



## **ALIGN PURPOSE AND PRACTICE THROUGH THE 3 Cs OF PARTNERSHIP**

Partnerships are relationships that thrive on effective communication, collaboration, and commitment --- the 3 Cs. The business world demands quality, speed, flexibility, performance, and profits. Customers and clients have limited or no patience. Employees have limited or no loyalty. In this environment, even if you have a great product or service today, there is no such thing as steady state. Use the 3Cs to help assure your future success.

Many companies today are based on a partnership model. Some variations of this model include: co-founders with shared ownership, venture capitalist(s) and an entrepreneur, or perhaps a typical professional service firm arrangement with a level of ownership dependent on the tenure, contribution, or status of the partner. Other organizations espouse a version of this model. *We partner with our employees* is their mantra. They attempt to create a linkage of staff to the business with philosophy and culture, behaviors and other methods like employee stock ownership plans or stock options.

Given that the partnership model (in its various forms) is broadly utilized, here are some ideas that help align the purpose and practice of successful partnerships. While there is no guarantee of a healthy company, the 3 Cs of partnerships can give a considerable boost to your company.

### **The First C is Communication**

It seems impossible to overemphasize the importance of communication in strengthening the bonds of a relationship. Individuals get together because they have a better idea for a product or service, or because there is strength in numbers. Other times they combine forces with complementary skills or resources. And sometimes, people become partners because their peers have elected them.

But, having common bonds doesn't assure that there will be useful dialog and good interaction. Even functioning under the same roof doesn't necessarily foster communication. People focus on their own issues. These might be their own customers and clients, or their referral networks and other business development activities, or staffing necessary to complete their projects. It is easy to become myopic and communication usually suffers. Differences get buried (they don't go away but simply ooze out at unplanned and unguarded moments). Similarities aren't identified. Frustrations simmer just below the surface.

An example is useful. One recent engagement was with a creative, exciting company that had grown from three to thirty plus people in just a few years. The partners used a proactive approach to improve communication. After an organizational assessment was completed, they determined that lack of communication was a bottleneck for them. While extremely successful, they felt they could do more. Further, they recognized their emphasis was on their clients and that they had not focused on their relationship. They decided on a three-point plan of attack to remove what they saw as an impediment to becoming even more successful.

1. Each partner wrote two vision statements, one was a personal statement, and the second was for the company. They met and shared these written documents with each other. Their aim was to common ground as a means of setting goals and improving communication.
2. The partners planned bimonthly meetings for communication. Considering the never-ending time for attending to client needs and their hectic travel schedules, any time the partners had been together they were discussing the company's financials. By arranging these additional sessions, they reaffirmed the importance of talking to each other ore broadly than just operating numbers.
3. The partners agreed to have a retreat once each year. This off-site encounter was dedicated to talking, listening, and planning. It was designed as a time to sit back, reflect and face the future in a purposeful manner.

### **The Second C is Collaboration**

Many companies are trying to encourage an entrepreneurial spirit in their staff members. Sometimes, however, this emphasis gets distorted into a me-first, individualism that can backfire and undermine needed bonds. Taking this one step further, while a firm lead by independent thinking, resourceful partners can be a true competitive advantage, the synergy that comes from collaboration can geometrically increase success.

Partnerships falter when building one or more practice or specialty overshadows other business elements without clear planning or direction to do so. Effective partnerships determine specific means to break down silos and build cohesiveness. They find creative ways, and make conscious decisions, about the use of limited resources. Partnerships unravel without collaboration.

### **The Third C is Commitment**

Commitment is defined as the state of being bound emotionally or intellectually to a course of action or to another person or persons. The best business ideas, relationships, plans and goals are undermined without commitment to the company's mission. Successful partnerships have defined specific mechanisms for commitment, accountability, and follow through. Some of these include:

- Constructively confronting when there is a disconnect between either words and activities, or tactics and behaviors;
- Not condoning (implicitly or explicably) rugged individualism at the expense of partner relationships;
- Demanding respect for others;
- Requiring active support for agreed-upon plans. They force a suspension of disbelief that can undermine efforts and progress, after providing an opportunity for honest disagreements to be aired.

Why are these 3 Cs of partnerships crucial? What makes communication, collaboration, and commitment essential? Business partnerships that practice these fundamentals have coherent, consistent plans and actions that support the hard work

and results the partners achieve. They set in motion the best type of positive cycle. The 3 Cs further the intrinsic rewards of partnership that in turn furthers the extrinsic rewards of repeat clients and customers, challenging work, dedicated employees, and financial well-being. Those are significant payoffs!

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