

# STRATEGY

A N D T H E

# FAT SMOKER

C H A P T E R

Many firms claim that what distinguishes their organization... **CONTINUE**

**B Y DAVID MAISTER**

**MANY FIRMS CLAIM THAT WHAT DISTINGUISHES THEIR ORGANIZATION** is that their people are client centric and act like trusted advisors. However, few of these organizations, when they hire, have programs to select for these attitudes and skills and few have systematic programs to help their people develop them.

**When they come to work, people leave behind everything they have learned about interacting effectively with others.**

In trying to understand how to build business relationships, we should draw upon what we already know from relationships in our personal lives. People often don't do this. It sometimes seems as if, when they come to work, people leave behind everything they have learned about interacting effectively with others.

If you want to win a client's business, it's necessary to give the client the chance to talk to you, person to person, about *their* needs, wishes, and wants. The key is to make it easy and comfortable for the client to share his or her feelings and secrets. In short, if you really want to win a client's business, you must know how to have a *conversation*.

The most trusted advisors in every profession are not those who have a ready answer for every client problem, but those who can, through questions and conversational style, put the other person at ease, make him want to tell you about himself, and engage in a dialogue.

To paraphrase the actress Angelina Jolie, who was asked in a television interview if she had to like the characters she was portraying in order to depict them well, "The key is to find that one small

slice of overlap between you and them, and focus on that overlap, ignoring everything else.” I don’t know about acting, but that sounds to me like a perfect recipe for human relationships.

**If you really want to win a client’s business, you must know how to have a conversation.**

You will accomplish more by saying to potential clients, “I’m not sure I understand why you are doing things the way you do; could you explain it to me?” than you will by saying, “If you’ll just shut up and listen, I’ll tell you the right answer to your problem.”

Most of us have discovered that whether it is love, friendship, or work, people respond best when they believe that you are (among other things) *considerate, supportive, understanding, and thoughtful*.

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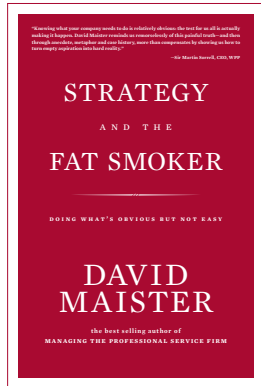
A reputation for being supportive must be earned through social habits. To be viewed by other people as *supportive* also takes thought and careful attention to language. It is important to remember that friends don’t judge each other. They don’t evaluate. They don’t point out each other’s weaknesses. Even when asked directly, “Do I look fat in this?” friends work hard to find the language that doesn’t disparage, with a reply like, “I like the other dress better.”

The key to business development success is making people believe that you are truly interested in a two-way relationship, and that you are willing to earn and deserve your relationship. You must first make deposits in the “trusting relationship bank” if you wish to make withdrawals later.

**The key is to find that one small slice of overlap between you and them, and focus on that overlap, ignoring everything else.**

As individuals, or as organizations, it is possible to set out to develop friendship skills. However, like all aspects of the fat smoker syndrome, it requires a concerted effort to invest today in building skills (and relationships) that will pay off tomorrow. Unless they are already naturals, relatively few individuals—and even fewer organizations—have the self-discipline to stick with the program. That’s why it’s a successful strategy for those who do.

## INFO



### BUY THE BOOK

Click here to get more details or buy a copy of David Maister's *Strategy and the Fat Smoker*.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Maister is widely acknowledged as one of the world's leading authorities on the management of professional service firms. For two decades he has acted as a consultant to prominent professional firms around the world, on a wide variety of strategic and managerial issues. In 2002, he was named as one of the top 40 business thinkers in the world (Business Minds, by Tom Brown, PrenticeHall/Financial Times). He is the author of the bestselling books *Managing the Professional Service Firm* (1993), *True Professionalism* (1997), *The Trusted Advisor* (2000), *Practice What You Preach* (2001) and *First Among Equals* (2002). These books have been translated into 14 languages. For seven years, he served as a professor on the faculty of the Harvard Business School (1979-85), prior to launching his consulting practice. He lives in Boston, Massachusetts.

In March of 2005, he finally took his own advice, gave up smoking and lost 30 pounds.

Visit his website at [www.davidmaister.com](http://www.davidmaister.com).

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