

The Trust Matters Primer

The best of the Trusted Advisor Blog



TrustedAdvisorassociates



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The best of the Trusted Advisor Blog

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Charles H. Green

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A Better New Year's Resolution

“My unscientific sampling says many people make New
Year's resolutions, but few follow through.
Net result—unhappiness.
It doesn't have to be that way.”

A Better New Year's Resolution

My unscientific sampling says many people make New Year's resolutions, but few follow through. Net result—unhappiness.

It doesn't have to be that way.

You could, of course, just try harder, stiffen your resolve, etc. But you've been there, tried that.

You could also ditch the whole idea and just stop making resolutions. Avoid goal-failure by eliminating goal-setting. Effective, but at the cost of giving up on aspirations.

I heard another idea: replace the New Year's Resolution List with a New Year's Gratitude List. Here's why it makes sense.

First, most resolutions are about self-improvement—this year I resolve to: quit smoking, lose weight, cut the gossip, drink less, exercise more, and so on. All those resolutions are rooted in a dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs—or with oneself.

In other words: resolutions often have a component of dissatisfaction

with self. For many, it isn't just dissatisfaction—it's self-hatred. And the stronger the loathing of self, the stronger the resolutions—and the more they hurt when they go unfulfilled.

It can be a very vicious circle.



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A Better New Year's Resolution

Second, happy people do better. This has some verification in science, and it's a common point of view in religion and psychology—and in common sense. People who are slightly optimistic do better in life. People who are happy are more attractive to other people. In a very real sense, you empower what you fear—and attract what you put out.

Ergo, replace resolutions with gratitude. The best way to improve oneself is paradoxical—start by being grateful for what you already have. That turns your aspirations from negative (fixing a bad situation) to positive (making a fine situation even better).

Gratitude forces our attention outwards, to others—a common recommendation of almost all spiritual programs.

Finally, gratitude calms us. We worry less. We don't obsess. We attract others by our calm, which makes our lives connected and meaningful. And before long, we tend to smoke less, drink less, exercise more, gossip less, and so on. Which of course is what we thought we wanted in the first place.

But the real truth is—it wasn't the resolutions we wanted. It was the peace that comes with gratitude. We had mistaken cause for effect.

Go for an attitude of gratitude. The rest is a positive side-effect.

Postscript: the article in the NYTimes on 7 January titled [Happiness 101](#) suggests that gratitude is the most effective “strategy” of many studied in engendering happiness.



A Better New Year's Resolution

from the conversation on the blog:

“The deal with resolutions is that most of us make them from a place of “lack” and “deficiency” and thus they are difficult to put positive intention and attention on for long, and why we so often quit within weeks, if not days...”

posted by Peter Vajda

click here to read
(and join in) the rest of
the conversation.

Trust Tip 32: Answering “Why Should We Choose You?”

“The answer is, opt out of the game. Don’t meet fear with fear; don’t engage in a competition; don’t accept that one-liners and differentiation are the real agenda.”

Trust Tip 32: Answering “Why Should We Choose You?”

It happens most overtly in a sales presentation: “So tell us, Mr. Jones, why should we choose you?”

Words vary. You may recognize:

- What makes you folks different, what sets you apart?
- Or,
- Why should we believe you’re different from all the others?

When a client or customer asks that question, many things are going on.

On the emotional front, “Why should we choose you?” Is almost always spoken as a challenge—an aggressive act, an invitation to spar and to prove your worth. Which in turn means the presumed relationship is combative or competitive.

On a purely logical level, the question is about differentiation. Furthermore, it presumes that the answer can be given verbally,

in a few sentences.

And finally, it’s a sucker’s game. Think honestly now: when was the last time you heard a seller answer that question so well that the customer sat back and said, “wow, that really is great! I guess you’ve got the job!” The truth is, people don’t buy because of differentiation—they buy because you can solve their problem.

So — what do you do with a combative partner who’s challenging you to a duel using weapons of his choice, and that he will disavow no matter how well you play?

The answer is, opt out of the game. Don’t meet fear with fear; don’t engage in a competition; don’t accept that one-liners and differentiation are the real agenda. Instead, respond with direct truth and client focus.

