



## **Trust: An Essential Ingredient In Success**

*By John O. Cunningham*

There was one common chord in the chorus of highly accomplished presenters who spoke at the 2008 RainDance conference of the Legal Sales and Service Organization. Experts on sales, law firm leadership, organizational change, and lawyer-client partnerships all cited the importance of “trust” as an essential building block in the foundation of success.

Jake Julia, V.P. of Change Management for Northwestern University kicked off the conference by telling attendees that “transparent and trustworthy communications” are essential to the success of change agents. Those who assume the role of change agent were also advised to develop partnerships with key leaders in their organizations by building trust with them.

Those notes were echoed by Harris E. Berenson, V.P. and Chief Counsel for Liberty Mutual Property Insurance, who said that lasting partnerships between in-house and outside counsel are founded on mutual trust and respect. He added that considerations of trust permeate the relationship in many ways, noting for example that “outside firms need to emphasize training of lawyers and staff because [in-house lawyers] need to be able to trust every one of them.” He also cited examples of events that can break down trust in a professional relationship, pointing to communications failures as the principal sources of trust breakdowns.

On day two, Howard Shafer, the former law firm executive director turned culinary expert, told attendees that trust and teamwork are essential to top-flight restaurant operations. Noting that a busy kitchen looks like a fire drill with sharp knives, Shafer suggested that trust in others is enhanced by adherence to minimum acceptable standards. He explained that kitchen

crews are trained to precise specifications on measurements, prep work, and communications about coordinated movements in the kitchen.

By contrast, Shafer observed that “lawyers by their nature, must have a certain professional detachment, and often have problems in building trust.” He recommended that law firms should consider the kitchen model of organization, which emphasizes not only the setting of standards, but the training of all staff on how to fulfill those standards in their roles.

Later in the day, sales expert Mark Stevens, author of “God Is a Salesman,” told attendees that commercial relationships are like a belief in God – they are based on an invisible trust and faith. Stevens asserted that a salesperson who can build trust effectively will never need to ask for business. He cited a number of examples, including the case of a real estate broker who declined to sell him a home because it was “just not a fit” for him and would result in buyer’s remorse. When Stevens later concluded that the broker knew him and his needs better than he imagined, he referred numerous clients to that broker.

On the final day of the conference, Sally Fiona King, Chief Operating Officer of Clifford Chance, emphasized the relationship of trust and leadership. “People want to trust their leaders, but trust has to be built by your actions over time,” she asserted. King added that “trust can be lost in an instant if you are not ready for a crisis.” She encouraged leaders to acknowledge and prepare for risks and emergencies, and stressed that honest communication in challenging times can build trust.

“Don’t just tell people everything will be all right. Be honest with them and tell them what they need to do because it is the unknown that causes fear and kills productivity,” she said.

King also concluded that challenging times often present the best opportunities for building trust and launching radical organizational change.



*John O. Cunningham is a freelance writer and legal marketing consultant who practiced law for 16 years, serving as general counsel to a publicly held international company and to a subsidiary of a Fortune 500 company. He can be contacted by e-mail directed to [C3cunningham@aol.com](mailto:C3cunningham@aol.com).*

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