

*The Fluent Blade
Cuts Cleanly*

Tao of the Zentropist

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF BLACK ROCK CONSULTING



BUSINESS RELATIONSHIPS

Finding Meaning Amid Complacency

Business relationships, like personal and romantic ones, are fundamental to our lives, whether we are freelancers or employees. While all of these relationships share certain commonalities, and all require constant nurturing, a key differentiator for those focused on business is “financial consideration,” otherwise known as “money.”

The undeniable and unassailable truth is that money does indeed, “change everything” and failure to acknowledge and respect this fact can lead to disastrous results in business alliances and partnerships. Disputes over money can destroy friendships and marriages, so it is certainly understandable that in any form of business relationship, sensitivity towards one’s economic future, cash flow or viability as a going concern is quite high.

“5 Critical Factors”

It is my belief that there are 5 critical factors that can go a long way in helping to identify, form and cultivate over the long term business relationships which deliver real value and substance. If any of these are missing, it is unlikely that the alliance or partnership will survive

over time, much less deliver mutual satisfaction or return on the investment of time, energy and possibly even capital.

The 5 Critical Factors for building meaningful business relationships include:

- **Open Communication**
- **Trust**
- **Synergy**
- **Aligned Ethics & Values**
- **Reciprocity**

These are all inter-related and inter-dependent, so don’t lose sight of this.

“Open Communication.” It is vitally important to set expectations early and to be frank and forthcoming about what the parties each bring to the table, and how they might positively influence each other. It is understood that businesses exist to earn money (ideally to generate profits in the “for profit” world) and are always seeking a return greater than the investment of resources or time.

“Trust.” Trust can take a long time to build, yet can be destroyed in an instant. You cannot have a meaningful relationship with a person or entity that you simply do not trust. At best you may have an “understanding” or “relationship of convenience,” but such

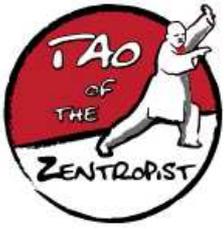
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“Far too many people and organizations pay lip service to ethical behavior or claim to embrace certain values, and then betray this in their actions. A prospective or existing business partner that is willing to cheat [a customer] is unlikely to treat your business any differently.”

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constructs are fleeting. To paraphrase Ronald Reagan, “Be willing to trust, but verify.”

“*Synergy.*” Situations in which two or more entities mutually cooperate in order to achieve an advantageous outcome can be described as synergistic. Every business should look at initiatives and actions in one of two ways: is this something that makes money or saves money? For a partnership to work, it must have a clear answer, and if you are mutually prospecting and closing prospective customers, your joint offering must be perceived this way by the would-be buyer.

“*Aligned Ethics and Values.*” As with oil and water, inconsistencies in theory and especially in the practice of ethics simply do not mix. Far too many people and organizations pay lip service to ethical behavior or claim to embrace certain values, and then betray this in their actions. A prospective or existing business partner that is willing to cheat or short change a customer, or to misrepresent their capabilities and accomplishments, is unlikely to treat your business any differently. Think on this and remember, trust matters.

“*Reciprocity.*” All relationships are either symmetrical or asymmetrical. In other words, the balance of power and capabilities in a bi-lateral arrangement are either evenly distributed between the parties or weighed in favor of one party. However the scales balance out, it is important that each party ask itself, “How can I bring value to this relationship and benefit the other

party?” In doing so, each is building “equity” in the relationship and if the other party is honorable, trustworthy and committed, both will be either directly or indirectly enriched either in the present or future. For reciprocity to work, however, the other four factors must be present; if they are not, it is unlikely that good faith efforts will be rewarded and the relationship cannot be defined as “meaningful.”

Keeping it Real

In this difficult present economy, a lot of individuals and businesses are discovering, sometimes belatedly, just how important relationship-building (i.e. “networking”) is. As the adage states, “The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The next best time is now.” If you are new to navigating these waters, be genuine and sincere. Those who are self-serving will quickly find their efforts rebuffed. If you wish to be successful, you need to invest very real time and energy into the process, not expect immediate results, and honestly care about the outcome. To read the original blog post which inspired this edition of the newsletter, [click here](#).

For Additional Information:

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