



GET REAL

**17 WAYS TO
TRANSFORM
YOUR CLIENT
RELATIONSHIPS**



Foreword

The best thinking in business is internally conflicted.
And increasingly so.

On the one hand, the “best practices” and daily subject matter of all the best consulting and advisory firms is focused on data, metrics and behaviors. Call it hyper-rationalization.

On the other hand, business is increasingly obsessed with “soft” issues: think emotional intelligence, leadership, influence, body language, collaboration, and team building.

Sometimes, these opposing trends are united—schizophrenically, I would argue—in an attempt to apply logic and data to the study of the non-logical and emotional. Think databases behind Meyers Briggs, engagement studies, or the ultimate: Google’s Project Aristotle.

Andrea Howe has taken a different approach to unity, to great effect. In *Get Real: 17 Ways to Transform Your Client Relationships*, she has melded a logical checklist to a series of interpersonal issues. At the same time, those interpersonal issues are clearly linked to specific behaviors of daily business life.

The result is a unique, blended and harmonious approach to an old subject: client relationships. You can read these 17 pearls as daily meditations. You can also treat them as subjects for discussion and even, on occasion, data collection.

Any way you apply them, you’ll be transforming yourself.

Charles H. Green

Co-author of *The Trusted Advisor* and *The Trusted Advisor Fieldbook* and author of *Trust-Based Selling*

Author's Note

If there's one thing that has become crystal clear to me over the last 10 years, it's that conventional business wisdom is seriously overrated—especially when it comes to client relationships.

You know the old sayings: “knowledge is power,” “always be closing,” and “fake it ‘til you make it.” Well, here's a different take:

- **Curiosity is king.** Curiosity is a hallmark trait of a trusted advisor. It keeps your focus on others. And when people feel good about *themselves* when they're around you, they'll actually want more of *you*.
- **Stop selling; start helping.** Don't try to convince anyone to buy from you. Focus instead on helping them make the best decision for them right now, even if (gasp!) that doesn't include you. Do this genuinely and you'll win appreciation, loyalty, and (paradoxically) more sales.
- **Keep it real.** There's a lot of pretense in business, and a pervasive belief that saying what you really think is too risky. Getting real is not only OK, it's a great way to distinguish yourself from everyone else out there who's clamoring for your clients' attention.

At The Get Real Project, we believe that getting unconventional gets results. That's our bottom line.

And in the words of Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu, a journey of 1000 miles starts with a single step, which is why we've published this booklet. It includes one thought piece for each of the 17 points in our Get Real manifesto, accompanied by a "make it real" challenge for you—a single step towards a different kind of working world.

Imagine what would be possible if business people around the globe demonstrated the everyday behaviors that we believe in. Aspirational? Yes. Challenging? Without a doubt. Worthwhile? We think so.

Especially since there's never been a better time to get real.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrea". The script is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'A'.

Andrea P. Howe

Founder of The Get Real Project and
co-author of *The Trusted Advisor Fieldbook*



Contents

Page

Curiosity is king.

Why it's a problem that you know stuff 2

Stop selling; start helping.

Hate to sell? Good. Do this instead. 4

Business is personal.

What your mom can teach you about
business development 6

Humor and levity do more than break the ice.

Want a better relationship? Grab a Snickers. 8

Trust is non-linear and paradoxical; embrace the opportunity.

The #1 lesson golf can teach anyone about trust-building 10

Be quiet and listen if you want to be heard.

The surprising secret to being influential 12

Mistakes are inevitable; how you handle them reveals your true character.

Want a better relationship? Screw something up. 14

Being vulnerable takeschutzpah.

Want to build credibility? Try showing more weakness. 16

The soft stuff is the hard stuff—master it.

Don't be helpful—at least not in this way 18

Control is an illusion; the best moments are usually improvised.

A different kind of response to
a “deer in headlights” moment 20

No risk, no trust, no doubt about it.	
Try this small risk with big impact	22
It's your job to get comfortable being uncomfortable.	
Why I hate confessing and do it anyway	24
You get what you give.	
What baked goods can teach us about client relationships	26
Be human. Please.	
Trust lessons from a CEO's unexpected admission	28
Change begins at home. Work on yourself first.	
Are you ready for your close-up?	30
If you can't be yourself, change jobs. Or hire a therapist. Or both.	
Authenticity: How much of you is too much?	32
Keep it real.	
Are you rejecting people the right way?	34

CURIOSITY IS KING.

STOP SELLING; START **HELP**ING.

BUSINESS IS PERSONAL.

HUMOR AND LEVITY DO MORE THAN BREAK THE ICE.

TRUST IS NON-LINEAR AND PARADOXICAL {EMBRACE THE OPPORTUNITY.}

BE QUIET AND **LISTEN** IF YOU WANT TO BE HEARD.

MISTAKES ARE INEVITABLE; HOW YOU HANDLE THEM

REVEALS YOUR TRUE CHARACTER.

BEING *vulnerable* TAKES CHUTZPAH.

