

Earning Trust in Business

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Trust can't be bought, it must be earned. In business, so much of our dealings are based on trust. Even though we have moved away from handshake deals to lengthy business contracts, we still ultimately like to do business with people we truly trust. As service professionals, we all want to be "trusted advisors." When discussing trust, I always think about Robert De Niro's character in the movie *Meet the Parents* who tells Ben Stiller's character that he is outside the "circle of trust." None of us wants to be outside the circle of trust with friends, family, or clients. Stephen M.R. Covey (son of Stephen Covey and author of the bestseller *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*) wrote an interesting book a few years ago entitled *The Speed of Trust* in which he gives practical guidance on how we all can develop a greater level of trust in our relationships. He convincingly argues that trust is not a touchy feel emotion, but something that is real, quantifiable, and that measurably affects both the speed and cost of doing business.

When it comes to choosing an advertising agency, businesses are placing trust in who they get to help them achieve their business objectives. There are many very good advertising agencies in the state of Mississippi. I recently had the opportunity to sit down and visit with Sutton Marks and his son Peter Marks, who represent two generations of leadership in the advertising industry. Sutton Marks' father founded Gordon Marks & Company in 1939 when Sutton was eleven years old. Sutton grew up working in the family business and joined the company full time in 1951. His father, Gordon, worked well into his 80's and came into the office until weeks before his death. Gordon would often say that, "I wish I was young enough to do it all again." It sounds to me that he was a man who loved his life's work. Sutton ran the firm until he approached retirement age and decided in 1990 to merge his agency in with Maris, West & Baker which had been formed in 1970 by Gerrit Maris, Norman West, Roy Baker, and Harry Brown. Today, Maris, West and Baker is a full service advertising agency with twenty two employees.

Sutton's son Peter joined Gordon Marks & Company in 1984, and he transitioned to Maris West & Baker with the merger. In 2005, Peter was named President of the firm and stepped into the legacy of two generations of advertising agency leadership. In 2010, Peter joined his father and grandfather in receipt of the prestigious Silver Medal from the American Advertising Federation. Their firm has represented many notable clients over the years including Deposit Guaranty National Bank, Entergy, Newk's Express Café, Mississippi State Department of Health, Jackson Convention and Visitors Bureau, and Thermo-Kool. Interestingly, they developed the State of Mississippi's logo, and they were the first Mississippi agency to launch a website for a client. Peter stressed that their firm doesn't like to be a thought of as a "vendor" but instead as a "partner" with their clients. They noted the high trust factor that they have with their clients, and how they like to be integrated with their clients' marketing departments.

In speaking with them and learning more about their business, I observed some of the key principles of building trust that they have successfully applied in their business. First, do great work! Sutton noted that his father had taught them to always, "hire talented people, train them, and put them in right role to do great work." Secondly, get results! Peter noted that, "we focus on the metrics and the

return on our client's investment in advertising." Thirdly, be honest! Peter shared that they are candid with clients and try to be the best objective advisors they can be. As he noted, "it is ultimately a disservice to tell a client just what they want to hear." Finally, keep your promises! The advertising industry, just like many others, is driven by very tight deadlines. They emphasized that is always important to give realistic promises to clients on deliverables and to keep your promises.

Even though the advertising business has radically changed since Gordon Marks first started his firm in 1939, the basics of building trust have not. These three generations of advertising executives are a good example of the success that can come when you build solid trust and long standing relationships. The good news is that we all have the ability to apply the principles of building genuine trust in our relationships. It is not always easy, but in the end, it pays great dividends both personally and professionally.

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