

MAKING IT WORK

– the 123 of good supplier relationships

I've worked in a number of industries – as a teacher, librarian, publisher, bookseller, and now a library supplier. In all my workplaces, there's been a common theme of books and literacy. Experience in the commercial and educational worlds as supplier and customer has helped me understand the real difference a good supplier relationship can bring to the smooth and effective operation of programs and communities.

Good supplier relationships can be as easy as **1.2.3.**

1. Find the one.

That is the person or sometimes persons who make things happen in an organisation. It's not always the person with a double barrelled title or fancy business card; it's usually someone passionate about their part of the business and who *understands the requirements* of yours. Finding *the one* may take time as you start working with a new supplier. Once found, apply all the usual business rules – over communicate and share the good news and the bad.

2. Be nice.

Two simple little words with far reaching consequences. Remember when your parents suggested that you treat others as you'd like to be treated? That old adage still holds true in this digital world.

Vendors run businesses that employ humans, so mistakes are inevitable, but the attitude of fixing those mistakes is the measure you're looking for. Was it their fault? Did they admit fault, and get the matter sorted quickly and efficiently? If so, thank your procurement unit that they chose wisely and remember to say thank you to the vendor. Good vendors want to know when they've stuffed up, because then they get a chance to improve.

3. Deliver what you promised.

Did the contract say you would provide profiles, a budget by fund, meet every quarter, orders every Friday? Deliver on the expectations. And if there's a problem at your end, then communicate as soon as you can. The customers we most enjoy working with are the ones who understand that life interrupts best practice. If there's a possibility of a problem, or extra funding – anything that will disrupt the ordinary and require additional resources – then shoot through an email or pick up the phone to give your vendor a heads up. Sometimes the problem (and the money) goes away, but the good relationship established will stand.

All our businesses are complex and our people often over-stretched. Putting some time and effort into maintaining good communication with your suppliers is important and economically sound. Add it to the list of KPIs for your senior team leaders, create a brief checklist of actions and expectations, which they can follow and plan supplier meetings for the calendar year.

1.2.3 – you're done. Good luck.

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