

12 Essential Relationship Principles for the New Year By Andrew Sobel

What beliefs or values guide you as you build your relationships? The right principles can powerfully inform your day-to-day behavior. Over the last several years, I've been assembling what I call "The Relationship Principles." These are around a dozen statements of belief and intent that will help you engage with others and build a strong network of trusted relationships. I'm going to share the first five of these. I'll describe the final seven in the next installment.

The Relationship Principles

ONE: Build your network before you need it. Isn't it kind of pathetic when someone you haven't seen or heard from in 20 years calls you up and asks you to help them? One of my clients was promoted to be CFO of a major company. When her appointment was announced in the media, she was flooded with calls from bankers, lawyers, and consultants who all wanted her business. Her response? She told me, "My question for most of them was: 'Where were you five years ago?'" Help others with a need, issue, challenge, or problem they have and build a relationship today.

TWO: Be generous with your time and wisdom, and help others without any expectation of receiving something in return . When you are always concerned with reciprocity, you essentially do things for yourself. You're a mercenary: "If I help this person then he or she will give me something I need." Last year, I met a member of the church I attend, who told me he had gone to my high school (Collegiate School here in New York City). I did not remember him—but he remembered me. He said, "I never forgot something you did that was kind. I was new to Collegiate, and you were a senior—and seniors didn't talk to underclassmen in those days! You actually came up to me and welcomed me to the school. It meant a lot to me as a scared, new kid." Build a reputation as a generous person who thinks about others, and your network will overflow.

THREE: Start a relationship by having a great conversation, not by trying to show the other person how smart you are. It's really irritating when someone you've just met keeps trying to show you how "intelligent" and insightful they are. You connect with people by finding things in common, understanding what issues they are grappling with, sharing ideas, and so on—not by relentlessly showing you're the smartest person in the room.

FOUR: Follow the person, not the position. Don't think in terms of "I want to build relationships with CEOs." Focus on developing relationships with smart, interesting,

motivated, ambitious people; and following them throughout their careers. Do this, and eventually, I guarantee you, you will know some CEOs!

FIVE: Cultivate your own interests so you are interesting to others. Ah, what a nice thought for the New Year! When you have dinner with a client, you only spend twenty minutes talking about business—the rest of the time you discuss family, vacations, books you've read, politics, hobbies, wine, and so on. If you want to be a person of interest, you have to develop interests. Read widely, engage in hobbies or avocations, travel, and make sure there are some “outliers” in your network of friends—people who are very different from you in terms of experiences, interests, and background.

New Developments

I want to share a couple of new developments that I hope will provide good value for you. On February 1, 2012 John Wiley & Sons will release my newest book, [Power Questions: Win New Business, Build Relationships, and Influence Others](#). More than a business book, *Power Questions* is a manifesto for a whole new way of engaging with clients, colleagues, friends and family. Second, in mid-January my new personal website will be launched. It will contain a huge number of free resources, including a large section on client relationship management with over 40 checklists, articles, and videos. Finally, not one but two of my articles got Readers Choice awards in RainToday's popular marketing publication, and they are up for the Best Content award of 2011: “Letter from a Client: This is Why You Lost” and “Never Ask a Prospect These Questions.” There are other some good articles in the list as well. You should have a look at it at [Best 2011 Articles](#) and—if you are so inclined towards these things—vote (hint: my articles are the 10th and 15th down from the top! In truth, if you missed these two articles you really should check them out.)

Andrew Sobel is the leading authority on client relationships and the skills and strategies required to earn enduring client loyalty. The most widely published author in the world on business relationships, he is a consultant, educator, and coach to major services firms worldwide. Andrew is the author of the recently released *All for One: 10 Strategies for Building Trusted Client Partnerships*—which was voted one of the top 10 professional services sales and marketing books of the decade—as well as the business bestsellers *Clients for Life* and *Making Rain*. He has contributed chapters to four books on leadership, marketing, and human resources management; and his articles and work have appeared in publications such as the *New York Times*, *US Today*, *Strategy+Business*, and the *Harvard Business Review*. He was a Senior Vice President and Country Managing Director for Gemini Consulting, where he served on the European Executive Committee, and for the last 15 years he has led his own consulting firm, Andrew Sobel Advisors, Inc. He can be reached at www.andrewsobel.com (Tel: 505.982.0211).