WHO DO YOU TRUST?

"Corporate Synergy," "Deep Dive," "Trusted Advisor," "Circle the Wagons," "Move the Needle," "Drill Down," "More Bandwidth." If you have ever sat in a business meeting, chances are you've heard these terms over and over...and over...and over. It makes you want to pick some low-hanging fruit and chuck it at the next person who describes themselves as being laser-focused while taking a holistic approach to tackling a recently assigned project that was initially right in their wheelhouse.

As annoying as some of these terms can be, one stands out as vital in today's business environment. As an HR Business Partner/ Manager/Consultant for the last 15 years this term has resonated with me time and time again. Before the term ever became popular, there were hundreds and thousands of people practicing it, most likely without having heard the phrase "Trusted Advisor." It's not just for consultant-type advisors but for any business relationship that relies on trust, which is to say all of them.

Back in the 90s, I was trying to find my way. I had graduated high school and was looking to enter the workforce while contemplating the next chapter of my life. Many of the jobs available to kids like me were in retail. It didn't take me long to realize that in retail customer service is king. I will never forget the primary rule in customer service: "The customer always comes first."

What I find interesting is that being a trusted advisor is not much more complicated than that. Essentially, it is taking customer service to the highest level. It is about knowing your customer or client along with their product(s) or service(s) and taking a genuine interest in their needs. It is about being sincere and doing what is needed to assist them in achieving their desired objective. A true trusted advisor is one who won't shy away from being sincere, truthful, candid and open. Sometimes that means saying, "I don't know but I will find out."

I recently received an email from a client who I had spent quite a bit of time with over the last six months or so. The email had a few logistical items but ended with "I would also like to discuss strategy with you." When a client emails and makes this statement, I know that I've hit the mark. It's a short sentence, but it says a lot. It says, "I trust you." It says, "I have some ideas that I would like to discuss with you and get your advice."

In any business, a key way to gauge your success as a trusted advisor is to review the number of referrals you are receiving. Recommendations are the highest form of flattery. If you have customers referring you to their friends, family, and business colleagues you have most likely hit the mark. A referral says the customer trusts you enough to connect you with those closest to them.

Obtaining trusted advisor status is about knowing the value of building long-term relationships. It's not about making a quick buck. It's about creating an experience where the customer expects each interaction to be better than the last. If you are known for failing to hit deadlines, exceeding budgets, and delivering poor outcomes, you will never be able to build the trust you're looking for.

So add these concepts to your toolbox. Work to ensure that your organization takes these principles to heart and you will find that when you are truly here to serve, you are here to succeed.

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