THE SOFT STUFF IS THE HARD STUFF—MASTER IT.

CONTROL IS AN ILLUSION;

THE BEST MOMENTS ARE USUALLY **IMPROVISED**.

NO **RISK**, NO TRUST, NO DOUBT ABOUT IT.

IT'S YOUR JOB TO *get comfortable*

WITH BEING UNCOMFORTABLE.

YOU GET WHAT YOU **GIVE**.

BE HUMAN, PLEASE. **CHANGE BEGINS AT HOME;**

WORK ON YOURSELF FIRST.

IF YOU CAN'T **BE YOURSELF** CHANGE JOBS,
OR HIRE A THERAPIST, OR BOTH. **KEEP IT REAL.**

CuRiosity IS KING

Why it's a problem that you know stuff

I grew up professionally in a world where knowing stuff was paramount (IT consulting) and I continue to live in a world where the same is true (professional services).

The more I learn about what it takes to have extraordinary relationships, the more I realize that knowing stuff is a problem. Knowing stuff is a way we all naturally guard against uncertainty, ambiguity, and our own fears.

The problems with knowing stuff about stuff:

- **It impedes curiosity.** When we know, we're less likely to inquire or wonder or muse. Yet being curious is a hallmark trait of a trusted advisor.

- **It cements our assumptions.** Confirmation bias is the tendency to look for, interpret, and recall things in a way that validates our own beliefs. The more we know, the more biased we tend to be.
- **It prevents us from taking risks.** If I already know (or think I do), I don't have to put myself in the vulnerable position of learning something, or admitting I'm actually not quite as sure as I'd like.

Side note: Paradoxically, confessing ignorance with clarity and confidence is one of the best ways to strengthen your credibility. My favorite line from Charlie Green's blog on this topic: "After all, technical knowledge can always be looked up; personal courage and integrity are in far shorter supply."

The problems with knowing stuff about people:

- **It puts them in a box.** Knowing others means we're more likely to confine them to past experiences.

Side note on this one: In workshops, I often hear, "I couldn't do/say that—he'd do/say this in response, and that would be bad!" Consider this: Assuming we know how someone will act or react is a profound act of arrogance that stops us from interacting in the very way that might actually invite a totally different response.

- **It stagnates the relationship.** When we know someone, we're less inclined to discover something new about them. And then we don't grow together.

To sum it up, being in a state of already knowing leads to narrow focus, disconnection, and arrogance. By contrast, unknowing builds relationships. Being constantly interested in our clients, customers, prospects, peers, leaders, suppliers, even our competitors, means we'll always be poised to learn, to positively influence, and to create connection.



STOP SELLING; START **HELPING**.

**Hate to sell? Good.
Do this instead.**

Everyone loves to buy. No one likes to be sold—not you, and not your clients. That’s for good reason, because “selling” gets a deservedly bad rap. Even in the dictionary, the verb “to sell” is linked to imposing, cheating, betrayal, and slavery. Yuck.

So if you hate selling, that’s good, because it means you have a natural aversion to doing something linked to manipulation, coercion, and general bad feelings.

Only there’s a problem, which is that you’re a professional, and by definition you have to sell. Yes, you. You may or may not have direct (or even indirect) responsibility for winning new contracts. You most definitely have to sell ideas to be effective in your role, whatever that role may be.

So now we have a conundrum. We have tension that's not the creative kind. And that's bad.

The antidote is ridiculously simple, really—so much so that it's easy to dismiss as a trivial platitude.

Are you ready? Here it is:

Stop selling; start helping.

In other words, when you aim to “sell,” don't try to convince them to “buy”—that's what leads to smarmy dictionary definitions and yucky feelings. Instead, help them make the best decision for them right now. That means do things like:

- Help them **see their problem/opportunity clearly** and accurately.
- Help them get **clear about what really matters** to them.
- Help them talk about it in **a useful way**.
- Help them **express whatever feelings they have** about it.
- Help them generate a list of options for **addressing their needs**—even (GASP!) options that don't include you.

As Charlie Green always says, people vastly prefer to buy what they need from people they feel good about. You can be that person by being a helper, not a Sales Guy.



{HELP}

BUSINESS IS *personal*

**What your mom
can teach you about
business development**

per so

If you're anything like me, you had a mom who insisted that you send a hand-written thank you note any time you received a gift. Oh how I dreaded sitting down to crank one of those out. It was, simply put, a chore.

