

### All for One: A brief Summary

By Andrew Sobel

A couple of years ago I was interviewing a CEO about his most trusted relationships with external service providers. In talking about one particular firm, he said, “They’ve built many strong relationships with our people, and they consistently add value. I know that we get the best that their firm has to offer. I really view them as a long term partner in growing our business.”

What this CEO was describing is what I call a trusted client partnership. Some organizations refer to them as “office of the chairman” accounts; others call them “flagship clients” or perhaps just “key clients.” They are broad, deep, and endure for years. They invariably contribute a disproportionately large share of revenues, profits, and intellectual capital.

Becoming an individual trusted advisor is a terrific accomplishment. But if you want to harness your organization to add more value, and engage with clients who are steadily reducing the number of firms that they are willing to do business with, you need to aspire to the next level, which is trusted partner.

But how do you get there? What are the ingredients of these long term, institutional relationships? In researching my new book, *All for One: 10 Strategies for Building Trusted Client Partnerships*, I found is that there are 10 essential strategies that you need to implement in order to consistently develop and sustain these extraordinarily valuable relationships.

I’m going to express these strategies as a series of shifts required to move you from Steady Supplier to Trusted Partner. Let’s start with the first five, which must be driven mainly by the individual relationship manager:

**Strategy 1: From Agenda Reacting to Agenda Setting.** When you react to the client’s agenda, you wait for the order. When you become an Agenda Setter, you invest to develop a deep understanding of their business, and you proactively engage them in value-added conversations about their most essential priorities and goals.

**Strategy 2: From networking to building relationship capital.** Networking is about the many—about adding new people to your contact list, and superficially staying in touch with hundreds of people. Building relationship capital means focusing on the critical few—the 15 or 20 key relationships that can truly make a difference—and truly nurturing these.

**Strategy 3: From selling to executive engagement.** Selling means following a five-step process, handling objections, and trying to close. Executive engagement is about engaging a senior decision maker in a thoughtful dialogue about his or her critical issues, and building trust in your capacity to address them.

**Strategy 4: From individual to institutional relationships.** Trusted partnerships are built on multiple trusted advisor relationships—what I call many-to-many relationships—and they require the relationship manager to be a door-opener—not a gate-keeper.

**Strategy 5: From core value to multiple layers of value.** You must deliver what you promise. But in trusted client partnerships, the advisor does more: He or she adds institutional value and personal value; tangible value and intangible value; expected value and surprise value.

These next five strategies must be mainly driven by the firm:

**Strategy 6: From opportunism to strategic client targeting.** High-impact client relationships develop when you

are working with the right client, the right executive, and the right issue. Saying no becomes as important as saying yes. Ralph Shrader, Chairman and CEO of Booz Allen Hamilton, put it this way: “Trusted partnerships begin with a senior client who is highly ambitious and sees himself on a bigger stage. You become a partner in helping him to achieve his goals.”

Strategy 7: From ad-hoc professional development to a client leadership pipeline. You cannot hire young professionals and hope that someday they will magically become capable of managing CEO relationships! The best organizations invest in a systematic development pipeline to develop and support their client-facing professionals.

Strategy 8: From individual silos to collaborative effort. A collaborative, one for all and all for one culture is the foundation on which you build trusted client partnerships. Individual, disconnected experts who work in silos cannot do it.

Strategy 9: From market research to multi-level client listening. Firms that consistently build these large, institutional relationships use five different channels to tune into their clients—informal, ad-hoc feedback is insufficient. These include an independent review process, CEO to CEO meetings, and client forums to gain a 360 degree view of their key relationships.

Strategy 10: From consistent delivery to a unique client experience. Many firms say they offer a unique client experience, but clients don't often perceive it as such. In the future, the ability to add more value during client interactions while increasing “ease of use” will be essential. Leading services firms accomplish this, for example, by increasing transparency, augmenting dialogue, allowing clients to define their desired relationship experience, and changing the physical relationship experience environment.