

That Partnership Feeling

**By
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Business Partnership has been the Holy Grail for finance professionals since the beginnings of this century. While teaching at the University of Chicago prior to World War I, J. O. McKinsey wrote about the importance of this role in his first books on budgeting. As part of its decentralization in the early 1920s, Du Pont developed many of the financial concepts used to measure performance. Not least, General Electric inaugurated its training curriculum for the finance staff in 1925.

The importance of Business Partnership persists. Many of the administrative-improvement initiatives launched in the 1980s and 1990s specified that one goal was to increase the time and attention the finance organization devoted to the business. They saw the need for finance to help the line grow revenues, improve operations, and address e-commerce.

Looking back, what strikes you is the realization that “business partnership” has been largely about analytic tools, measurement practices, diagnostic frameworks, and planning, budgeting, and decision-making processes. In other words, the profession has emphasized the development of the intellectual content and process methodology that are needed to master the partnership role.

But where is the emphasis on the human dimension – the soft side of being a business partner?

Everyone “knows it” when they see a business partner adeptly navigate an emotionally stormy issue; and competency models describe requisite behaviors extremely well; yet people have a hard

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time articulating the underlying capacities of people who perform the role with ease.

Most often, line managers and peers attribute such easy mastery to good chemistry or a special knack – “He’s a good people person.”

There’s some truth to these assertions because what is essential to the business-partner role is so often invisible to the eye. It is the feelings that come from inside, feelings that go beyond the spoken word to create the right action for the particular moment, no matter how challenging that moment may be.

Consider the commonplace words used to define good business partners and how easily they evoke deeper feelings:

- **Respect** – the feeling of appreciation or esteem that comes from treating others the way that you wish to be treated yourself;
- **Trust** – the feeling of warmth and reliance that stems from knowing that you will never deliberately do harm to others;
- **Faith** – the sense of certainty or assurance that comes from knowing something is true even though you cannot prove it;
- **Hope** – the courage to face the unknown because you know that possibilities exist beyond your personal knowledge and experience; and
- **Service** – the sense of gratitude and love that comes from helping others achieve their dreams and grow as human beings in the process.

It is the feelings, not the words, that are the salient point once you realize that your behavior flows invisibly from your inner emotional state. Another way of saying this is that your actions are a

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manifestation of your state of mind. This is a matter of simple logic. It is something every child shows and that each of us knows.

For example, when you are angry, it is hard not to be critical of co-workers; when you are worried, it is hard not to be distracted by what others are saying; when you are joyful it is hard not to be happy, even in the face of adversity.

So, if a business partner's thoughts of faith are generating an inner sense of wellbeing, is it likely that he or she will become so anxious as to suffer "analysis paralysis"? What conflict cannot be resolved by a business partner whose actions are based on the warmth that flows from an inner sense of trust? If the business partner and the client are both respectful and reverent about their mutual wellbeing, are they likely to be overwhelmed by feeling of stress or busyness? How can worry get a foothold if one is being hopeful and feeling confident about the future? And how can selfishness and egocentrism gain traction where love inspires a natural humility and a desire to help others succeed?

Reflect on these words. Don't you see how just reading about these deeper feelings has a calming effect on your state of mind? Haven't your thoughts become more tranquil? Isn't that inner voice giving you insight into what this essay is pointing towards? Doesn't your common sense and inner intelligence seem more accessible?

Unlocking the mystery of becoming a good business partner is as simple as seeing that whenever profound feelings are present, you have unfettered access to wisdom -- unfettered because your mind is not cluttered by busy thoughts, paralyzed by fear, defeated by jealousy, confused by analysis, or blinded by arrogance.

In this state of mind, the insights, intuitions, and perspectives that line managers seek from their business partners seem as easy as breathing in and breathing out. Not only is all acquired knowledge

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and relevant experience accessible but so too is the universal intelligence that lies just beyond the frontier of what each of us already knows.

But the business partner's influence doesn't stop there. The expression of deeply felt emotion can be infectious, for all of us are attuned to respond to human feelings. The mood of a roomful of people can instantly improve. Meetings can become more lighthearted as rapport deepens and people feel more affinity for one another. Personal agendas suddenly seem so obvious that people stop paying attention to them and start looking to serve the team's needs and interests.

As people stop paying attention to their minds' inner chatter and become truly curious about what others are trying to convey, they suddenly start listening more thoughtfully and with more respect.

As they see things freshly and gain more perspective about the essence of unresolved questions, they find themselves creatively attacking even the thorniest problems.

Collaboration becomes tangible as people see their interconnectedness and recognize how much team efforts can accomplish. Because they are grateful for being part of something larger than anything they could ever hope to achieve working alone, they stop worrying about such things as how much recognition their individual contributions will receive.

In one sense, many finance organizations see this picture already. Every competency model for business partnership points to the kinds of behaviors described in this essay. But not one makes the link explicit – that these quintessential partnership behaviors are nothing more than the manifestations of our thoughts expressed as feelings. Since we all have the power to create our own lives via our thinking, why not act from clear mindedness as evidenced by powerful and profound feelings?

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This is not to say that worry, aggravation, or stress cannot hijack your state of mind from time to time, no matter how sincerely you intend to act with these deeper principles in mind. Repetitive or self-centered thinking can overtake anyone. We all get out of the wrong side of bed from time to time. Illness can muddle our thinking and make it difficult to pay attention to business.

But as humans we have been given a wonderful gift. We intuitively comprehend that we are the thinkers. In that sense we know that we can choose which thoughts to pay attention to and which thoughts to ignore. It is not a matter of mind control. Rather, the knowledge that our thoughts precipitate our behavior gives us the natural resilience to recover from habitual thinking or low moods.

Awakening our deeper intelligence is just a thought away. Our journey through life may be principally a voyage of discovering how the natural quietude and calmness of our minds permits us to tap our deepest capacities and express them moment to moment.

Seeing this for yourself is all it takes to play the business partner role with grace and ease.