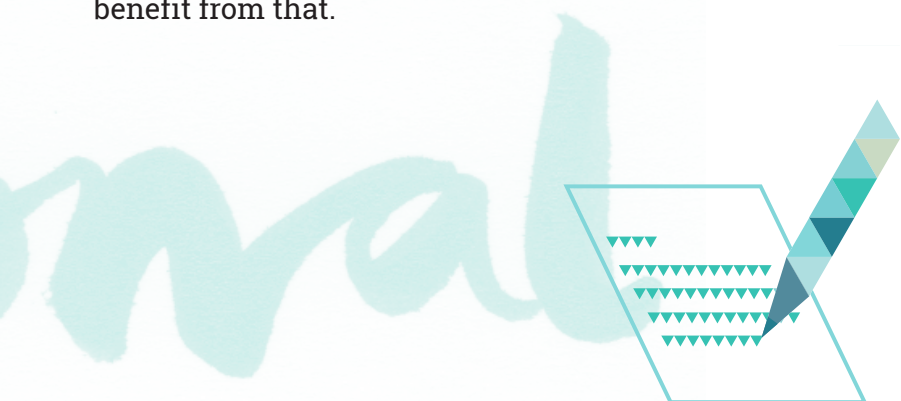
Decades later I'm ever-grateful to my mom for having me do something so many times that it's now easy and comfortable. Why? Because a hand-written note is a striking differentiator in today's low-touch, technology-driven world.

A handwritten message is also versatile. It's a great way to:

- Tell an existing client **something you appreciate** about them
- Share with a new acquaintance **something that struck you favorably** about your first meeting
- Let a past client know **they're on your mind**
- Brighten the day for **someone in a support role.**

It's all the better if you have to make a little extra effort to track down a good snail mail address; they'll know it really mattered to you that they get your communication.

Here's an added bonus: The brief time it takes to express yourself is time spent present to gratitude rather than everyday stress. I don't know anyone who can't benefit from that.



humor AND levity

**DO MORE THAN
BREAK THE ICE**

**Want a better relationship?
Grab a Snickers.**

hmm

If you're anything like me, you're guilty of taking business—and life—a little too seriously every once-in-a-while. (Actually, if you're like me, you take things too seriously a lot.)

Not long ago I got a status message from Dropbox that reminded me to walk on the lighter side of life:

Dropbox 3.0.5
Connecting...
Downloading 18 files
(0.2KB/sec, a long time left. Grab a Snickers.)

I like this message because it's unexpectedly light-hearted, casual, and funny. It's also honest. It's something a friend would say to another friend. More than a system tray message, it's a great reminder to relax a little, and to communicate with people in a convivial, approachable, and direct way.

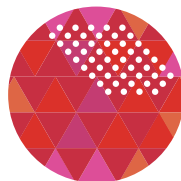
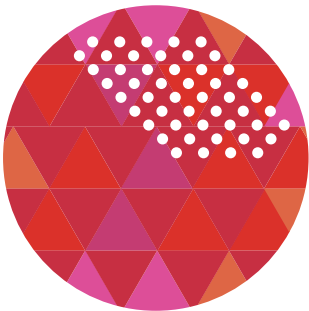
I know just about all my relationships—especially the ones marked by challenging circumstances—would benefit from a little levity. How about yours?



trust

IS NON-LINEAR AND
PARADOXICAL;
{ EMBRACE THE
OPPORTUNITY }

**The #1 lesson golf can teach
anyone about trust-building**



I am not a golfer. To me, the only logical way to get that tiny little ball to travel hundreds of yards off the first tee towards that tiny little cup is to hit it as hard as possible.

If you're a golfer, you just shook your head in dismay because you know what my strategy will yield: a nice left hook into a thick forest of trees.

Trust is like golf: neither makes sense. They're both rife with paradox, and the more we try to insist on bringing logic to the game, the less effective we'll be.

Off the green, the thing you're most afraid to say or do is precisely what will build the most trust. The best way to gain credibility is to admit what you do not know. The best way to close more deals is to stop trying to close more deals.

In other words, play it safe or hype your expertise or Always Be Closing and you slice the ball; take risks, be honest, relax ... and land it square on the green.

Trust is vexing in this way. It's also fascinating (at least to me) because of its seeming trickery.

Bottom line: it's ridiculously simple to build more trust: simply embrace its paradoxical nature by making a point to do the opposite of what your baser instincts tell you to do.



be quiet
AND **LiSTEN**

IF YOU WANT TO BE HEARD.

**The surprising secret
to being influential**

There's a very close relationship between influence and trust. In fact, there's one very specific aspect of trust-building that makes you more influential. It's a surprising one.

First, a quick recap. In the business of advice-giving, recommendation-making, idea-offering, or selling, it is not enough to be right—you have to earn the right to be right.

Now, the “how.” Most people assume we earn the right to be right by being knowledgeable, prepared, articulate—in short, by being credible.

Not so.

The key to getting your advice taken actually has surprisingly little to do with the content of the advice you give and everything to do with the context of how you listen to others.

Others will listen to you, and be open to your advice, point of view, and perspective once they feel they have been fully heard and understood by you. Even better if you're open to influence in the process.

And therein lies another paradox: want to influence others? Stop trying to influence them. Listen first.

LISTEN



**MISTAKES ARE INEVITABLE;
HOW YOU HANDLE THEM
REVEALS YOUR TRUE**
Character

**Want a better relationship?
Screw something up.**

Conventional business wisdom says, “Avoid mistakes at all costs.” I think that’s a bunch of hooey. Simple and unconventional acts, like being honest about screwing up, have the power to transform relationships.

