

VENDORS ARE NOT THE  
ENEMY: Managing and  
Building Relationships

“We don’t accomplish anything in this world alone...and whatever happens is the result of the whole tapestry of one’s life and all the weavings of individual threads from one to another that creates something”. This was a saying from Sandra Day O’Connor, Supreme Court Justice. It was a good start for the above program that I attended at this year’s ALA Annual Conference in Seattle.

As a Legal Administrator, sometimes in the rush of things in our daily office schedule we get aggravated with the interruption of sales calls. What we tend to forget is that the effort and time we put into building relationships with our vendors will save us time in the long run. It is important for you to develop a win-win relationship with your vendors by communicating your firm goals and objectives. If you have an open and honest relation with vendors it is easier to establish whether or not they are the right fit for your needs. If not, they could make recommendations with business affiliates. If you discuss the vendor partners goals sometimes you can see how they align with your firm goals.

Here were several pointers I got from the session and would like to share with other Legal Administrators;

- 1) Don’t Allow cold sales calls or drop-ins. Most of our offices are set up with receptionist that can politely tell a vendor that they will need to schedule an appointment and give them your business card.
- 2) Don’t be afraid to say “no”. Vendors are use to it and appreciate your honesty instead of keep calling which waste time for both of you.
- 3) If you agree to meet with a vendor then ask them to bring one piece of competitive information with them you could pick up some meaningful information from.
- 4) Give at least 45 days for RFPS. Before you start the process make sure it is absolutely necessary since it is very time consuming for all parties involved.

5) Never Burn Bridges – what if the firm merges or what if you change jobs. Remember, vendors talk to one another and know the good and bad administrators.

6) Build an honest relationship with vendors. Get to a level where you feel comfortable talking about what is good and what is bad.

7) Let vendor know if it is service, cost or quality you are looking for and your order of importance.

8) Define roles and responsibilities to vendor of those in your office that will play a part in the relationship. This can minimize your time after establishing the partnership.

9) Let vendor know about a future build out project instead of keeping it a secret. This can avoid future phone calls and possibly save you money if you can take advantage of a current special.

Building a strong business relationship with a vendor takes time, dedication and a willingness to always look for a win/win proposition for both parties. We do our best to squeeze vendors for the things that we want, but need to remember to give something back. Otherwise, why should a vendor want to do business with me?

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