Here’s what it sounds like:

“Why should you choose us? At this stage, I don’t know why; it would be arrogant of me to claim I do know. In fact, it’s even

Trust Tip 32: Answering “Why Should We Choose You?”

possible that you shouldn't choose us. It depends on some key questions, which I've brought along to discuss with you.

“But first, to answer the spirit of your question, 74% of our customers tell us they chose us for one of two reasons. 53% said it was because of our after-sales service. The other 21% cited ease of integration. Those were the main reasons our customers gave.

“Your reasons may or may not map those of our other customers—your situation is unique. One big driver seems to be the level of first-line customer interaction our customers have. Perhaps if we talk about your level of first-line customer interaction, it will become clear to all of us what is and isn't attractive to you about our solutions.”

In responding this way, you first acknowledge an obvious truth—any blather about why a brand new customer should buy from you is nothing but BS anyway, and even if it were true, would be utterly unconvincing. So—tell the truth.

By answering the customer's question literally—what are the reasons they should buy from you?—you show respect.

By offering actual answers to the actual question, you validate the customer's question, and show you have real data to answer it. (BTW—I hope it goes without saying you actually do need real data).

By offering to engage in discussion, you indirectly state the only way customers make serious decisions—by engaging in dialogue. So—tell the truth and start the dialogue.

Finally, by seriously entertaining the proposition that your service may actually not fit 100% of the customers out there, you get points for speaking the truth, and save both you and the customer and lot of cost and pain trying to pretend otherwise.

When asked, “Why should we buy from you?”—tell the truth.

Trust Tip 32: Answering “Why Should We Choose You?”

from the conversation on the blog:

“I’ve always agreed with your premise that, at that time,
actually all the time, the only answer is the TRUTH.”

posted by Philip J. McGee

click here to read
(and join in) the rest of
the conversation.

Does Your Customer Trust You? The Acid Test

“If you have never, ever, recommended a competitor to a good customer, then either your product is always better than the competition for every customer in every situation (puh-leeze), or—far more likely—you always shade your answers to suit your own advantage.”

Does Your Customer Trust You? The Acid Test

Most salespeople will agree—there is no stronger sales driver than a customer's trust in the salesperson. And, I suggest, the best way to be trusted is to be trustworthy—worthy of trust. You can't fake it.

Is it possible to know if your customer trusts you? Is there one predictor of customer trust? Is there a single factor that amounts to an acid test of trust in selling?

I think there is. It's contained in one single question. A “yes” answer will strongly suggest your customers trust you. A “no” answer will virtually guarantee they don't.

The question is this:

Have you ever recommended a competitor to one of your better customers?

If the answer is “yes”—subject to the caveats below—then you have demonstrably put your customer's short-term interests ahead of your own. This indicates low self-orientation and a long-term perspective on your part (I'm assuming sincerity), and is a good indicator

of trustworthiness.

If you have never, ever, recommended a competitor to a good customer, then either your product is always better than the competition for every customer in every situation (puh-leeze), or—far more likely—you always shade your answers to suit your own advantage. Which says ‘you always put your interests ahead of your customers’. Which says, frankly, you can't be trusted.



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Does Your Customer Trust You? The Acid Test

Here are the caveats: don't count "yes" answers if:

- a. The customer was trivially important to you
- b. You were going to lose the customer anyway
- c. You didn't even offer a product in the category
- d. You figured the competitive product was terrible and you'd deep-six them by recommending them.

The only fair "yes" answer is one in which you honestly felt that an important customer would be better served in an important case by going with a competitor's offering.

If that describes what you did, and it is a fair reflection of how you think about customer relationships in general, then I suspect your customers trust you. If not—well, then why should they? Would you?



Click here to take the Trust Quotient test and find out more about how you rate!

Does Your Customer Trust You? The Acid Test

from the conversation on the blog:

“Telling a good customer where to get the best solution to his problem will increase your business with him because he will ultimately come to you first on most buys.”

posted by Cameron

click here to read
(and join in) the rest of
the conversation.

