nor is it likely that you've received a referral from anyone who isn't convinced that you're both a "super lawyer" and a stand up person. We know that clients hire lawyers that they trust will get a good outcome who also care about them. We also know that referral sources, whether inside your firm or external, put their own credibility and client relationship when they make a referral. Without trust, that's too big a leap of faith. So how can you encourage people to trust you, particularly those you haven't known long?

Negotiation is the answer. The good news is that you probably use these principles every day in your practice. Consciously applying negotiation principles in the context of business development, however, can make the process more efficient and effective. Here are negotiation "do's" that will position you for success:

- **Have a clear goal in mind.** If you don't know what you want, you can't get it. In any business development related conversation, a realistic expectation of a successful outcome is fundamental. What do you want the other person to say, do or decide? And, in situations that involve high stakes, sophisticated decision-making processes and multiple parties, a reasonable outcome may be nothing more than an agreement regarding "next steps". Expecting more in the short term may cause you to move too fast, which makes others uncomfortable. Rarely is business development "one and done"; be prepared to invest in the relationship.
- **Ask good questions.** Questioning is critical to gathering information about the person with whom you want to establish trust. Your questions, however, must have a purpose and reflect the fact that you've given thought to the situation. You'll want to pose questions that help people think about the issues differently or even to consider new things. Doing so will enhance your credibility. But those questions are not enough. Asking other questions that reflect you care about his/her personal concerns contribute to emotional rapport.
- **Listen to the answers you get.** Don't use the time when the other person is responding to your question to plan your next question or statement. Really listen to what the other person says and take your time before responding. There is no action you can take that does more to build trust than being completely present in the moment.
- **Anticipate challenges.** Most of the time you can anticipate—and should welcome—objections. You are way ahead when people are open with you about objections they have to your "ask". Don't try to shut them down; unanswered concerns thwart agreements. The opportunity to deal with these issues in a collaborative way builds understanding and deepens the connection.
- **Make your value visible.** Don't assume people will automatically understand how much value you bring to the table. It may be that your expertise was essential to a good outcome in a similar matter. Yet, unless they know that you have that relevant experience, that your strategy worked and that your skills were a differentiator, no further trust develops. Get comfortable with the idea that you have to let people know about your relevant accomplishments. The challenge is to find a way that assures the client or referral source that you know what to do and how to do it without being obnoxious. One way to do that is to have someone else do your "bragging" for you. Another is to say what you did without modifiers; let the facts speak for themselves.

There's also a negotiation "don't" that can seriously impede business development success — overinvesting in a relationship. If you have been doing all the heavy lifting for a reasonable time period and don't get signals that your efforts will be rewarded, it's probably time to move on.

Relationships thrive when you negotiate to build trust. And who doesn't want more business development success with less stress?

*This week's guest contributor is Carol Frohlinger, J.D., cofounder of Negotiating Women, Inc., an advisory firm which helps organizations leverage the talent of women in leadership. The firm's **Just Add Women® Initiative Toolkit Series** provides practical content for law firms' women's initiatives. Coauthor of **Her Place at the Table: A Woman's Guide to Five Key Challenges to Leadership Success**, Carol is a well-known speaker on how women can negotiate with authenticity to achieve their maximum personal and professional potential.*