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DEVELOPMENT COUNSEL

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contents

Building trust

Trust is crucial to the effectiveness and longevity of relationships between expert professional advisers and quality clients. Because trust depends on:

- reliability;
- acceptance and empathy; and
- openness and authenticity,

it is rarely 'instant', and generally builds over time.

Being trustworthy is the foundation of trust.

Reliability builds trust

Because your clients aren't God and can't read your soul, they have to rely on what you say and do to work out whether you're worthy of their trust. Do you do the following things?

- Do what you say you'll do?
- Take action within agreed timeframes?
- Consistently meet deadlines?
- Keep commitments you've made?
- Habitually follow through to check that things have gone well?
- Deliver the solutions you offered, promised or led clients to believe you could deliver?

The right answer to each of these questions is 'yes'.

Check that you're consistently behaving in these ways to build trust with your valued clients.

Acceptance and empathy build trust

For an expert professional, it's often easy to see the foolishness and errors which have disadvantaged a client or led to their awful predicament which you're now about to set right.

Strengthening trust with clients may be undermined by:

- being unduly critical;
- attacking their selection of previous advisers;
- not taking time to hear them out; and
- not understanding their priorities and concerns.

Communicate your acceptance and empathy by:

- respecting your client's point of view;
- exploring the impact of the situation on them;
- reassuring them of your genuine concern and ability to assist;

- avoiding any temptation to remind the client that you wouldn't have let the situation develop if consulted earlier; and
- emphasising your willingness to help.

This way, you won't create the impression that you think your client is foolish or inferior, and you will clear the way to build strong trust as your willingness to help is put into action.

Authenticity and frankness build trust

Humans have well developed 'crap detectors': some have remarkable capacities to work out who's on the level, who's not being completely frank or straightforward, and who's not telling them the whole story.

Strong client relationships depend on the trust that develops in an open, frank and truly authentic dynamic.

This goes well beyond mere technical honesty, and may at times call for the courage and gumption to speak fiercely.

As an expert professional, you can go a long way to building trust and truly serving your client by:

- saying what you really think and believe;
- when necessary, giving the bad news clearly and unmistakably — not hiding unpleasant facts, issues or possibilities;
- telling your client when they're wrong;
- admitting when you've made an error, got it wrong or even changed your mind; and
- being clear about your limitations.

Showing the authentic, real you to your client is not to be feared or avoided — you'll be far more believable and trustworthy when you

show that you're absolutely straightforward and don't shy away from bad news.

Reinforce trust

Trust is absolutely key to successful and enduring client relationships — it grows from a dynamic and complex interplay of:

- reliability;
- acceptance and empathy;
- openness and authenticity; and
- clear communication and fierce speaking.

How you put all these ingredients together determines the extent and quality of trust you establish with your clients.

Every so often, take stock. Evaluate your trustworthiness based on these dimensions:

- you say what you believe;
- you tell clients the truth — the real story;
- what you say is what you do;
- you follow through on your offers, commitments and promises;
- you are tactful and kind to clients, but never shy away from telling it like it is and giving clients bad news;
- you do not avoid conflicts or smooth things over only eventually to have it all catch up; and
- you advise your client as you would expect and hope to be advised if the tables were turned.

Lasting, productive professional relationships are built on trust.

To earn trust, above all, be trustworthy. ●



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