My Client is a Jerk: 3 Keys to Transforming Relationships Gone Bad

“Truly bad behavior, more often than not, comes from decent people who are stressed out. If someone is behaving badly, it’s a good bet that they are afraid.”

My Client is a Jerk: 3 Keys to Transforming Relationships Gone Bad

(This is an abridged and partial version of my latest article just published at RainToday.com)

Have you ever had a really difficult client?

- Who won't take the time up front to share critical information
- Who just cannot make a decision,
- Who is frozen by politics or fear or ignorance,
- Who argues, rejects, and is disrespectful.

There is a common thread to all of these cases, which—if we understand it—can help us succeed.

The common thread has nothing to do with the clients.

The common thread is us.

The Client Situation

Let's get some perspective—about our clients, and about ourselves.

We've all said, if only in our heads, "My client is a jerk." Unfortunately, "my client is a jerk" is a terrible problem statement. For starters, clients don't usually buy into it.

People successful enough to hire us typically have achieved some degree of success in life. While it's popular lately to describe the prevalence of "a**holes" in business (see Robert I. Sutton's book, [The No A**hole Rule: Building a Civilized Workplace and Surviving One That Isn't](#)), their frequency is overestimated.

Most clients have spouses, or parents, or siblings capable of loving them. Most have a boss who has promoted them.

Truly bad behavior, more often than not, comes from decent people who are stressed out. If someone is behaving badly, it's a good bet that they are afraid.

My Client is a Jerk: 3 Keys to Transforming Relationships Gone Bad

Identify the fear, and you can find a real problem statement.

Manage to talk about that fear with your client, and you can create a lasting bond.

Our Own Situation

What's true of clients is equally true for us, especially in selling. We fear not getting the sale.

We're afraid of our boss, peers, loved ones and clients judging us.

But we carry the ultimate judges around in our own heads. We allow ourselves to be hijacked by our own ideas of being "good enough." There's a thin line between having high standards and beating up on oneself.

If we act from fears, we will run from judgment—usually by blaming others. "This sale was doomed because I had a difficult client. If you'd had my client, you would have failed too. My client is a jerk."

At first blame, people will commiserate with you. But when blame turns into resentment, people move away. Misery may love company, but company doesn't return the favor.

Blaming a client never got you the sale, and it never will. But it can kill the next one.

Self-Diagnosing and Fixes

For more on diagnosing the problem (and examples of reframing it), and for three fixes for difficult clients situations, read the rest of the article at RainToday.com.

There aren't any difficult clients. Not really. There are only relationships that aren't working well. And nearly all of those can be fixed. But it must start with us.

As Phil McGee says, "Blame is captivity; responsibility is freedom." To get free of "difficult clients," take responsibility for fixing the relationships.

My Client is a Jerk: 3 Keys to Transforming Relationships Gone Bad

from the conversation on the blog:

“I believe we teach people how to treat us. I wonder how many of those being bullied by the client you mention have actually stood up to the guy. To that end, we can indeed all be “blamed” (or, more accurately, take responsibility) for all of the bullies in our lives.”

posted by Andrea Howe

click here to read
(and join in) the rest of
the conversation.

I'm OK, You're an Idiot

"I'm an idiot, you're an idiot. So let's get over it, let's work together and let's do something great."

I'm OK, You're an Idiot

In 1967, Thomas Harris wrote “I’m OK, You’re OK,” arguably the most famous use of a 2x2 matrix (with cash cows/dogs/stars and question marks a close second).

Today’s Big Western Wisdom is Positive Psychology; see the NYTimes’ [Happiness 101](#).

I think *I’m OK, You’re OK* is a terrific book; and the wisdom in positive psychology is timeless, universal, and very valuable.

But I also think they both leave something on the table.

Do you, like me, advise or influence others for a living? Then you may suspect that Harris pulled punches. My inner voice says:

“I’m OK, you’re an idiot,” and

“You’re OK, I’m an undetected fraud.”

If you’re like me, those two mantras rent space in our heads almost

simultaneously. We are (or is it just me?), as Bill Wilson put it, insecure egomaniacs, buffeted by a socially acceptable form of schizophrenia.

IOYO and PP suggest we get in the flow, bliss out, focus, be aware, accept, be happy.

