

THE NATURE OF CLIENT VALUE

Consultants often congratulate themselves gratuitously on providing great service, caring about their clients, being trusted advisers, etc and ad nauseum.

Here is a simple but non-negotiable check-list to ascertain whether you are really providing premium relationship value — value by virtue of a client *relating* with you — over and above the type of general expertise that is almost certainly readily available through multiple sources.

1) Most of your conversations should be about client **outcomes**, not your methodologies, six step models, catchy jargon, or a nifty new template. Clients if they come from serious companies, have lives that are amply complicated already. Our job is to simplify complexity, help produce value out of the static...not add more of it.

2) Do your homework relentlessly. No matter how well you think you know that company or individual, prep for all key meetings, coaching conversations and the like, so a minimum amount of the time that is supposed to be earmarked for delivering value is spent catching you up or just giving you information you could have imbibed and thought about well in advance. Hit the ground running and chalk up as much progress via each interaction as possible.

3) Commit to the client's success, not your comfort level or peace of mind. Clients respect

courage and people who help them see and face things they otherwise might not have. What percentage of the time you spend with your clients is in this zone, rather than politically correct acquiescence or amiable tautologies that may provide some therapeutic reprieve or the equivalent of quinine water to their temples, without actually confronting challenges to tangibly advancing their goals and interests?

4) Be able to defuse ire, irritation and misunderstandings. If you're going to implement number (3), you will often set off sparks. Be able to calmly reframe the situation, and hang in there with them until the truly intended message makes it across. Your client says, "You keep telling me how I'm being ineffective as a coach. What about my people? Don't they have any responsibility?" You: "They do, and we'll define effective coaching on your part as effectively getting them to take that responsibility, rather than making your own life unnecessarily harder. Can we focus on that opportunity?" A smart client will get over bristling and realize there's real value here.

5) Make sure "success" is defined as business value not "project completion". You can satisfy the statutory requirements of "project success" and deliver no real ROI. The client won't be able to quibble, but they'll never hire you again. Ensure business value is tracked constantly, barriers to achieving it are tackled in real-time and pathways to raising the bar on it are

innovated and exploited as a signature of your work.

6) Be impeccable with commitments, assiduously timely with promised responses, unambiguous in communication, easy to contact and to be connected to, non-defensively open to course-correction (again as long as it relates to business value) and a world-class listener (if they don't get your prime attention, they will be highly dubious as to whether they're getting the best of your expertise either).

7) Deliver unanticipated value, but value relevant *to them*, as you get to know them. Then you can offer a real value add, not cosmetic "bonuses" that no one wants and which you can mindlessly dish out telling yourself you're doing so much for them. Be



Sensei is an international consulting firm that helps their clients deliver business results by improving human performance and optimising the value of team and leadership interactions.

We focus on areas where companies can raise the bar on performance, productivity and profit. We ensure that any work we do has clear line of sight to specific business outcomes of value to the organisation, so that a solid return on time, energy and investment is realised.

We are experts in the process of unlocking potential and focusing this in the right ways on the right aims; and we excel at emotionally engaging leaders and teams to own the change, take accountability for it and deliver it. In short ...
'We do the really hard part of the soft stuff.'

gracious, be generous — but first be humble enough to be curious and genuine enough to be empathic.

Don't just jump to attention and do everything asked of you. Be a true advisor and help them think through what they're requesting to ensure it will get them the value they anticipate. Your judgment is a critical part of the value you offer. Don't do this in a haughty way, shooting down their ideas. But do it in a collegiate manner, helping clients check assumptions, ensure data is valid, that we're not prematurely falling in love with the first idea we have, and *then* execute what's agreed with passion and professionalism. Saying later, "You asked me to do this," won't help if the action taken is counterproductive. We had best be there to help our clients get the best help from us they possibly can. They probably already have enough stooges in house.

9) Be an object of interest. Clients want to engage with people they enjoy, respect, possibly even admire in some ways. If you're a fascinating person, people will feel they get stimulus from their time with you, outside the professional engagement. That personalizes the interaction and provides the ultimate basis for rapport. You can't partner with someone you never get to know. You won't *want* to partner with someone who seems drab or one-dimensional. After all, the client may fear your advice and assistance may be as monochromatic as you seem to be. Flex your personality — not arrogantly, but openly and invitationally.

Run through these nine client engagement health checks. Assuming you're a competent professional who can add client value, these nine differentiators will allow you to scale the commanding heights of client value...by going up the client hierarchy of value. HJ Heinz opined that if we do common things uncommonly well, we will succeed. These are uncommon things alas — do them uncommonly well, and you'll occupy your own category with your clients — a special and rarefied one in which you each support each other's success.

Omar Khan, September 2009