

Chicago Daily Law Bulletin®

Volume 161, No. 85

Developing long-term trust with clients can be powerful

Trust. It is the bedrock of all deep, long-lasting relationships. When we successfully cultivate trust, it is very powerful and we can move mountains. But trust is tricky.

While it may take years of painstaking effort to build trust, it is also ephemeral and can disappear in a matter of seconds. When there's doubt, feelings of vulnerability creep in and can cause cracks in the foundation of what has otherwise been a fruitful partnership. Doubt sets in when trust is lacking.

We all know that trust is key with clients. While these relationships may be a bit more arm's-length than with friends and family, we do ourselves a great disservice if we forget that the basic rules of healthy personal relationships also apply to clients.

So how do we cultivate trust with our clients and keep it alive? There are a number of important ingredients to ensure that these relationships are built with a solid foundation and will succeed over the long run.

1. Look to the long term rather than the short term.

There is no way around it — it can take a long time to build a trusting, open dynamic with a client. Some are more trusting than others, and it may take a while to get there. If you push too hard too quickly, you may appear disingenuous and self-serving and ruin your relationship.

2. Be authentic.

It is all about communicating often and being truthful in what you say and do. You must say what you mean and mean what you say.

Through a demonstrated track record of honesty and transparency, clients will know that they can

count on you.

3. Listen before speaking and hear what they are saying.

We all need to do a lot less talking and a lot more listening. There is no other way to learn how our clients tick, what is important to them and what keeps them up at night.

We must also focus on what they are saying — even if they are not saying a word — so that we can figure out the best way to earn their confidence and garner their trust.

4. Respect confidences and act with integrity.

When we reach a point where our clients are sharing confidences with us, they believe we have integrity and are trustworthy.

We must be respectful of their wishes, be discreet and act in a manner which demonstrates that we are worthy of their trust. There is nothing more destructive than divulging confidential information that has been carefully entrusted to us.

5. Be resourceful and a strong problem-solver.

An important part of cultivating a client's trust is demonstrating

By establishing a successful track record of being there through the tough times, clients will trust us implicitly.

that they can count on us to come up with creative solutions to their most difficult issues.

Clients do not hire us to solve their easy problems — they can do that on their own. Rather, they call us when the chips are down and they cannot figure a way out.

PARADIGM SHIFT



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6. Consistently deliver excellence.

Another key way to develop trust with clients is by being dependable and consistently bringing our "A" game. Clients rely on our ability to consistently perform, regardless of whether we are having a good or bad day. They don't want excuses.

If for some reason we are not at our best, we should be self-aware enough to recognize it and consider other options such as involving a colleague in the matter who will be able to deliver what the client needs when we cannot.

7. Be realistic.

Clients hire us to give them the benefit of our experience. While they always hope for the best, it is our responsibility to provide them

with our honest, realistic feedback in a particular situation.

We build trust if our assessments tend to align with how things turn out. If we are overly optimistic and do not adequately prepare clients for what could happen, we diminish our trustworthiness.

8. Do the right thing, even when it is hard.

This can play out in a variety of ways. For example, we may be given the opportunity to pitch for new work and get asked by our client whether we can handle it on our own, when we know it is outside our comfort zone.

Or we may be asked about the credentials of a competitor who is a fine attorney, but we fear we may lose the business if we speak honestly. We are always better off telling the truth and maintaining our credibility with clients than acting in our own self interest, which generally backfire over time.

9. Be selfless.

There is a certain level of selflessness that goes into developing a trusting relationship. When we consistently demonstrate that we are putting the needs of others before our own, we show that we have a level of wisdom and judgment that clients can rely on.

They will trust that we will act in their best interest and will want us to help them navigate through whatever issues they may be wrestling with at the moment.

10. Be positive.

When we conduct ourselves from a happy place and consistently drive for the most positive outcome, we inspire a level of confidence in clients that will draw them to us.

While it may not always work out, they will walk away believing that we tried our best and will have enough faith to come back to us again in the future.