

Building Strong Relationships

Maggie was a retired schoolteacher starting a second career. She applied for a sales associate position with a well-known hotel and conference center. While she had no sales experience, her maturity, calm demeanor, and articulate style impressed the Director of Sales.

The position of sales associate is challenging. In addition to selling the facility and its services to the local community and industry, it is important to have a good working relationship with the hotel's operating departments. Ultimately, they are the ones who must execute the promises of the sales staff.

In short order, Maggie proved adept at winning new business for the hotel. She had a knack for meeting new people and establishing a sense of trust. Much of it came from her genuine, down-to-earth nature. She was short on hype and easy promises, but long on establishing meaningful relationships built upon commitment, confidence, and trust. Her clients knew that she was true to her word.

But as strong as she was in finding new business, she was even stronger at building those key relationships with hotel department heads and line employees enabling her to ensure that promises were kept and expectations met. Inevitably things would fall through the cracks and some meeting room was not set up properly for one of her clients. Maggie, because she always double-checked arrangements, would find the problem and seek help to correct it. Because she had taken the time to develop good working relations with the housekeeping, maintenance, and banquet staffs, she never had problems finding someone willing to help. As one porter said of her, "She always asks so nicely, there is no way to say no."

Maggie was an outstanding success as a sales associate. In two years she increased her hotel bookings by 18.3%, and more importantly, trend lines promised even more future business from her many satisfied clients. Not surprisingly, when the Director of Sales was transferred to another property out of state, Maggie was asked by her General Manager to take over the position.

Your success in balancing the needs of those you serve lies in ensuring that you build strong relationships with individuals. How do you do this? Begin by:

- Treating everyone you meet with courtesy, respect, and good cheer.
- Focusing on each person you deal with as if he or she were the most important person in the world.
- Taking the time to get to know people; sharing your time and attention with them.
- Learning about other people's jobs and the challenges and difficulties they face.
- Keeping promises and following through on commitments.
- Being principled, showing fairness, and demonstrating integrity.
- Recognizing the ultimate value of people in all you do.

Relationships depend upon how you view yourself in relation to others. If you see yourself as separate and apart from your constituencies, if you view others as the means to your end, if your vision and goals lack a broader purpose than your own needs and ambitions, establishing meaningful relationships will be impossible. On the other hand, when you see yourself as part of a team with a shared mission, then a sense of service will be an intrinsic part of your service team relationships.

The difference is your attitude, your motives, and your approach to dealing with others. Since all of these things are within your power to change, establishing a service-based approach to leadership by building strong relationships is totally up to you.

Ed Rehkopf, Excerpted from Leadership on the Line: A Guide for Front Line Supervisors, Business Owners and Emerging Leaders, Clarity Publications, 2006