

# SHOULD WE TREAT PARTNERS LIKE CUSTOMERS?

TO BE OR NOT  
TO BE

THOUGHTS  
FROM LEADING  
GLOBAL PARTNER  
PROFESSIONALS



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## C.E.O. A

Partners are a vital part of our growth-strategy, no doubt. Our company holds intrinsic value because of the positive influence they drive through the business. But we are growing rapidly, and can't commit vast amounts of additional resources to these relationships. They are important investors, but our clients come first.

## C.E.O. B

Our partners are part of our team. Our company simply would not exist without the opportunities they drive through the company, so have advanced access to everything they need to sustain it. They are subject to the same high standards we expect from our colleagues and stakeholders, and share equally in our wins and losses.

Let the debate begin.

The old adage 'Partners are part of our team' holds true, but is that what every partner wants?

Do we need to start treating our partners like customers in regards to resource allocation, sales cycles, and touchpoint protocols?

I asked the global channel community that same question recently on LinkedIn, and the response I received was enlightening, to say the least.

So much so, I was compelled to take their comments and turn them into this eBook.

The deep knowledge on this subject by those who shared their POV deserved dissemination.

Big thank you to all the contributors here - your valuable insights to the channel & ecosystem community cannot be overstated

I hope you find these equal and opposing insights as valuable as I did.



## Vaughn Mordecai

**Chief Revenue Officer @  
Mindmatrix | Partnerships  
Guru | SaaS Sales Leader |  
Partnership Tech Evangelist**



Would that mean that "The partner is always right?" Hmm, definitely not. HOWEVER, we do have to build a really positive experience for them or we're going to get blown off entirely, which we don't want.

The power dynamics have switched. Used to be that the vendor controlled: "Tell them to do this" "Treat them like they're part of our team" "Have them do that" "Give them this collateral that we use with the sales team" etc. It just doesn't cut it. They're not part of your team AND THEY DON'T WANT TO BE.

They are businesses in their own right that want to be successful. If we engage them in ways that helps THEM make money, they'll engage with us. If we don't, say goodbye. Ciao Partner!!!



## Harald Horgen

**Revenue transformation for software companies and OEM/machine builders. Build an action plan and focus your team on your next-generation business model**



Absolutely.

Recruiting partners is the same process as direct sales to enterprise customers - understand their problems and how can solve them; set mutual expectations during the sales/recruitment process and meet them; have a customer success/partner management team that is focused on customer/partner satisfaction after you close the deal.

Think about much time and effort you would put into closing a \$250K subscription sale, and what you would invest to keep that customer happy.

Why wouldn't you do that and more to recruit and maintain a partner that might generate \$1million per year?



## Elena Zapolyanskaya

**Building b2b partner networks  
from scratch | Founder @  
PARTNER2B**



I'd say "no". Partners are:

- 1) lead-gen channel
- 2) your tool for offering expansion
- 3) CAC reduction.

All of those are long-term benefits. One single customer is more about short-term.

Loosing one partner is much more expensive than loosing one client. Meaning partners need more nurturing approach.



## Erick De La Fuente

**Orchestrating growth for  
service based businesses**



Might get hosed here for this but I disagree with the "treat them as part of your team" mentality. For me, it's akin to the "we're all a family here" corporate culture.

Your partners have other needs outside of your organization and thus you should set and have different expectations of each other than you would with your own team members.

My perspective is that you should market and sell to your partners in a similar way that you would to your clients. In a B2B services environment you need to build awareness with them consistently, ensure they understand and are interested in what you offer, you need to build trust and credibility with them, and be around consistently enough to be top of mind at the right time.

TLDR - your partners are your customers, just in a different context.



## Philip Walsh

**Passionate Sales Professional  
| Sales Enablement Expert |  
Elevating Teams to Peak  
Performance 📈 Drinks coffee  
(aber wie!) | Loves dogs**



As everyone says, Partners should be considered an extension of your team.....

But you should treat them like your most important PRPSPECTS

i.e. - continuous intelligence gathering (like a discovery call that never ends!) around how you can better serve their needs and never take their existence for granted.





## Djana Gas

**Lead Global Expansion @Yokoy  
⊠ Strategic Partnerships**



I think partners should be treated like part of your own team.

They are kinda extended family helping to make dreams come true- yours and theirs.



## Kent Henderson

**VP WW Channel / Builder of  
GTMs, Programs and Orgs  
from Scratch**



There should be a level of candour in partnership that supersedes that you'd typically have with a customer.

I'm not saying that we shouldn't be candid with customers, but partnerships must feature a regular revisit on the proverbial warts you wouldn't necessarily expose to a customer.

It's more of a "for better or worse, in richer or in poorer" relationship.



# Eleanor Thompson

**Activating Partnerships for  
Revenue Growth**

“

It depends on how you treat your customers



# Antonio Caridad

**Partnerships, Partner  
Operations, GTM Strategy,  
Partner Programs,  
Ecosystem-Led Growth**



Many are saying what I'm thinking.

They should be treated as part of your team. Period.

Now hopefully you treat your team appropriately and very well (as we know some orgs don't), so the hope is that the partner feels valued, part of the business, and important.



## Chris Murray

**Partnerships at Influ2 -  
Contact level advertising**



I think they should be treated as part of  
/ an extension to your own team.

I would say treat them better than a  
client as they're worth more to you than  
a client.

But that implies clients don't get the best  
service.



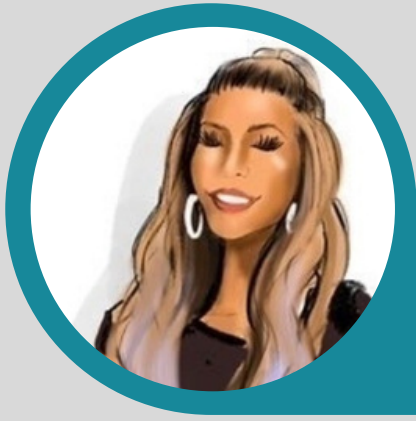
# Jennifer (Totten) Richey

**Partnerships Leader | Partner  
Strategy, Programs &  
Operations | Partner  
Development | Alliances &  
Channels**



I think that through-partner clients can/do/should receive the best service when you treat your partners as a priority.

Because they receive the amplified value of the partnership backed by the strength of your enablement and management of that partnership.

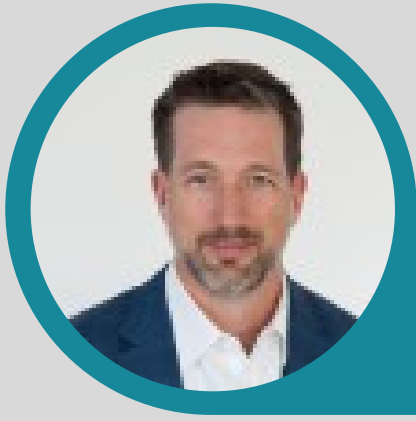


## Sharon Pare

**Senior Partnership Program  
Manager**



Partners who co-sell alongside to your to-be clients should be treated as if you/they are an extension to each others' respective teams; meaning transparency and consistent internal conversations as if you work in the same office.



## Patrick M. Ferdig

**Helping B2B SaaS Vendors,  
Agencies, and Service  
Providers Partner Better to  
Grow Faster**



No, the relationship is completely different. In fact, as I think more about it, there are almost no commonalities.

Different engagement model, connection points, different outcomes and expectations, and a completely different set of experiences that need to be curated.

From the day-to-day perspective, I think the foundational engagement element is quite different.

Let's put it this way: do sales or customer success reps naturally make great partnership leaders?





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