

Cultivating Relationships

Some are good at it, some not so good, some enjoy it, and some hate it. *Is it really that necessary?* More often than not, when working with my clients, 'business relationships' comes up as a relevant area for their performance improvement.

Cultivating relationships, both within and outside the organisation, is important for staff at all levels. The benefits include many, for example:

- Being a better leader / manager / team member
- Improving one's capabilities as a knowledge worker
- Achieving successful project outcomes
- Enhancing learning and development
- Contributing to problem solving, innovation, creativity
- and, building collaborative workplaces

In "The Social Side of Performance" the authors (Cross, Davenport, and Cantrell) discuss how high performers maintain and leverage their networks. This is not just a social butterfly exercise, it's about building deeper relationships that are mutually beneficial. The authors found three common 'tactics':

1. More than just business: contacts are also personal in that they connect at some social level e.g. a shared hobby, similar backgrounds.
2. Follow through: high performers make time and the effort to respond quickly and to keep their commitments. Important relationships are those you can rely on.
3. Actively Reciprocate: it's a two-way street; share knowledge, don't hoard, but "...I don't think of it as a favour 'bank' in which knowledge is exchanged tit for tat".

See end for a reference to the full article.

What You Can Do: Tips for Cultivating Relationships

Here are just a few simple ideas to get you (or your staff) started.

- * Discuss with your team what relationships are required to support your work, and how you each plan to cultivate them
- * Tap into, or create new, Communities of Practice = groups of people coming together to share and learn from each other; held together by a common interest; they share insights, experiences, tools, better practice
- * Include external contacts in your Communities of Practice
- * The personal touch: spend time in meetings getting to know people – who they are, how they feel, their backgrounds
- * Join industry associations, management organisations, networking or other interest groups
- * Think broadly – develop relationships with suppliers, research institutes, customers, competitors, alumni
- * When attending courses and conferences, get to know new people
- * Share your contacts with your colleagues, organise events/functions that will assist social and business contact
- * Maintain active contact with staff who are seconded out to other Depts/Agencies/Organisations
- * In your staff database, include (privacy permitting) social interests and hobbies
- * Make it a habit to be responsive and reliable
- * Think of ways to share information with your relationship base
- * Use incentives to reward your teams and staff for good relationship management skills
- * Hire people who are likely to develop or bring in their networks

Relevant Quotes

Here are excerpts from just a few of many articles that comment on relationships.

"The first secret of effectiveness is to understand the people you work with and depend on so that you can make use of their strengths, their ways of working, and their values. Working relationships are as much based on the people as they are on the work". (Peter Drucker)

"Taking responsibility for relationships is therefore an absolute necessity. It is a duty." (Peter Drucker)

"A true collaborative mind-set does not involve managing people so much as the relationships among people, in teams and projects as well as across divisions and alliances" (Jonathan Gosling and Henry Mintzberg)

"Knowledge is embodied in people gathered in communities and networks. The road to knowledge is via people, conversations, connections and relationships. Knowledge surfaces through dialog, all knowledge is socially mediated and access to knowledge is by connecting to people they know or know who to contact." (unknown source)

" 'These leaders integrate listening and talking at a very high level,' says Harvey Seifter, a collaboration expert and former executive director of the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. 'They listen carefully because they respect the specialized knowledge others have, and they're eager to integrate the best ideas into the product.' In other words, it's in their interest to foster open, trusting relationships." (Russ Linden)

"Our research located 15 significant factors that differentiated excellent workplaces from the generally good workplaces around the country [Australia]....we concluded that quality working relationships represent the central pivot on which excellent workplaces are founded. Quality of working relationships = people relating to each other as friends, colleagues, and co-workers. Supporting each other and helping to get the job done." (Darryl Hull and Vivienne Read)

"When leaders learn to understand and work with relationships on the level of feeling, intuition, mind and spirit, what appears to unfold are miracles." (Margot Cairnes)

Sources

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(*) Cross, R., Davenport, T.H., and Cantrell S., 2003, '**The Social Side of Performance**', *MIT Sloan Management Review*, Vol 45, no.1

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Gosling, J. and Mintzberg, H., "**The Five Minds of a Manager**", *The Weekend Australian Financial Review*, Dec 31, 2003 - Jan 4, 2004

Hull, D, and Read, V., 2003 "**Simply the Best Workplaces in Australia**" Working paper 88, University of Sydney, Dec 2003, www.acirrt.com

Linden, R., 2003, '**The Discipline of Collaboration**' *Leader to Leader*, No. 29

About This Article

My aim is to provide you with information to assist you at work, with your own development, and in developing your staff. The theme for 2004 is 'Building Collaborative Workplaces'. Each month I concentrate on an area based on topics raised by my clients. Material is drawn from journals, books, articles and shared experiences.

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