For the record, I’m not actually suggesting you intentionally make mistakes as a way of getting more real in your relationships. I am suggesting that mistakes are inevitable and potentially even beneficial.



There's nothing logical about mistake-making as a relationship-builder. Put our left brains on the case and we'll conclude that making mistakes draws down on trust because there is risk: for example, it might prove we don't know what we're doing and can't be counted on to "get it right."

Enter the paradoxes of human relationships to help us make sense of it all. For sure, sometimes the risks have some pretty serious downsides. It's also true—and here's the part we usually forget, ignore, or under-appreciate—that there are upsides that often far outweigh the downsides, like:

- You become **accessible and real**.
- You show what you value (things like **honesty, quality, results**).
- You demonstrate that you're more **interested in making things right** than protecting your own self-interests.

All of which pretty much trumps the costs (tangible and intangible) of a goof.

Our screw-ups are an opportunity for us to show people what we're made of—to make known how we handle ourselves and who we choose to be in a moment of truth. Do the right thing and they'll learn they can count on you for far more than your intellect and charm.

actor

BEING vulnerable TAKES CHUTZPAH

**Want to build credibility?
Try showing more weakness.**

You've probably noticed my tendency to focus on the "squishier" aspects of trust-building, like intimacy and self-awareness. I do this not because they're more important (all four variables of the trust equation matter) but because I think the "soft stuff" needs more attention than business people routinely give it.

Now, I want to be sure credibility gets its fair share of the spotlight.

Here's my favorite piece of advice for building credibility: admit what you don't know.

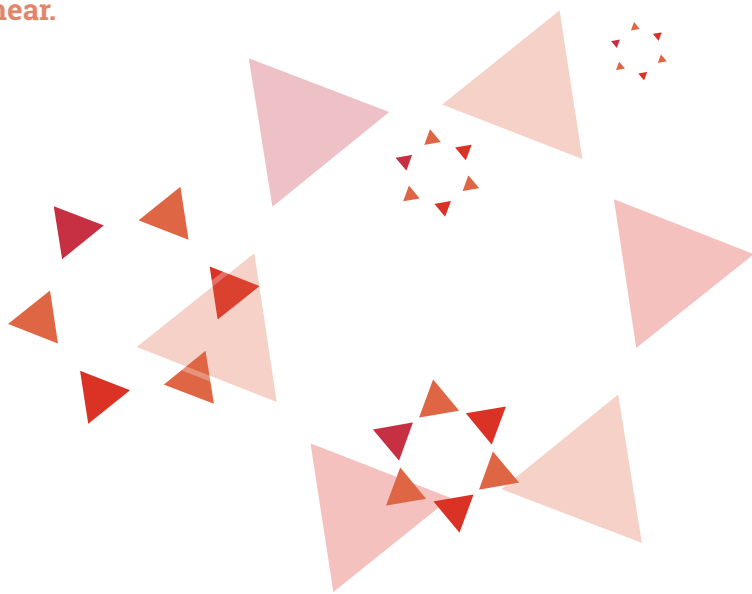
I've been in and around the consulting industry for nearly 25 years and I know very few consultants who are comfortable not knowing an answer to a question (myself included). Poor souls, we're burdened by the belief that clients not only want answers, they want the right answers ... and right away. This leads to a lot of well-intended bad behavior. Like ever-so-slightly exaggerating what we do know in order to fill in the gaps. Or allowing silence to cover for us.

The alternative is having the courage to say "I don't know" when you don't know—with candor, clarity, confidence. And therein lies the plot twist: when we're OK to admit what might be perceived as weakness, people see our strength.

"I don't know" builds credibility for one simple reason: it shows you are honest. Your truthfulness communicates something as important, if not more important, than what's on your resume: that above all else, you are someone who can be counted on to be real.

My co-author Charlie Green's version of this little piece of advice: freely confess ignorance. To quote Charlie, "After all, technical knowledge can always be looked up; personal courage and integrity are in far shorter supply."

Hear hear.



THE **Soft** STUFF
IS THE HARD STUFF
—MASTER IT.

**Don't be helpful—
at least not in this way**

I was searching through unfinished blogs the other day and found one to share with you. It's about how attempts to be helpful can backfire in a big way.

This is a story about a time I called an airline's customer service desk because our car broke down on the way to the airport, making it clear that hubby and I weren't going to be getting my very homesick stepdaughter back to her mom 1,000 miles away—at least not that day.

I called the airline twice. On call #1, here's what I said (slightly desperate):

"Our car has broken down and we're waiting for a tow truck, which means my step-daughter won't be able to make the flight that's taking off in about 45 minutes. I'm hoping you can help me figure out next steps and options."

(Probably too much “back story,” as my husband calls it. Anyway ...) Here’s how the customer service rep replied:

“Confirmation number?”

On call #2, here’s what I said (defeated):

*“Our car broke down and we had to get towed home,
which means my step-daughter missed her flight home.
I’m calling to re-book her flight.”*

(Less back story—I do improve with time.) The (new) customer service rep’s immediate reply:

“Confirmation number?”

