

STRATEGY



Get to 100-percent return on your business relationships

Text by Rita B. Allen

You could certainly plan and function more effectively if you had a crystal ball that would tell you what's on the horizon over the next six months, 12 months and beyond.

The reality is, no one has a crystal ball.

The magic, instead, lies in your ability to focus your business, whatever discipline you may be in, on the tried-and-true basics of building solid and long-lasting relationships.

Building relationships with your clients, customers, employees, colleagues, managers, teammates and all other appropriate stakeholders is the core competency required in business today. You need strategies to do so in a proactive, strategic and deliberate manner.

The key is to create your own formula that works for you and fits your style, approach and needs. The formula is made up of the following.

Planning - 30%

Include an even mix of strategy, execution, accountability and discipline. Create your "formula" and stick to it. Here are the steps required in the planning process.

Self awareness. Be ready and able to articulate your personal brand, value-add, differentiating factors, goals and aspirations. Know yourself well - your strengths, interests, limitations, values and priorities. Empower yourself with this knowledge and exhibit the confi-

dence of a self-directed, focused and purposeful business professional and/or owner.

Business plan. Do your homework and due diligence, define your business strategy and set goals and objectives. Allow for flexibility and learning to evolve; revisit and adjust regularly as necessary.

Identify your key contacts. Create your VIP list of existing clients and contacts, hot prospects and other relevant sources of leads and information.

Create a database. Maintain, update and enhance regularly this list of your key contacts. Select a tool that also has a tickler system to assist with follow-up and ongoing contact management.

Develop your annual marketing plan. Be specific, targeted, realistic yet creative. Plan for monthly, quarterly, semi-annual and annual activities. Stay true to it - follow up and be accountable!

Sincerity - 20%

Keep it real - be authentic and genuine.

Get to know your contacts. What are your commonalities, similarities and differences? Reveal yourself. Find shared interests as well as ways to complement and balance one another. Initiate ways to assist each other in addressing needs, concerns and challenges. Be a resource.

Listen actively. Engage in dialogic communications. Show genuine interest in helping rather than trying to sell

your services. Start a two-way conversation and keep it going. Listening more than speaking always leads to attentive comprehension and effective consulting results.

Offer your time, expertise. Extend yourself, your knowledge and your contacts as appropriate. Offer to help in a variety of ways without asking for anything in return. Act in ways that truly exhibit your passion and values. Exercise the Golden Rule, common courtesy and professional etiquette.

Outreach/visibility - 20%

Every portion of each day should include communications of one kind with key contacts.

Maintain contact. Stay in regular touch with key contacts via e-mail, telephone and in-person meetings. Be deliberate and planned with your efforts, including specific timelines, activities and follow-up. Send notes, book information, articles, links. Make lunch/coffee dates, initiate introductions to others, etc. Follow up in a deliberate and systematic fashion.

Be 'in play.' Maintain your visibility in the marketplace. Attend professional association meetings, dinners and events. Stay current on the market and industry trends. Be well read and educated. Keep your name out there - write articles, conduct workshops and speaker presentations, be quoted in newspapers and trade journals. Network, network, network!

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Execute marketing strategies. Craft and execute well-defined marketing strategies in a disciplined and methodical way. Identify a plan that is suited for your style and approach – and stay true to it. Find ways to give back to your profession and community.

Credibility - 15%

Follow through. Deliver what you promise in a timely and consistent manner.

Focus on quality. Reach out to mentors and advisors regularly. Stay grounded and humble. Don't stray from

your mission and vision, yet stay open to new opportunities and improvements.

Build a solid reputation. Stay true to your mission. Market yourself and your accomplishments regularly. Advocate for yourself. Don't be afraid to promote your value-add. Establish yourself as a subject matter expert and reputable advisor. Tell your stories of success, give client testimonials and quotes.

Patience/resilience - 15%

This is a long-term process that can't be rushed.

Long-term mindset. Don't expect immediate gratification. Have a formula and stick to it. Gain momentum and never stop. Relationship building is a long-term process to be viewed as laying a foundation and planting seeds for future growth and success.

Acknowledge, celebrate victories. Stay positive and optimistic. Once you reap the rewards and see benefits achieved, it all makes sense and you will be a believer in the process.

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