

Stretch Yourself into a Better Partner for Clients

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Executing a world class project requires building a partnership that will stand the test of time.

In our business, we don't look at client interactions as transactions—each one is a chance to strengthen the connection. The nature of our projects mean they can take years from initial contact to completion, and their sheer scope and depth make strong relationships vital to our ongoing success.

Successful partnerships start with good relationships, and good relationships start with individuals being the best they can be.

Collectively, Corporate Project Services is a team of individuals who genuinely care about our clients and want them to be successful. Our ultimate goal is to be the best partner our clients can retain, and it's up to each and every person on our team to achieve it.

Over the past couple of years CPS has taken charge of this by emphasizing personal growth and development—investing in our people so we can be more well-rounded than the competition in every way possible.

Building Infallible Partnerships with Better People

People have a tendency to believe the so-called “softer” skills (such as communication skills, leadership, personal habits, and teamwork) are



less important than having technical expertise, or not as important as being skilled in a process or operating a piece of equipment. However, knowledge and skills will only get you so far.

There's a big difference between being knowledgeable vs. being knowledgeable AND adept at relating to other people; or being knowledgeable AND able to move a project along effectively. Which type of person would you prefer to work with? One that's more well-rounded, of course. What's the use of being an expert if you aren't able to effectively communicate that expertise?

When companies invest in the individual development of their people, that's a positive indicator that they're dedicated to building rock

solid partnerships. If you're a manager, make a commitment to support the growth of the people on your team. Conversely, individuals must take advantage of the opportunities granted to you.

Successful Partnerships Start with YOU

Personal growth in the "softer" areas makes you a stronger partner and someone clients trust and want to work with long-term. Here are five rules of thumb about personal growth that will make you a better partner to your clients and teammates:

- 1. Set goals for yourself and be relentless in pursuing them.** Be diligent about setting and tracking goals and sitting down for regular meetings with your manager to review them. Each member of the CPS team sets monthly goals aimed at making us better at SOMETHING. Without them, we have no path for growth and nothing pressing us forward.

Goals hold you accountable and give you a road map for accomplishing the growth you desire, but unless you are persistent, they'll easily fall to the backburner. Your personal growth plan should always be a priority. Focus on what YOU need to work on most. Personal growth will look different for each person on the team. We all have gifts, but if we push ourselves in areas we're not as strong, we can continue to grow in our roles as project managers and trusted advisors to our clients.

- 2. Seek opportunities for continuing education.** Improving ourselves should be something we all continually strive to do, and that requires engaging in valuable self-growth practices. This could be as simple as

reading a book or taking an online class. For our CPS team, we find great value in spending time on the assembly floor or at the Wenger Technical Center or making onsite visits to observe startups or audits firsthand. There's also benefit in finding a mentor who already emulates the areas where you want to grow.

The point is to stretch yourself in new directions. Never stop learning. Time devoted to learning new things—"sharpening our swords," if you will—keeps us moving forward. Otherwise, we remain stuck doing the same thing day after day, not going anywhere. Education gives us new perspectives that we can apply to projects to make partnerships stronger.

- 3. Communication always deserves more attention.** Good communication is the cornerstone of any good relationship, so no matter what other areas you need to grow in, [communication is a skill that needs constant evaluation and honing.](#)

Lately some of my reading has been on intercultural communication studies, an area I chose because being able to communicate well with people in other cultures is beneficial to my role and makes me a better partner. Being able to talk to people and ask good questions helps get to the heart of what clients need to reach their goals. When we are effective communicators, we can really understand what clients need and can respond precisely, thus reducing confusion and saving them a great deal of pain and money.

- 4. Don't be afraid to fail.** It's natural to be afraid of failure. But I've learned failing is

not always a bad thing—on the contrary, it actually can be a very good thing. Learning and bouncing back from failure is a huge component in driving ingenuity, a core CPS value. Getting over the fear of failure is the only way to break out of your comfort zone, and the only way to grow. Look at failure as a learning opportunity—the best kind—and embrace it. The experiences you have when things don't go as planned are ones you won't ever forget. Remember that discomfort, change, and challenge force us to grow and become better versions of ourselves.

5. Don't ever quit trying to improve yourself.

The speed of business never slows down, so any amount of stagnancy can be detrimental to your momentum. Just being “good enough” isn't going to ensure repeat business with your client or a positive referral down the road. When you are the best you can be, the client reaps the benefits. Clients prefer to work with people who are ahead of the curve. Any training we do, whether it's to learn better self-discipline or improve project management skills, or even learning how to run a software application more effectively, it all translates to good things for the client.

Improving the ways in which we interact with people is essential for the longevity of our partnerships. That's one of the reasons I recently started learning Arabic. I've lived in the

United Arab Emirates for two years, and during a previous point in my career I spent four years in Afghanistan. While English is the universal business language used in most areas of the world, my hope is by speaking some of the native language it may help me connect more with my network here. It's one small way I can show my interest in their culture, which can break down barriers and help bring people closer together.

If the relationship is on solid ground, your chances for a successful partnership increase exponentially. The more you grow as an individual the more appealing you're going to be to clients and better able to forge a good relationship. Better people make better partners, and that's really what it's all about.

How have you pursued personal growth? Share your ideas with us on LinkedIn! You can also [reach out to our team](#) if you have questions for CPS.

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