



11 Principles of Maintaining Client Trust: The Key to Long-Term Success

By Bill Bachrach, CSP, CPAE



As you know, without trust nothing else matters. I'm sure you know what it's like when a client trusts you. Have you had the experience of working over time to earn someone's trust and enjoyed the benefits building trust can bring? It's a great feeling, isn't it? One the other hand,

you may have had the experience of not creating trust quickly enough with certain prospects. It's not a good feeling to be trustworthy, but unable to create that belief in the eyes of the prospect. With trust, establishing relationships with the right clients seems almost effortless. Without trust, it's an uphill battle. A battle that can't be won with experience, knowledge or even credentials. Remember, without trust nothing else matters.

The following 12 Principles have been developed to crystallize the actions that build and maintain trust with your clients. If you are reading one of these ideas and think "I know that" let that thought trigger the more profitable thought, "Am I doing that?" You always achieve greater levels of success doing what you know, not just knowing it.

1) Trust is a function of understanding. By using your client's values you obtained in my "What's Important About ___ To You?" process periodically, you maintain a high-level of trust and understanding. As you discovered, the more you understand your client and what he/she is about the more trust you will build. What used to take you 'a long time' to build trust, now is begun much quicker. You want to continue that type of a relationship with your prospects.

2) Often the shortest path to a trusting relationship crosses through some feelings of discomfort. We trust people who help us discover the truth even if it is uncomfortable. This can be difficult to accept for many salespeople because our goal has always been to make people feel comfortable. It's a new perspective to realize people will trust you more when they become comfortable being sometimes uncomfortable when they are with you. The truth isn't always pleasant. A good example is life insurance. When people think of life insurance, they naturally think of their own mortality which sometimes creates discomfort. You can help them get past their discomfort and move toward decisions that will benefit their family and make them

feel good. Help people recognize the truth, be willing to deal with their discomfort and they will trust you. Don't confuse discomfort with negative emotions.

3) We demonstrate our trustworthiness based on our ability to ask good questions and our willingness to listen. The flip side of this principal is that trust is not based on being told about individual credentials or company accomplishments. As we discussed earlier, if you begin your relationships by talking about your personal credentials and how great your company is, you probably have a client who nods on the outside and thinks "Who cares?" on the inside. Ask good questions, shut up, and listen. Avoid listening for a need that you can fill with one of your products. Listen to truly understand your client. People will perceive you as knowledgeable, credible and trustworthy based on the quality of your questions and how you listen, not by your statements.

There was an agent who went into an interview with a prospect who set the stage perfectly and waited for the prospect to complete going up the values staircase on the Financial Road Map®. After the agent completed the first three questions of the interview, the prospect said, I can tell you are the kind of person I would like to do business with because of the kind of questions you ask. This prospect has a \$25 million business and doesn't have any insurance or related products. The prospect sent the agent a thank you note for the time they spent together and said he was looking forward to working with him. How many of your prospects and/or clients send you thank you notes for the time you spend with them. What types of questions are you asking?

4) True professionals ask tough, thought-provoking questions. The kind of questions nobody else ever asks. The first thing the Doctor asks is, "Where does it hurt?" Then he touches you right where you just told him it hurts! You may not enjoy the pain, but you respect the fact that he gets to what you care about quickly. One of the very successful Financial Professionals I know asks, "How's your marriage?" The responses can be very interesting and, yes, some people challenge the relevance of this question. This is how he responds, "The question is completely relevant for two reasons: 1) There can be absolutely no secrets between you and your financial advisor because every nuance can make a difference in my advice. 2) If your marriage is tenuous, it can dramatically effect the plan I propose

and the investments I recommend." He's right on both counts, isn't he? He says that after he asks this question and gets the answer, all the other questions seem easy and the clients open up. Ask tough, thought-provoking questions and more people will trust and respect you. This is important to building long-term client relationships.