Really? That’s the best you can do? You who profess to be all about “luv”?

I’ve written before about the importance of empathy, and the specific impact it has on our business relationships (there’s a direct tie to influence, among other things). I think this story is an important one to tell because we’ve all been that call center rep. The great empathy famine isn’t limited to people who are trained to work from scripts. Case in point: I see robotic responses every time we drill listening skills in our workshops (remember that one?)

The intentions might be good: “Give me information so I can help you as quickly as possible.” The subtext is not good: “You’re a confirmation number, not a human being.”

Fixing it wouldn’t have taken a lot of time. A simple, “Oh no!” to start would have been enough. That might be enough for your customers, too.

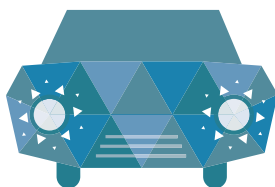
What that means, though, is you have to first see the opportunity to create connection, then *seize* it.

THE BEST MOMENTS
ARE USUALLY
IMPROVISED

**A different kind of response to
a “deer in headlights” moment**

One of the best lessons I’ve learned from the improv comedy workshops I’ve taken is a new and different way of getting through a “deer in headlights” moment. (I don’t know about you, but I experience these moments on a regular basis, with varying degrees of headlight brightness.)

The lesson, in short, is to be willing to put my thoughts on loudspeaker.



Take this example: I'm speaking to an audience of 900 (or any audience, for that matter, it just seems that I feel more pressure to impress them the bigger they get) and have forgotten what I'm going to say next. My years of consulting "training" has me thinking, "Don't let them see you sweat; just keep talking and you'll find your place again." My improv experience has me saying out loud, "Well, shoot, now I've completely forgotten what I was going to say next."

Other examples:

When a client asks a question I'm not prepared for:
"Oh how I wish I had prepared for that question."

When a client says something and I have no idea how to respond: **"I have absolutely no idea how to respond to that."** (Accompanied by a self-deprecating chuckle when it's genuine and appropriate.)

The problem with the consulting thinking for any of these situations is that I stay frozen in the headlights, distracted by the panic—mild or extreme—as I struggle to find my way. Meanwhile I'm partially present at best.

The beauty in the improv approach is two-fold:

- 1. I almost immediately get unstuck.** It's as though someone graciously cuts off the headlights.
- 2. Others almost always laugh,** or at least relax a little. I become someone they can relate to, rather than someone who's trying to impress them.

To be sure, I don't always rise to the occasion. There are times when, in hindsight, I realize I should have simply said what I was thinking. Regardless, I continue to work the muscle because I know I get better at improvising by practicing improvisation, and because when I do muster a different kind of response, I'm invariably reminded of the power of being real.

NO **RISK**, **NO TRUST**, NO DOUBT ABOUT IT.

**Try this small risk
with big impact**

Have you ever forgotten someone's name? Like, maybe, right after you learned it? Or worse, when you've known them for months/weeks/years and you have no good excuse for your inability to summon it up?

And when that happens, what do you do?

If you're like most people, you dance around it. You find any way possible to avoid admitting your blunder.

That's not your only option. In fact, practicing a different response has benefits that go far beyond your relationship with what's-her-name.

Try this instead: admit your predicament. Say something along the lines of:

"You just told me your name and I've already forgotten it."

"I'm awfully embarrassed to admit that I can't remember your name."

"Your face is so familiar and I can't for the life of me remember your name!"

The confession approach is not only a great way to get better at the whole name thing (small muscle), it's an important way to walk the talk of a trusted advisor (big muscle). Why the significance? Because it's taking a risk. Telling the truth. Revealing your humanity—which, interestingly, usually makes others much more at ease doing the same with you.

Get comfortable (or at least more comfortable) with the name thing, and you'll find yourself better able to take bigger and bigger risks—the kind that definitively set you apart from the pack.

Side note: I'm pretty good at remembering people's names and I'm often asked, "What's your secret?"

It's a two-part answer. Being willing to admit when I've forgotten is one part—it takes the pressure off, plus I can get a refresher when I need it. The second part is repetition/practice. I make a point to call people by name as often as I can without being weird about it—from participants in my workshops to help desk reps who answer when I call.

And when someone's name is pronounced in a way I might not easily remember (and will want to), I make a note. In other words, there's no magic in it; I'm just committed to it.

IT'S YOUR JOB TO
get comfortable
WITH BEING
UNCOMFORTABLE

**Why I hate confessing
and do it anyway**

I've been thinking a lot lately about the power of confessions. I don't mean the criminal or religious kind; I mean garden-variety acknowledgments and admissions. They have a curious relationship to trust-building.

I've confessed a few times recently.

Last week I confessed to failing to write a Weekly Tip because I'm still muddling through a renewed commitment to work/life balance.

