

Trust. It's a beautiful thing.

By Barbara Burke, September 21st, 2009.

“Aha! #14
Give a little.
Get a lot.”

Last week I had the pleasure to present at the Annual Allconnect Partners Summit held at the posh Chateau Elan Resort outside Atlanta. Of the countless conferences I've participated in over the past 18 years, I have to say that this one was one of the best.

Allconnect took a radical and risky approach that really paid off.

Vendors invite their top clients to their annual users conference to strengthen their relationship with their key clients and customers. The majority of these conferences typically focus on telling customers how wonderful their service or product is and how even more wonderful it will be next year. This is usually a one-sided conversation in which the vendor does most of the talking.

This year Allconnect decided to try a very different approach. In reviewing the past year, management admitted when they dropped the ball and what they learned from the experience. Throughout the conference I observed management and staff actively soliciting suggestions and ideas from their clients about what they could improve upon or do differently. I thought it was brilliant. Instead of a monologue full of the usual self-serving fluff, what I saw was an earnest and honest exchange of ideas between all the participants. The client companies came away with a greater understanding and appreciation of Allconnect's business. But most important, what both parties gained from the experience was an increase in Trust.



On the flight home last Thursday I made a list of some of the long-term benefits that come from vendors and clients engaging in such honest, constructive dialogue.

1. Honesty breeds Trust.
 - > Clients have more confidence in a vendor who responds quickly to their problem. They are also more willing to bring up small problems when they arise instead of waiting until they become big, expensive problems.
2. Trust builds capital that can be accessed when things go wrong.
 - > When there is a misstep or broken link a client who trusts their vendor will be more patient and tolerant – and may even offer ideas that will solve the problem.
3. Trust creates loyalty.
 - > Even when a vendor's service or product costs more than the competition, the client having forged a trust relationship is less likely to jump to a competitor with a sweet offer.
4. Trust makes it more likely that clients will try something new when it is proposed.
 - > When a client is happy with their vendor they are more open to buying additional products and services.
5. Trust transforms the relationship.
 - > Instead of being on opposite sides, the vendor and the client become partners.
6. Partnerships generate innovative solutions.
 - > Partners share ideas with each other and come up with new ways to utilize the vendor's product or service to solve business problems.
7. When there is greater alignment between the vendors services and products and the needs of the client, all parties benefit.
 - > When the operation runs more smoothly and focuses on continuous improvement, everyone wins. Tru

I applaud the management team at Allconnect for taking the risk to be honest and open with its clients. Trust. It's a beautiful thing.