

BI Radio

Episode 14 – Core Values at Work

00:00:00

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Kelsey Howarth: Hi. I'm Kelsey Howarth. A core IBM value is trust and personal responsibility in all relationships. IBM has worked hard to actively build and preserve relationships with all of the constituencies of our business, including clients, partners, communities, investors and fellow IBMers. So, today I'm joined by Mark Jeffries who has become a trusted advisor and communications consultant to some of the world's largest and most successful companies. Mark is a talented speaker who regularly appears as an image and communications expert on network television news, finance and lifestyle programs. Here, he joins me to discuss his new book, "What's Up with Your Handshake" and share tips on how people can convey a more open, trusted and respectful image in the workplace.

Kelsey Howarth: With me on the phone I have Mark Jeffries. Welcome Mark.

Mark Jeffries: Hello. Thank you for having me.

Kelsey Howarth: In your book, "What's Up with Your Handshake", you advise people on how they can use soft skills to win. In essence, the book shows ways that people can present an image that's open, generous, adaptive and thoughtful. Obviously, most people want this kind of image but why do so few people do this successfully?

Mark Jeffries: We all set out hoping to please our clients, to demonstrate that they can trust us and that in many ways we're going to be completely responsible for everything we do and say, but what often happens, when it comes to the point of the sell and let's face facts, that's what we all do, we'll sell the whole time, we forget all of that and we become obsessed by the message we're trying to put across. And, when that happens, we start to forget the person in front of us. And, the whole secret of strategic communication, or soft skills, is about relentlessly considering the person in front of you, what it is they want to see and hear, and then adapting your message to suit that. And, that's a great way to create a very high level of generous feeling, and open nature and real trust in a relationship.

Kelsey Howarth: In your chapter, on the five stages of successful networking, the first stage is establishing trust. Can you give us some tips on how people can quickly establish trust when meeting someone new?

Mark Jeffries: Trust is a toughie at the beginning, because of course, trust builds over time. Every time you demonstrate that you're a great person to do business with, you become as a result more trusted. But, if you think about how we make choices in our general lives based on a product we've never used before, we will trust perhaps what other people say. We might even trust a very impressive advertising campaign. So, it's about the message you put across, it's about how you act and behave in front of someone, and if you've got any mutual connection, it's about invoking those as well. The more little ticks you can apply to this kind of trust check box, the more the person in front of you is likely to trust you. But, it comes with time. So, initially it's all about your behavior. How you behave in front of someone, show that you have some of those trusting values, i.e. that you listen, that you respond to what's being said, you take notes and you act accordingly.

Kelsey Howarth: Originally the handshake was a symbol of trust. You were showing that you didn't have anything in your hands. Can we talk about handshakes a little bit? What's the proper etiquette for handshakes?

Mark Jeffries: Yes. We can talk about handshakes with pleasure. You know, I use the handshake as kind of a metaphor for the whole book, because the handshake very often is the first impression, and you only get one chance to make a first impression. The point I make is very, very simple. It's this: You notice something that's slightly askew, we take notes when something is not quite right, and so the handshake actually is very, very important. I mean, nobody ever corrects another person. You'll never meet someone and go, nice to meet you Joe, what's wrong with your handshake? You'll never say a thing. So, people go through life, their own life, believing they've got it right when in fact they have not.

Now, in the grand scheme of things, it's not a deal breaker, but it will tilt the scale against you slightly if your handshake is just a little off. So, it's important to get it right and getting it right very briefly is duration wise, a two second maximum, one, two release. In terms of if you're a guy, you've got to keep your hands nice and dry and there's a very simple solution for that, you just go in and rinse your hands with cold water before you shake anybody else's hand, and your hands are dry for like 20 minutes. The water obviously cools the hands down but it also acts like an astringent and it takes that clamminess away.

The other thing of course is strength. How strong should your handshake be? Well, the rule is simple. Just match strength. Match what's coming at you. So, if you are shaking hands with someone with a very delicate handshake, you don't want to be like a total fish but you don't want to crush their hand either. Match the strength that you find.

Kelsey Howarth: A key IBM value is the idea of preserving trust, even after a relationship ends. Do people generally consider this as much as they should? Are there simple ways that people can stay in touch and connected?