The week before I emailed a client I hadn't reached out to in nearly a year. I was tempted to avoid the communication all-together because (1) it had been a long time (2) I was embarrassed that I didn't know if he had retired as planned

(in which case his retirement came and went without any acknowledgment from me). I texted someone who was “in the know,” and learned that he had chosen a big and unexpected promotion over retirement. Then I wrote to him. I was tempted to (only) say, “I’m tardy to say congrats on your promotion!” Instead, I also confessed my embarrassment that I had to ask someone where he was.

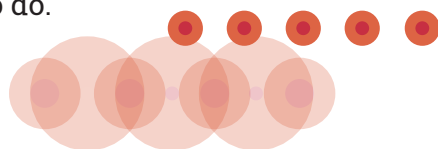
I’ve also missed opportunities to ‘fess up, to keep the record straight. Just last week I failed to follow my own advice about admitting uncertainty about someone’s name. (And while I just confessed that to you, the real power would have come from confessing it to him.)

When I do confess, there are three things that seem to be true:

- **I’m almost always uncomfortable doing it.** It feels risky. I much prefer for people to think of me as organized, knowledgeable, and other-focused. It’s not easy to confirm that’s not always the case.
- **My best confessions are honest and simple.** Too much “Oh I feel so terribly” and it starts to be all about me, which takes the attention away from where it belongs.
- **Confessing is almost always well received.** I got three times as many personal replies to my Weekly Tip email as I normally do, all encouraging and appreciative. And the promoted client answered me within hours.

We assume that by admitting something unfavorable we’ll lose trust, when it’s usually the opposite. Vulnerability is paradoxical. And it’s dramatically different depending on what viewpoint you take. Vulnerability expert Brene Brown reminds us that we experience our own vulnerability as weakness while others experience it as courage.

The key is to take a deep breath and do the opposite of what our baser instincts tell us to do.



**YOU GET
WHAT YOU**

GIVE.

**What baked
goods can teach us about
client relationships**



Five years ago I was surprised by a knock at the door—an unexpected delivery of baked goods from a local sweet shop. The package included a hand-written note from Kacy, the office organizer I had hired exactly one year before. The sweets were to commemorate my first anniversary in my new home office, with a reminder that she was available should any lingering piles be in my way, and a no-obligation request to tell others about her services if I was so inclined.

I immediately logged onto Facebook (well, by “immediately” I mean right after I ate a cookie) and posted kudos for Kacy, along with a link to her web site. (And I’ve referred her many times since. For years.)

While this might seem like a great marketing story, don’t be fooled; Kacy’s actions are as much about deepening client relationships as they are about marketing. And anyone in any role can learn and benefit from her best practices.

In the parlance of the trust equation, Kacy’s gesture was a clear demonstration of high intimacy and low self-orientation, with a little dash of credibility in the mix as well:

- Kacy **acknowledged me**, in a very personal way
- She let me know **she cared about me**—enough to keep track of, and commemorate, the anniversary of our work together
- Kacy was **generous, without expectation of return** (which, by the way, is why I felt inspired, not obligated, to refer her)
- She had the **confidence to ask for more work**.

Plus there’s one other great lesson here: **Being in touch with clients takes focus and effort, not time**. One touch-point in a twelve month period might be plenty, if it’s the right touch point.



BE HUMAN.
please.

**Trust lessons from a CEO's
unexpected admission**

plea

The CEO of a company I work with recently did something unexpected when he stopped by the class I was leading on *Being a Trusted Advisor*.

He was late by nearly an hour—delayed by others during his prior meeting, which apparently was a doozie. Most leaders would put their game face on, glide in with a brief apology (or not), and proceed to give their talk. This CEO didn't do that.

Instead, he came to the front of the room, greeted everyone, and said, "I hope you'll bear with me for a few minutes. I'm winding down from another meeting."

He said it with humility and quiet confidence. It was a simple, authentic gesture.

Within no time, it was clear he was fully present for the group. And I believe the messages he subsequently delivered were more poignant and powerful because they were delivered by a CEO who also happened to be a fellow human—prone to stressors and distractions like the rest of us, only unlike most of us, willing to admit them.

This CEO's transparency is a form of improv, which I've been writing a lot about lately. It's "thinking out loud," which you can practice, too. Feeling distracted? Say something briefly about that. Concerned about the impression you're going to make? Acknowledge it, with your own humility and quiet confidence.

You'll get focused and be more accessible as a result—qualities that help build trust in any relationship.

CHANGE BEGINS AT HOME.

WORK ON
YOURSELF
FIRST.

Are you ready for your close-up?

your

And now, the spotlight is on ... *you*.

Self-awareness is the basis of Emotional Intelligence and the basis of leading with trust.

To know yourself is to be cognizant of your full inventory of weaknesses, triggers, hot buttons as well as strengths, interests, and sources of passion and purpose.

I'm not talking about narcissistic self-obsessed perfectionism. I'm talking about achieving a level of self-awareness that paradoxically improves your ability to connect with others.

The more self-aware you are, the better you are able to manage yourself. Knowing yourself means you're less likely to act automatically from your blind spots and more likely to make choices that are consistent with what you value and feel passionately about.

How well do you know you? How often do you use that knowledge to be the best you?

