



Becoming a Value-Added Business Partner

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What can you do to help foster a business-partnering role that is viewed as value-added?

For years, CLOs have heard about the importance of being a “value-added” business partner. In fact, many have become respected and valuable business partners to fellow members of the C-suite. Unfortunately, many CLOs are better at talking about being a value-added resource than actually being one.

Take a few minutes to answer the following questions, and be completely honest. To keep it simple, use a scale of 1 (rarely/never) to 5 (always):

- When the top executive(s) of the organization or business unit are analyzing and making a significant business decision, am I included in the discussions and a part of the decision-making process?
- When a new strategic project is being planned that may impact all or a significant part of the organization, am I consulted as a key stakeholder to help determine implementation feasibility?
- Am I enlisted as a trusted adviser/sounding board/confidant to some or all of the C-level and other senior executives in the organization?
- When the financial performance of the organization starts to decline, are the key initiatives and services that my team and I oversee some of the last things to be considered for budgetary reduction?

If you scored between 16 and 20, your current behaviors and role positioning are likely adding value. If you scored between 12 and 15, there is some indication that you should begin rethinking your behaviors and repositioning your role. If you scored 11 or less, rethinking your current behaviors and repositioning your role should be a high priority. Although this mini-self-assessment is only meant to be a rough directional indicator of how you may or may not be viewed or treated as a value-added business partner within your organization, it may help you determine whether you need to improve this aspect of your role.

What can you do to help foster a business-partnering role that is viewed as value-added? Here are three key personal development strategies:

- **Listen Carefully and Patiently:** It’s easy for CLOs to fall into the trap of wanting to posi-

tion themselves as the expert or answer person, particularly when it comes to development and performance improvement issues. When consulted, are you quick to give answers or recommend solutions before you really understand the core business issue, problem or situation? When it comes to the art of listening, go beyond the executives you want to partner with and spend time listening to employees at all levels of the organization. It’s the people below the senior leadership level who can usually help you gain true insight into the organization’s real culture and operating issues that could impact key business decisions.

- **Ask Discovery-Oriented Questions:** One key question is often worth much more than a few quick answers or recommendations. Discovery-oriented questions actually help respondents discover the best option or solutions by allowing them to think about and reflect upon things they may have missed or not given enough consideration. As appropriate, a value-added business partner also will ask the challenging or confrontational questions that others may not be willing to ask because of their role, relationship or various political reasons. By establishing the understanding that all questions are acceptable if they can help produce a better business decision, you will be in a stronger position to be a real partner.
- **Offer Business Case Responses:** When providing recommendations or opinions, remember to frame your responses in a business case context, rather than in a human resources context. Discuss options and impacts in terms of how they will help to achieve the desired business results. It is critical that you consider the strategic, operational, technological, financial and people implications of every decision or recommendation.

Clearly, taking the lead in this manner will require you to take the time to develop and nurture a relationship with your business partners that is built on knowledge, trust and integrity. Not always a simple task, but well worth the effort when you achieve that much-deserved value-added status. ■

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