Mark Jeffries: Yes there are. I think you're right. I think a lot of people see a deal not happening often at the end of a relationship, or indeed something has gone wrong and there's a lot of bad feeling, and therefore that signals once again the end of a relationship. I believe very strongly that you should never burn your bridges, because you never know what's going to happen in the future. I used to work in television, and there was an old phrase in television which was simply this, be nice to people on your way up so that they will be nice to you on your way down, and that's because T.V. very much is like that. You get all the way to the top and people like to knock you down. Business is different, but you never know who is going to cross your path again in the future.

So, the simple rule is this, keep yourself on the radar. Even when a relationship has effectively ended, even if it's temporary, make sure you reach out and connect with that person, maybe once a month, a quick e-mail. And, you want to have some value in that e-mail. Maybe it's a link to a website with some interesting content. Maybe it's a cut and paste story from say the Wall Street Journal or a financial newspaper with something that you think might interest them. Just keep offering them these nuggets, and trust me, a year, two years down the line, they'll be back for more business.

Kelsey Howarth: Your book states that the one thing harder than becoming a success is staying one. Can you explain?

Mark Jeffries: Well, this is difficult, because you sell yourself hard to get up to the top, and whatever your product or your service is, you sell it very, very conscientiously and finally you get the deal, people think you're great and you're set, or at least you think you are. The problem is, all of those promises you've made, all of that good feeling you created and good will has to stay, it has to stay consistent and that's really hard. That means you've got to keep doing what you are doing for the rest of the business relationship or the duration of the deal. So, it's very easy with the excitement of the potential of the deal to sell yourself hard and become successful. And, to stay there is a little harder, because it requires you to constantly keep thinking about everyone, keep thinking about the deal that you've done but at the same time, be selling for the next deal and the deal after that and the deal after that.

Very simply, in the world of strategic communication or soft skills, you are always on. You never reach a point where you can go, done it? Fantastic! I can switch off now. You're always on and the problem is this. You can be the most successful, articulate, wonderfully mannered perfectly behaved person but one day you lose it. That's what everyone remembers. So, unfortunately, the difficult news is that you play the role for the entire career that you're choosing, which sounds difficult, but you know what? One you're committed to it, it's not that bad. Just remember, you're always being observed.

Kelsey Howarth: For more information on Mark Jeffries, please visit his website at markjeffries.com. That's markjeffries.com.

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Don Campbell: Hi, I'm Don Campbell, Chief Technology Officer.

Stephan Jou: I'm Stephan Jou, Technical Architect.

Andrew Kowal: I'm Andrew Kowal, Product Manager.

Don Campbell: So today, we'd like to talk about innovation that matters. So, everybody does innovation or claims to do innovation, but really what is innovation? And, how important is it? And, how do we determine whether it matters or not?

Stephan Jou: Well, innovation is very important obviously otherwise people wouldn't be purporting to do it. What I find is that it's harder to do innovation depending on the environment, so it becomes a challenge for a very large enterprise to continue to innovate, and because everyone recognizes this, it's important. There are things that need to be put in place to make that easier, to happen.

Andrew Kowal: But, large corporations got there for a reason, and you know, companies are kind of like sharks and relationships, and if they don't move forward they die right? And then, something else will take the spaces and take the money away from them, where they

do their business. So, it's important that they come up with new ways of fending off other people who are just as hungry for that next dollar as they are.

Don Campbell: But culturally, there has to be something in place to allow them to contribute in an effective way?

Stephan Jou: Yes. It's important to maintain that as much as possible and probably introduce new things to help sort of scale up the innovation process.

Andrew Kowal: And, the innovation that matters doesn't always have to be home grown either. Part of the way a company for example might choose to move forward into a new market space is identify innovations that others have made and move forward with them. People tout Apple all the time as being such an innovative company, and they are and some may say that more so than the likes of a Microsoft or whoever, who constantly copy, but where did Apple get the idea for the mouse? It was Xerox PARC. You know, it's an idea of sort of looking around and saying, hey, the whole idea of what matters is seeing some kind of technological innovation, a business model innovation and then applying it to the new space.

Stephan Jou: That's a good example of actually a pro of being a large enterprise. Sometimes the surface upon which you can innovate is much larger. Just because you are a bigger company, you have more resources available to you, you can almost do innovation at a meta level as opposed to always being the one guy who has to do everything from scratch.

Don Campbell: But, that environment, because it's so large has to be a little bit more prescriptive. You can't be quite as ad hoc about it, you can't have individuals sitting in their own offices or cubicles or working on various things independently without a way of sharing and communicating and joining forces when innovations really can be brought together and have more velocity and more strength.

