



October 14th, 2020

Continuous Learning

PART 3: VENDORS & PARTNERS

Written by: Kirk Hoaglund, Chief Executive Officer

Growing and improving as a company means having dedication to continuous learning - learning how to be a better community member, employer, and service provider. Some of that comes from active research, formal training, and other educational resources. Perhaps more of it comes from other sources. In my first post on this topic, I wrote about "Clients". In Part 2 "Employees". Here, in Part 3, "Vendors and Partners".

I've met leaders who treat their vendors as sort of second-class citizens: they are getting paid to work, they should work. I think that is a mistake. I believe you should genuinely care about their successes. If you need their services, then you need them to stick around. There is also a very good chance that some of their experiences are different from yours. They likely can bring along insights that will help your company improve. Listen to them.

Make this planned and purposeful by asking them for their feedback on you as a customer. Ask them about how they've

handled difficult clients or tough business change. Listen to what they are saying about:

- **How they are treated by your company.** One of my favorite quotes is "How you do anything is how you do everything." Treating employees, clients, peers AND VENDORS with respect is an important part of running a successful venture. Ask your vendors and partners how they are treated by your staff. Ask the harder question of how they've been treated by you. You might find some great lessons in their answers.
- **Their customers' unmet needs.** They have lots of customers. Depending on how specialized their services are, those other customers might be similar to you. Or, those other customers might need just the kind of help that your firm offers. Either way, this is a fascinating discussion.
- **Their approach to calming a difficult customer**

exchange. Maybe they've even had to calm you down (see my first bullet). When a job is important, emotions can run high. When a job is complex, errors will happen. There is always room in your bag of tricks for ways of dealing with a hot situation, cooling it down, making the fix, and keeping the client. Most businesses have a story or two that will provide new insight for the next time you are on the hot seat.

- **Things they do to wow their customers.** I participated in a small business seminar, now years ago. The presenters asked us to complete this sentence "Happy customers ____". They shocked the crowd by filling in "LEAVE". "Happy customers leave." Maybe it is because you've fallen into a little complacency or maybe someone else created a new 'Wow Factor'. You need to keep thinking about ways to wow your clients. Think about ways your favorite vendors wow you? Ask them how they do the same for other clients.

Continuous learning is more effective when is it done explicitly with attention and care. You have vendors and partners that can bring new ideas and new perspectives. Make the ask.

CONTACT US