IF YOU CAN'T
BE YOURSELF,
CHANGE JOBS.
OR HIRE A THERAPIST.
OR BOTH.

**Authenticity:
How much of you is too much?**

It's not unusual for a conversation about authenticity to come up in our workshops on trusted advisorship and trust-based selling—in the face of encouragement to be real, questions arise like, “How much is too much?” “Can I really be myself? Should I?”

All great questions, without one simple answer.

This very conversation came up recently with a group of super-smart engineers and scientists whose clients are often very senior-level government people, including some of the highest-ranking military leaders in the United States.

One participant chimed in passionately because our discussion reminded him of someone who used to consult with one of his clients, a Navy Admiral. This other guy's regular attire included a ball cap and an earring.

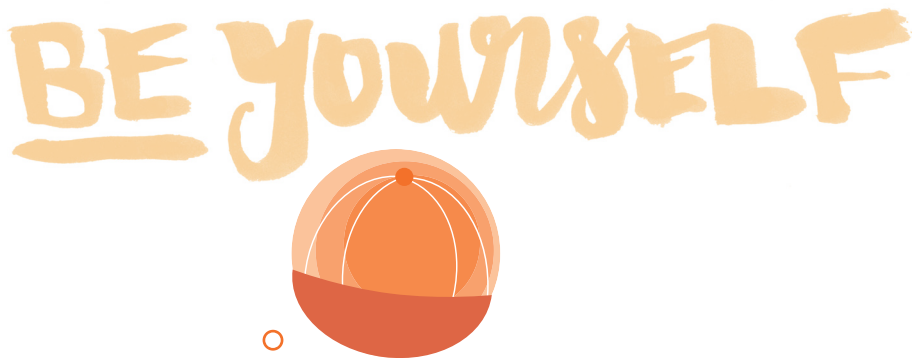
"Here's the thing," said my workshop participant, with a tinge of wonder, "The Admiral loved him."

This led to a lengthy discussion—as is often the case with super-smart engineers and scientists—about *why*. What was it about this guy? Was he effective because he was different, and stood out? (And if so, what does that mean for me if I'm more of a suit person?) Why didn't the Admiral interpret it as disrespect?

Here's what we finally concluded: his shtick worked not because it was different, but because it was authentic. He wore the attire that was most comfortable for him. (In other words, it wasn't a shtick). He didn't flaunt his clothing choice in an in-your-face way that said, "I don't respect your authority"; he wore his accessories quietly in a way that said, "This is who I am, Sir." Integrity was his motivation, not irreverence. And his interactions were consistent with that message: he was real while also being respectful.

In short, Ball-Cap-and-Earring-Guy was simply being himself, which had the curious effect of making the Admiral more comfortable being *himself*.

This strikes me as the ideal we're all striving for: being us in a way that honors and serves others.



KEEP IT REAL

**Are you rejecting people
the right way?**

Once when I was leading a workshop we got to talking about how to deliver rejection messages: you weren't chosen, your recommendation wasn't accepted, you aren't getting the special dispensation you asked for. These are difficult messages to both send and receive. How you approach them speaks volumes about you.

The conversation reminded me of a Real Rant I once wrote about a rejection letter I had received from a committee for one of those mega-conferences, letting me know my speaker proposal had not been accepted. The letter was unbelievably polite. And therefore so very painful to read.

I knew from the first sentence that I hadn't been chosen, although the actual "you weren't chosen" message didn't come until waaaaay down the page.

Here's what the well-meaning conference committee wrote:

Dear Andrea: Thank you for submitting a presentation proposal for the XYZ Annual Conference being held <date> in City, State.

Each proposal was given careful and deliberate consideration ...

It went on for many sentences before they said what I had figured out as soon as I started reading.

Here's how I wished they had opened my rejection letter:

Dear Andrea: I wish I had better news. I'm sorry to say your proposal for ABC Topic was not selected this year for the XYZ Annual Conference being held <date> in City, State.

There's more to it (both the letter, and my re-write). The key lesson: Rip off the Band-Aid. Do it with compassion, for sure. Just please do it. We all have a tendency to take far too long to say what needs to be said, and then say it overly politely, and formally, when a little humanity would do a world of good.

Good intentions don't automatically make for good trust-building. Good risk-taking pretty much always does.



MAKE IT REAL

An action to take for each of the 17 points in the Get Real manifesto.



We're a big fan of running experiments here at The Get Real Project: a defined set of time when you try out a new behavior or practice. An experiment can last a day, a week, or a month. The key is it's finite, which means you don't have to commit to a lifelong change. Somehow, this makes it more palatable to just try it out for a bit, and ironically makes it more likely you'll actually make a lifelong change.

Here are 17 "make it real" challenges for you, one for each point in the Get Real manifesto. Choose the ones that grab your attention and interest, and then make an experiment for yourself or your team (or both).

1. Curiosity is king.

Look for every opportunity you can find to discover something new—about the world, about other people, about yourself. Make a quick list of what you learned at the end of each day.