Stephan Jou: Yes.

Andrew Kowal: Yes. Smaller organizations where things are certainly riskier, you can't hide from the market so much, because if you spend a lot of effort innovating on something and the market doesn't like it, you die, and it's like natural selection. But you know, the larger an organization becomes, it's easier to isolate some of these innovations. But, the problem too is that some of these innovations need time to foster and need money to foster. There is a reason why regrettably these super colliders and Hadron colliders and so on that they build are, you know, so monstrous, 27 kilometers dug out of the Alps and whatever they do now to do those kinds of tests. There are only certain organizations that can handle certain types of innovation, and so having a large organization doing that is good for the deep pockets too.

Don Campbell: And, I think you have to be willing to let things fail depending on how risky and how edgy you want to be, if everything you do in your innovation cycle is going to market, then maybe you're really not pushing the envelope enough.

Andrew Kowal: Some of the old chestnuts too like the glue that's used in Post-It Notes. It was supposed to be the perfect adhesive that would never come apart, and now you end up being hey, it's low residue and reusable and it opens up a new area. A little bit of basic science if you have the resources can lead to those kinds of, in that case I believe it was 3M, those types of innovations.

Stephan Jou: And, that's a great example. And, be willing to look at something that maybe has a slightly different outcome than the original purpose and be able to take that into a brand new area. That's innovation in itself, just recognizing that.

Don Campbell: So, how valuable is innovation just in and of itself that fact that you have a culture that supports innovation, keeps people's spirits up and keeps them wanting to work in your organization? Google does that a lot and they talk about having 20% of their time being accessible to projects that are outside of the normal business day, and that makes people drawn to companies like that because they know they get that opportunity. I mean, innovative thoughts and ideas really need to be mined. They need a place to go to where they know they can at least be given the opportunity and the support that they need. There is a lot of young minds that may be coming up with great new thoughts but wouldn't have a clue how to take a product to market or deal with down stream implications or all of those things around the business model, then they can make those innovations much more successful and they don't feel they have to do it all on their own. I think that's a big part about bringing out innovations in your company, not just hoping they will come out.

Andrew Kowal: And not, you know, literally -- somewhat literally reinventing the wheel. If within a trusted organization, you want to be able to innovate, it would make a lot more sense for people to innovate on incrementally on stuff that people have already done rather than having four or five people coming up with the same idea and running with it as far as they can and keeping in stealth mode until the last possible minute, which simply just causes confusion.

Don Campbell: And, for large organizations, you might be talking about crossing borders and time zones, and it's just not practical to understand what's going on in the development organization of a different country, even within your same organization, but understanding, you know, a place to go where you can find that information so you can learn to join forces and build something collaboratively. I think that's a big part of pushing an innovation forward.

Andrew Kowal: Now, some people would say, well, look at Apple. They hide their stuff altogether. When they're working on something new, they have, you know, these guys locked up in a bank vault type lab effectively to churn out these new ideas, but like how do you actually glean that kind of thing without being so opened that your competitors can just walk all over you? Is it the real protection time to market? Is that the real way to make innovation that matters? Just make sure that when you do innovate, you think about such things as well, somebody else is coming out with this so we better follow this path of dropping a particular idea into the marketplace?

I mean, bottom up, group think, groundswell, or whatever you want to call it, can generate a lot of really interesting ideas, but we all know cases where people run around that there's inefficiencies and so on and you know, does there need to be for a real successful innovation, you know, if you go up high enough, there's always one person. Does that have to be the case for innovation to succeed? For innovation to work?

Stephan Jou: I don't think so. I think there are different levels of innovation and I think we need to recognize that some of the innovation as you alluded to earlier isn't necessarily just a single project, it's more like taking what's available to you, and some of that may come from within your company, some of it may come from without, but clearly the larger the palette of innovation available to you, the better that meta innovation can happen, and the closer you'll be able to hit that market.

Don Campbell: So, innovation that matters, it's all about helping to drive the business forward, it's efficiencies, it's about exploring new markets, it's about enabling customers to be successful and more competitive in what they do with your products and services and technologies. There's a lot of white space out there, a lot of opportunity to innovate, so we certainly are recommending that companies put effort into it, put some budgeting aside for it, and turn out as much innovation as they can, because this is a great place to be. Thanks fellows.

Andrew Kowal: Thank you.

Stephan Jou: Bye.

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