5) We trust people who make us think. People trust financial professionals who force them to think about the most important issues in their lives and the relationship of money to those issues. The biggest reason most people never achieve the important financial events in their lives is because nobody really helps them think about them. In 1952 Dr. Albert Schweitzer won the Nobel Peace Prize and he was asked, "what's wrong with men today?" Schweitzer replied, "Men don't think." Forty years later, the only difference is that today's fast pace environment leaves us less time to think than ever. Help people think and they will trust you. In our busy schedules, many of us don't take the time to sit down and think about what is important to us. By helping your clients to take the time to think, they will appreciate you even more.

6) We trust people who are accurate. People who are extremely good prospects and clients but are difficult to reach, consistently tell me the best way to reach them is by accurately identifying an issue which is important to them. Several years ago, I did some research on this issue. I managed to get appointments with some of the most influential and difficult to reach people in my city. I asked them all one question, "What does it take for a complete stranger to get an appointment with you?" They will then tell you what it takes. This strategy creates the trust necessary to get the appointment, but not necessarily enough trust to cement relationships. That's your next step. Use research to build trust through accuracy. Maintain it the same way.

7) Trust is an emotion. Aristotle said, "No appeal to logic is ever as successful as an appeal to emotion." We trust people who create an emotional bond between us. With all the great products and services available, it is easy to go back to making features and benefits presentations. Think about the feelings people need to have in order to do business with you in the beginning and continue to do so over time. Ask questions that create feelings of trust, curiosity, openness, and decisiveness. First create the emotions, then give the features and benefits. This is important for maintaining clients with the amount of advisors out there trying to take your business away from you. Paul Parker once said, "You can handle people more successfully by enlisting their feelings than by convincing their reason." Don't try to solve an emotional issue with a logical process. Create the emotional bond of trust.

8) We trust people who believe in their recommendations enough to express themselves with conviction. You will have to do this throughout your relationship with your client. True professionals tell people what to do. You may even have to 'slap them around' to get them to do the things they agreed to do. A friend of mine was quoted as saying this when his clients attained their savings goal and then wanted to reward themselves by spending the money on a trip for the family. You are the knowledgeable professional. When you act like it, more people will trust you.

9) We trust people who "speak our language." Everyone has a different "Buying Strategy" or way they prefer to have information presented to them. For example, some people respond to the opinion of outside experts and some people could care less what the 'experts' think. Do you have the flexibility to present differently to different people? Is your presentation designed to make your client comfortable or to make you comfortable? More people will trust you if you "talk the way they buy."

10) We trust people who do what they say they are going to do. Rule #1: Eliminate low pay-off commitments. Rule #2: Once made, follow through on even the smallest commitments. Do what you said you would do, before you said you would do it, and people will trust you. People are impressed when you do this because there are so many people today that over commit or have no intentions of doing what they say because they think the client will forget you said you were going to do something for them.

11) We trust people who care. Only people who care about the client will develop the necessary skills to do the things mentioned here. Unfortunately, it's a very small percentage of people who become truly competent at building trust and who are willing to invest time and money in their trust-building skills. Fortunately for these special people, the payoff in both financial rewards and career satisfaction is very handsome. Build more trust by demonstrating that you truly care about your clients. Wouldn't it be great if we could walk up to prospects and clients and say "I care" and have them believe you? We all know that it doesn't work that way. We have to do the things mentioned to demonstrate that we care. If you really don't care, these steps won't help you.

With all this information about trust why don't more people develop trust-building skills? One reason is we assume people should figure out for themselves that we are trustworthy. Intellectually, we know this is ludicrous. But there is something emotional that keeps us from building trust on purpose. It doesn't end with building trust in their first five minutes of an interview. We must do the steps necessary to

maintain our relationships - the key to long-term success.

Emerson wrote, "What you do shouts so loudly in my ears I can't hear a word you are saying." What are you doing to demonstrate that you really care? Are you truly client-driven or are you just giving lip service to one of the latest buzzwords? Do you have a deliberate strategy for creating an emotional bond of trust between you and your clients or does trust just seem to happen by accident if it happens at all?

Consider each principal and answer the questions posed. Take the action necessary to be a master at not only building trust but also maintaining it. You will find yourself achieving greater and greater levels of success with less and less effort. After all, if trust is so important shouldn't we invest more time learning how to build and maintain it.

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