Well, yes—and no.

**To do great work, being a little nuts sometimes helps.
The trick is not to kill the beast within, but to feed it—
while keeping it in the cage.**



I'm OK, You're an Idiot

St. Augustine saw value in suffering. Nietzsche wrote of the spiritual bankruptcy of serenity (as did Seinfeld). Carlos Castaneda, in *Journey to Ixtlan*, portrays alienation as the spawn of wisdom. In William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience*, the twice-born are way more interesting than the once-born. Artists know what doesn't kill you makes you—more creative.

An ex-boss, when I told him sadly I was getting divorced, said, "Congratulations! What a wonderful learning opportunity!" Turns out he was right.

I once showed a CEO the results of a psychological survey of his top 20 consultants. "Jim," I said nervously, "the shrink says these are not the profiles of psychologically balanced, healthy people!"

Jim looked up at me patiently, and said, "Yeah?"

He was right too.

The day my pulse doesn't jump twenty points in the first client

meeting is the day I'll leave the profession—suffering either from arrogance, indifference, or burnout.

The challenge is to be constructively schizophrenic—to harness the power of the dark side and channel it.

So here's my reformulation:

"I'm an idiot, you're an idiot. So let's get over it, let's work together and let's do something great."

(Credit where due: Anthony de Mello said it first—"I'm an ass, you're an ass." As he said, it's about ego deflation.)



I'm OK, You're an Idiot

David Maister wrote, “the problem is never what the client said it was in the first meeting.” He didn’t exaggerate.

Jeff Thull says the inability of clients to fully understand the solution is the hallmark of complex organizations in today’s world.

So clients suffer from the idiot disease as well—they suspect their ignorance, as we do.

But we’re sicker—painfully aware of what we don’t know, yet also knowing it’s just the tip of the iceberg. Paranoia is rational. And yet—this is great news.

If—a big “if”—we can jointly accomplish the ego deflation inherent in “I’m an idiot, you’re an idiot,” then:

- We don’t waste time posturing
- There are no dumb questions
- We are free to help each other

- The Not Invented Here syndrome Disappears
- We can seek each other’s advice - and offer it freely
- We can produce some really, truly, scary good work.

I like to think we can keep the edge. A Netscape programmer in the heady early days of Web 1.0 wrote, “We come into this world naked, bloody and screaming; but if you play your cards right, it doesn’t have to stop.”

Don’t settle for serenity alone. Be a cynic who trusts. Seek dare-to-be-great humility. Embrace your idiocy and leverage it.
~~Don’t~~ worry—be happy.

As one famous control freak advisor puts it—“It’s a Good Thing.”

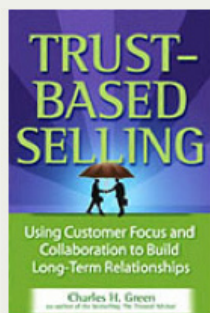
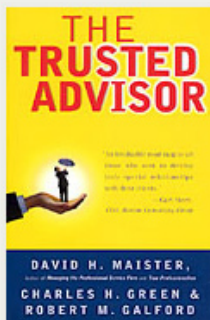
I'm OK, You're an Idiot

from the conversation on the blog:

“What audience will follow a weak trumpet? We’re sitting there as audience members hoping to be taken out of ourselves. We want to know the speaker—I think audiences crave intimacy with speakers—but we don’t want to know that they’re NOT OK.”

posted by Sims Wyeth

click here to read
(and join in) the rest of
the conversation.

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About The Author

Charles H. Green is a speaker and executive educator on trust-based relationships and Trust-based Selling in complex businesses. He is author of Trust-based Selling (McGraw-Hill, 2005), and co-author of The Trusted Advisor (with David Maister and Rob Galford, Free Press, October 2000).

Charles has spoken before a variety of industry and functional groups. An engaging and content-rich speaker, he has taught in executive education programs for the Kellogg Graduate School of Business at Northwestern, and for Columbia University Graduate School of Business, as well as through his own firm, Trusted Advisor Associates. His work centers on improving trust-based relationship and business development skills for businesses with complex service offerings.

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