2. Stop selling; start helping.

Set a different kind of goal for every meeting you have: to help your clients or colleagues make the best decision for them right now. What changes about your approach? Your experience? Your results?

3. Business is personal.

Send three hand-written notes of thanks or appreciation.

Tip: I like to have a stack of assorted stationery on hand in my office. I also tuck a few blank note cards into my travel folder—they're a great way to fill time during takeoff and landing.

4. Humor and levity do more than break the ice.

Look for opportunities to bring some merriment to your interactions. (Yes, I did indeed say "merriment.") How might you be a little friendlier? A little more approachable?

5. Trust is non-linear and paradoxical; embrace the opportunity.

Notice when your baser instincts get triggered: fight or flight, self-preservation, the instinct to win. If you can shift the dynamic in the moment, great. If not, that's OK; self-awareness is nine-tenths of the battle. Are there patterns in your own reactions and behavior? What sparks a less trustworthy reaction for you?

6. Be quiet and listen if you want to be heard.

Get curious. Bring to mind an upcoming opportunity to be influential with someone (or a group). What point of view are you bringing to the table? State it crisply and simply. Then, put your point of view aside and do the really important work: reflect on what you are curious about. What do you need to find out that will help you thoroughly understand and appreciate their perspectives?

7. Mistakes are inevitable; how you handle them reveals your true character.

Own up to a mistake—recent or otherwise. Be responsible and apologetic, not defensive and guilt-ridden. Don't justify or blame, just do what you can to make it right (which might simply be 'fessing up in the first place).

8. Being vulnerable takeschutzpah.

Notice every time you're tempted to put a little spin on your response to someone, or to tell a little lie by omission—at work or at home. Just notice. Then script in your head what it would sound like if you responded in a more direct way instead. (Bonus: do just that.)

9. The soft stuff is the hard stuff—master it.

Catch others in the act of doing empathy right and wrong. (Awareness is Step #1, and sometimes it's easier to see things in others first.) Then see if you can catch yourself. Are there patterns behind when you're more empathetic ... and less so?

10. Control is an illusion; the best moments are usually improvised.

Do what we all love to hate: role play. Get together with two colleagues and rehearse a conversation. Have one of you be the client, one the listener, and one the observer. Alternate roles. Practice navigating the twists and turns of the discussion. When you're not sure what to say or ask, say just that. What's it like—for you and for them?

11. No risk, no trust, no doubt about it.

Practice referring to people by name, and practice admitting when your memory fails you. What's it like for you? What does the experience teach you about bigger risks you might take with the people in your life?

12. It's your job to get comfortable being uncomfortable.

Look for opportunities to confess a little something you might be tempted to gloss over. What's it like for you? What kind of reaction do you get?

13. You get what you give.

Think about clients with whom you'd like to stay in touch. Make a list. What meaningful milestones might you track and acknowledge? What gesture might you make that's distinctive, genuine, and simple?

14. Be human. Please.

Think about leaders you've experienced who are powerful presenters. What made them memorable for you? What traits might you emulate?

15. Change begins at home. Work on yourself first.

Take time to get to know yourself a little better. Journal about what matters to you. Take a self-assessment and reflect on your results. Ask a trusted colleague for their best advice to you. Or all of the above.

16. If you can't be yourself, change jobs. Or hire a therapist. Or both.

Look around your life for people who have a particular (and effective) way of expressing themselves. What can you learn? How might you be more of you?

17. Keep it real.

Aim to be more direct when you have to deliver bad news. Find a way to bring your humanity into the mix—whether that's compassion, vulnerability, humor ... or all of the above.

REAL.

ABOUT THE GET REAL PROJECT

The Get Real Project is a platform for founder Andrea Howe's mission: to kick conventional business wisdom to the curb and transform how people work together as a result.

Andrea is the co-author, with Charlie Green, of *The Trusted Advisor Fieldbook*. A recovering IT consultant, she has dedicated the last decade to teaching people in consulting and sales how to reap rewards by mastering the “soft stuff” and getting relationships right.

Andrea and the Get Real team are best known for their signature programs on *Being a Trusted Advisor*, *Trust-Based Selling*, and *Trust-Based Consulting*—thanks to their close and special partnership with Charlie and his company, Trusted Advisor Associates. They also teach professionals how to be great off-script by applying the best practices of improv comedy to everyday work situations.

Getting Real Just Got Easier

Want to take your client relationship skills to a whole new level of mastery? Visit www.thegetrealproject.com for some (free) places to start:

- Get our **Weekly Tips** delivered to your virtual doorstep, or access 100+ from our archives
- Download eBooks, recordings, and more
- Print your own copy of the **Get Real Manifesto**.

You might also benefit from **Trusted Advisor 24x7: The Video Series**, a 29-lesson set covering the essentials of trust-based business relationships (not free, but easy on the wallet).
www.trustedadvisor24x7.com

And by all means contact us directly if you'd like:
hello@thegetrealproject.com or 1.800.946.4395.

We'd love to get real with you.





THE
GET REAL
PROJECT