

Key practices for cultivating virtual relationships

Your clients and staff look to you for support, inspiration, and confidence. Creating and cultivating connections beyond the traditional face-to-face interaction provides you the opportunity to extend your guidance, care, and expertise to help people persevere through challenging times.

Nurture your relationships

Show your care by reaching out and scheduling regular check-ins with your clients, individual employees, and team.

- Quick virtual check-ins with regular frequency can have a big impact. Use video whenever possible, but strike a balance. Too much video can be exhausting for everyone.
- Keep in mind, your clients and staff may be experiencing challenging situations in their personal lives. Always try to be aware of and sensitive to what they may be experiencing:
 - Understand they may feel insecure, uncertain, or resistant to changes happening around them.
 - And, remember sensitivities are heightened during times of uncertainty and people react to crises in many different ways; some react emotionally, others may take time to process.
- Share helpful information and give them a forum to ask questions.
- Don't make assumptions. Listen, engage to learn, and understand what's on their minds.
- Be intentional and deliberate. Let them know they are valuable to you!

Build trust

Spend time with your clients and team to get to know them better. Show them a personal side and give a glimpse into your life to build trust and provide comfort. Taking time to build trust leads to more authentic connections and deeper relationships.

- Let them see who you are outside of work by sharing a funny story or hobby which can lead to discovering shared interests and connecting further.
- Take time to hear what's on their minds and answer their questions. Employees may have new ideas to share or steps to consider, and you'll want to acknowledge their input as well. Listen to your clients for cues to uncover issues or concerns, or to discover new needs.
- Define what success looks like:
 - Talk with your clients about near- and long-term goals, reinforce positive sentiments, and discuss concerns or changes to consider.
 - Trust your team to be productive, set expectations in advance, and be clear about how you will measure success.

“We are not business people first, we are people first. We are parents, children (no matter your age), grandparents, uncles, cousins, spouses, partners, and friends. Our jobs are an important part of our lives, but they are what we do, not who we are. Our work doesn't define us.”

Walt Bettinger, President & CEO
Charles Schwab
San Francisco, CA

“I made a commitment to call every client of mine on the phone to check on them. To explain the details of the CARES Act to clients and potential clients, my family helped me create a funny video that brings viewers into our daily work-from-home life, while providing useful information.”

Cris Cabanillas, Partner
Monterey Private Wealth
Monterey, CA

Proactively communicate

Provide support by making sure your clients and employees have information that impacts them, or they might need.

- Know your audience. Do research and be prepared with relevant and timely information.
- Communicate openly and often.
- Bring information and updates to them, both in writing and verbally.
- Identify new ways to connect.
- Take time to have meaningful conversations with all clients and each employee on your team.
- Use multiple channels to communicate (video, email, text, IM, phone) and use the one that works best for the need. **Reminder:** Only use channels that are compliant with your firm's policies. Consider checking with compliance and legal counsel to advise of any risks associated with methods of communication.
- Make sure to always provide the best way and times to contact you.

“We’ve been sending two emails per week and hosting a weekly webinar with our investment team to respond to clients’ questions. We gave all of our clients the opportunity, leveraging online scheduling tool Calendly, to schedule check-in calls and video conference meetings with their advisors to review their plan and investment strategies.”

Joe Martin, Chief Client Experience Officer
Summitry
San Mateo, CA

Coach

Provide direction, coaching, and guidance.

- Help clients understand new ways of working together and employees understand new guidelines, processes, and what they mean for them.
- You might teach clients how to use new tools to communicate, or guide your staff through a change in policy, or reinforce expectations of them. Be a beacon of support as they navigate this new environment!
- Advocate by finding solutions and resources to work through uncertain times as well as anticipate challenges they might be facing, then make yourself available to them to discuss options and provide guidance.

“We make it a priority to check in with videoconferencing meetings every morning. We’ve also engaged an outside meditation expert who joins us every Friday morning to lead a 30-minute guided meditation. We’re trying to be creative to keep morale up and create a positive virtual work environment.”

Ryan Bouchey, Vice President
Bouchey Financial Group
Troy and Saratoga Springs, NY

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