# The Second Time Around

By Kathleen Goolsby

"Love is lovelier the second time around . . ." or so claims the lyrics in the Sammy Cahn song, "The Second Time Around," recorded by Frank Sinatra and dozens of others. In reality, this sentiment often proves untrue when it comes to partnering relationships. I have studied hundreds of outsourcing relationships for their keys to success and their root causes of failure. Simply put, in a failed relationship, the parties did not establish up front a partnering mind-set and behaviors before they began working together.

Failure then starts to evidence itself in relationship characteristics such as the service provider's inflexibility in working with the client's changing business needs; the client feeling the provider nickels-and-dimes the client at nearly every step; and neither party trusting each other to do what they promised, or to communicate openly and honestly, or to be committed to each other's success. Not limited to just outsourcing business models, these characteristics also show up in other types of failing partnering relationships.

A new partnering relationship that follows on the heels of a prior failed relationship is often more challenging than the one just ended. That's because, when things go wrong in a relationship, it's natural to blame the partner for the problems and not look at ourselves as part of the underlying cause. This mistaken perspective leads to a decision to establish the new relationship in a framework of constraints designed to prevent the new partner from possibly repeating behaviors that occurred in the first relationship. In doing so, we make the first mistakes in the new relationship: we make decisions from a past orientation and we don't establish a foundation of trust with the new partner. Hence, we eliminate two of the Six Partnering Attributes, which are essential building blocks for success; so we set up the new partnering relationship for failure.

Sure, we are to learn from our errors in life and do better the second time around. But in a partnering relationship, the second effort cannot be filled with constraints based on the unsatisfactory performance of a past relationship. This strategy simply "overmedicates" the symptoms (the other party's behaviors) of a prior failed relationship, does nothing to prevent the underlying problem from occurring again, and sets the stage for failure in a slightly different flavor from the prior relationship.

Obviously, organizations want the second relationship to succeed, but they seldom understand what this success requires. First of all, it requires trust, not chains of constraint. It is also important to talk about trust up front, before the seeds of failure have already germinated.

Here are four Partnering Intelligence guidelines for steps to take up front that will put the organizations in a position to walk together on a path to success:

1. **Talk about trust.** Both parties need to come to a mutual understanding or definition of trust. They need to discuss exactly what trust means to them and how it will be demonstrated in each other's behavior.
2. **Talk about the prior failure.** The party that just experienced a failed relationship should not hide that fact from the new partner. The best practice is to inform the new partner that it just exited a bad relationship. Together they should discuss the things that caused the prior failure and mutually establish some mechanisms to ensure those things do not happen in the new relationship.
3. **Ensure the partnership framework includes a mechanism for effective self-disclosure and feedback.** Both of these behaviors build open, honest communication, which is a hallmark of effective partnerships and essential to success. It also helps in building trust.
4. **Establish mechanisms for enforcing trust.** The new partners need to talk about and negotiate into their relationship management structure one or more mechanisms that will facilitate and enforce their agreement to demonstrate trusting behaviors and to discuss them again, as needed.

Summing up these guidelines, the parties must be willing to engage in trusting behaviors up front and enforce them on an ongoing basis. It's in their best interests to do so. Trust is crucial to building a mutually beneficial relationship that will remain strong enough to operate flexibly and collaboratively through challenges and opportunities that arise. Both parties must also be willing to talk about trust at the point in time when their behaviors fail to demonstrate trust, ensuring the discussion ends in a win-win manner with a re-alignment of their interests and a renewal of their commitment to mutual success.

To learn more about operating from a future orientation instead of making decisions based on a prior relationship, use the Partnering Intelligence self-paced Future Orientation workbook. To learn more about establishing and sustaining trust, use the self-paced Ability to Trust workbook. There is also a Partnership Intelligence self-paced workbook for establishing self-disclosure and feedback.

In addition, Partnership Continuum provides corporate consulting services for establishing highly effective partnering relationships as well as remediating troubled relationships.

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