Who's Got Your Back?

There is something to be said about the power of partnership.

Recently, I was coaching a leader who was vetting the prospects of teaming up with a new business partner. Our conversations were frequent and focused. The intentionality was high because the stakes were high. Get it right and life is good. Get it wrong and you're looking for the red flashing button marked: get-me-out-of-here-in-a-hurry. Chances are good that you know exactly what I'm talking about.

As a leader, when the top priority on your shopping list is FIND A NEW PARTNER, what do you look for?

Having spent the better part of 40 years in strategic partnerships, like collecting rare coins, I have curated some priceless learnings—sometimes the hard way. Let me pass along a handful.

- **Trust—Am I confident that my partner will instinctively have my back?** A partner is someone you can count on. To be sure, a true partner is someone who delivers on his promises, but more importantly, someone who seeks your best interests day in and day out. You live in the certainty that any issues or conflicts will be forthrightly addressed—behind closed doors, not in the public square.

- **Alignment—Is there an uncompromising commitment to the mission of the organization?** No alignment? No deal. Move on. Partners need to share an air-tight agreement when it comes to purpose.

- **Respect—Do I have a deep personal regard for my partner?** Reliable partners have an unrelenting respect for each other. While acknowledging their differences, they know, accept, and support the entire package of who the other person is. They defend you and look for ways to boost your performance.

- **Clarity—Is there thoughtful delineation in our respective roles?** Partnerships are set up for success when there has been a healthy dose of upfront agreement on respective responsibilities. Each person knows what lanes they are to run in. This kind of clarity rises in importance if there is considerable overlap of competencies between the partners.

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- **Communication—Can I talk openly and freely with my partner?** You can spot a great partnership by the quality of communication. Above all, there's a premium placed on clarity.But it's also open. Candid. Honest. Confidential. Comprehensive. Frequent. It's heart to heart. There are no surprises. And any potentially confusing communication is always interpreted with the benefit of

the doubt.

• **Relationship—Is there an ever-growing relationship?** Partners realize that everyday synergy and endgame productivity flow best out of relationship versus an org chart. They are constantly making relational deposit in their partnership account. More often than not, decisions and directions emerge effortlessly due to the ever-growing bank account of relational capital.

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• **Chemistry—Do I enjoy my partner?** A partner is someone you simply like to be with. You feel at home. You bring out the best in each other. You track. You get each other. The partnership doesn't feel like a duty or obligation. There's energy and synergy. There's enjoyment.

In view of these partnership components, how can you put them into play?

If you're exploring a prospective partnership, I would recommend that you and your potential partner carve out a chunk of time and thoughtfully discuss each of these essential ingredients. You may want to consider adding a consultant to this vital process—someone who can help you take the conversation to a deeper level.

If you're currently in the middle of a partnership, I would recommend first that you call out which of these seven components you do well and celebrate that reality. And second, with a view to investing in your partnership, I'd recommend identifying which one you need to give attention to and devise a short set of strategies to increase your effectivenss.

In short, the power of your partnerships will be in direct proportion to your investment in them.

So invest well because the ROI is high.

Chuck Olson
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