



Striving to deliver Outstanding Client Service

Building deep client relationships is challenging. Follow these 'keys for Outstanding Client Service' and you'll build enduring and trusting relationships with them every time.

If you're looking to run a successful business that takes great care of its clients, there are several principles of client service you need to follow. These are values, beliefs, and rules I've picked up over the years running B2B organisations and they've gone a long way toward building strong, enduring client relationships. Here they are...

- 1. Do what you say you are going to do.** For example, never keep a client waiting. Honestly, if you show up late, don't expect them to stay a client very long. Your 'word' needs to be your word. If you say you're going to do something or be somewhere at a specific time, do it, stick to it every time. People remember broken promises. Be a reliable and dependable professional. If we let them down in the same way repeatedly (twice or more), it will become a problem and cause dissatisfaction, keep it up and they will drop you like a school case and go find another company that sells the same stuff as you, and they'll get it from them.
- 2. Attitude is everything.** Who likes doing business with someone that is half empty? No one likes doing business with a draino, they always zap you of energy and often resources too. So you have to be 'up' and 'can do' every time or they will avoid you like the plague. I love what Chuck Swindoll says about attitude. *"The remarkable thing is that we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past... we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, that is our attitude. I'm convinced that life is 10 percent what happens to me and 90 percent how I react to it. And so it is with you... we are in Charge of our Attitudes".*
- 3. The client is always right (unless they're wrong).** Clients aren't always right. Many times they are, but not always. Ask yourself if it's worth falling on your sword to be right. If not, shut up. But if they're wrong and if being wrong is going to be harmful to them as an individual or company (let alone it is harmful to you or your company's reputation or credibility), see the next commandment. Don't always tell the client what they *want* to hear. Tell them what they *need* to hear. Most professionals appreciate candid conversations or advice when it is delivered the right way. If it is delivered in a good spirit and taken poorly, so much so that they walk away, so be it. You just can't help some people, can you?
- 4. Don't let the client hurt themselves.** Sometimes clients want to do stupid things. Sometimes they want to pay you a lot of money to do things for them that will hurt their organization. At times you have to say NO. Vehemently. Do NOT let your client do stupid stuff even if they think it is the right thing to do. If you know for sure (out of experience or research etc.) that what the client is going to do is stupid, tell them, even if they want to pay you a lot of money for their idea or for a particular strategy that they want to implement. You'll pay a much bigger price in the end (especially if it hurts the client). They'll actually respect you a lot more for standing up for your belief and or knowledge on the subject, and **not** just letting them do something harmful and taking their money, but rather helping them avoid problems.

5. **Know when to walk away and turn down work.** Sometimes a client has unrealistic expectations, sometimes they just don't want your help, advice or expertise, if they are not listening to you or are busting themselves to do it 'their way' – there will come a time when you must simply let them go, sometimes even if it means they sink. As painful as it is, some people won't walk away from their idea or concept till they feel the pain of failure. Also, if a client asks you to do work that you don't have experience or competency in, say no. Walk away. It won't work out well for anyone. Sure, you'll attempt to do the work, perhaps poorly, you'll take their money, but they won't be happy. That's bad all the way around. Remember a poor reputation lasts a long time after you clean up the mess. The best advice here is to point them to another company or associate that can provide what the prospect or client is wanting from you.
6. **Remember they're clients, not customers.** A customer is a transaction. A client is a relationship. Personally I try to build long-term close relationships with clients such that people think I'm an employee (part of the team). It is about having huge buy in... I believe it is very important for you to have total commitment to each of your client's absolute success. If you can't give it or they won't let you have the input to do everything you can to make them a success, again at times you may have to walk away. It might be painful to walk away, but there are always other prospective clients out there that want the relationship and the success that comes with it, so go find them.
7. **Stuff happens – so fix it.** Look - mistakes happen. Always be quick to credit their accounts or admit fault, everyone appreciates an apology, so make one, when an honest mistake is made – fix it right away. If they're the least bit dissatisfied, put a credit on the account. If they make contract or payment errors that benefit you, call them up quickly and return that money immediately. Honesty is always going to pay off. Besides it's not your money. Imagine they find the error afterward and you didn't bring it to their attention. It's about integrity, you must maintain it, personally and corporately.
8. **Avoid contracts.** Well not entirely... Yes, you should *have* contracts. Just avoid *referring* to them if you can. If you're referring to the contract to resolve a dispute, you're wrong. You've made it adversary. Talk like grown-ups and resolve differences without involving attorneys. It's cheaper and easier.
9. **Structure a deal so everyone's excited and everyone is a winner.** You should never take the last dollar off the table in a negotiation. Structure deals that are fair. Set pricing you're happy with and that they'll be happy with – ensure there is a great RIO for the client down the track. Be smart and ensure your client or prospect knows what's in it for them, and for you. Ensure the client understands your terms and conditions, no one likes surprises. If you look at pricing and feel cheated at the negotiating table, you should walk away from the deal if you can't maintain your reasonable price tag. Getting taken for a ride will kill the relationship. It's almost like taking poison – it's not going to end well. Come to terms that are agreeable to all - including yourself. Don't be afraid to walk away from work you feel it is unfair.

So there you have it, a few keys for Outstanding Client Service. Follow them and you'll move from having customers to having deep, long-term happy client relationships.

Keep pressing toward the Goal.

I'm reminded of what the scriptures say in the New Testament book of Philippians 3:12-13 in the NLT version...
12) *I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me.* 13) *No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead...*

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