

# Case Study

PARTNERING

intelligence

## Client Profile

Bank of America

## Building Trust in an Outsourcing Relationship

### Business Issue

What elements are really necessary to make an outsourcing partnership successful over the long term? That's what Bank of America learned when it decided to outsource its human resources functions to start-up, Exult, Inc. (now Hewitt Associates) in 2001.

"We were very concerned about the difference in size of our two companies," said Mary Lou Cagle, the bank's vice president. "We had the ability to run over a smaller company like Exult. We have an excellent history of doing mergers and acquisitions. But not partnerships." However, they were aware that outsourcing fails without a win/win relationship.

### The Solution

To level the playing field and build a framework for their alliance, they hired Stephen Dent of Partnership Continuum as their partnership coach.

"The relationship is the key thing," said Cagle. "We knew Exult would be able to get the tasks done. But, in the long run, it's trust and the relationship that will cause us to be successful."

"We knew how to gobble up companies, but we didn't know how to partner," said Mary Lou Cagle, the bank's vice president. The bank's history of growth through excellence in mergers and acquisitions didn't include a model for creating win-win relationships.

With Dent's guidance, the two companies learned to

- Build trust
- Give and receive feedback to understand what each needed from the alliance
- Treat each other as equal partners
- Treat their alliance as a new business for both of them, with its own culture, principles, and strategies

Using Partnership Continuum's partnering tools, the two companies built a new framework for their day-to-day interactions. The leadership teams of both parties went through a day-long exercise where they each came up with their individual vision, mission, and strategies for the alliance. This exercise was important in revealing to each other what they each needed from the partnership.

The next step was to build a joint strategic framework representing the best thoughts for their alliance. The bank established dedicated resources to build this framework for our alliance. In addition, the bank established a business integration team, with its team leader as the day-to-day person helping the alliance run. For every process, there was a business integration person at the bank matched with an equal person from Exult.

## Results

Their framework makes them both equal partners in their new business. According to Cagle, this is not a client-vendor relationship. In fact, it is an award-winning relationship (<http://www.outsourcing-journal.com/feb2002-steps.html>).

Asked to describe why their arrangement works so well, Cagle said, "People and relationship. What often takes years to develop, the bank and Exult accomplished in just a few short weeks. We learned to build trust and express what we both need from the partnership. It's about self-disclosure and feedback. We have a process by which we can resolve conflict because we are learning to talk the same language."

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In the twenty-first century, businesses that develop, sustain and profit from partnerships faster and better will attain organizational success. At the core of any successful business are people. After all, businesses don't partner; people do. Developing the partnering intelligence of your people is what we do.

Partnership Continuum, Inc. mobilizes your relationships with employees, customers, suppliers, and even competitors in surprising and rewarding ways. Our unique and innovative programs and products lead to higher productivity and stronger relationships enhancing your partnering capability through building trust, positive exchanges, respectful interactions, beneficial outcomes, future potential, and leadership excellence.

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