

Column Title: **As The Saw Turns**

Article Title: **What Do Your Clients REALLY Think of You?**

Do you ever wonder about the answer to that question: What do your clients really think of your company, your products and services, your people? There are lots of ways to survey clients, from custom written surveys to generic online surveys (see www.surveymonkey.com) to focus groups to personal interviews. Companies like yours and mine employ many of these techniques in an effort to get a handle on how their clients think they are doing.

Some surveys are focused primarily on the product or service a company offers; its' level of quality, its' usefulness, how well it meets the clients needs, its' value vs. price, etc. Other surveys focus on the people involved...their responsiveness, knowledge, commitment, and so forth. Many of these surveys are very long and complex, requiring a significant time commitment on the part of the person completing the survey. All of them have their place and their level of usefulness.

An industry friend recently conducted his own survey of his client base, asking the audience to respond to only one statement: "If you want to keep my business, here is what I expect:" He was surprised that almost every client surveyed responded, and they went into vivid detail about their likes and dislikes...what to do and what not to do in a business relationship.

It was a simple survey with some pretty profound results. It's not rocket science, and you've probably heard much of it before, but it's certainly worth hearing again as you start another year in this business. So here are the top five 'do's and don'ts,' according to this survey:

"If you want to keep my business, here is what I expect":

Do Not:

- **Whine:** Excuses, excuses, excuses; stop with the excuses, just get the job done. I don't want to hear how hard it is to do or how long it takes to make it happen. I hired you to do it...just do it.
- **Fail to take “no” for an answer.** If I don't like it, and I tell you I don't like it, it means I don't like it. The answer is “no”. What part don't you understand?
- **Beat around the bush (waste my time).** If you want direct answers, ask direct questions. Do not come to my office without knowing anything about my business or what you and your company might do for me. Do your homework, I do!
- **Fail to take responsibility.** If it's your job and it gets screwed up, own up to it. Just be up front and tell me and let's move on. Get over it!
- **Go over my head.** If I want you to go “up there” I'll take you. Believe me, I'll find out, and I can be very vindictive.

Do:

- **Listen.** Why ask the question if you are not going to listen to the answer? To get the right answers, you have to ask the right questions. That means you have to do some research about my company and my product and my program. Do it.
- **Respond.** If you want the work, respond to my wishes and desires. This does not mean I have all the right ideas and will not consider alternatives, it does mean I have the final say.
- **Be honest.** Do what you say you are going to do. Don't make me promises you can't keep, don't overstate your capabilities, and if things go wrong, you come to me, don't make me come to you.
- **Be committed.** Get all the information you can about me, my product, my market, my customer, and then make recommendations that mean something to me.
- **Return my phone call...really!**

My initial response to this was that it shouldn't be that hard...this is pretty basic stuff. But I think that's the point...we sometimes forget the basics. If these are

the top concerns (of the respondents to at least one survey), it tells me that if we can focus on the basics of a business relationship, that would be a great start to a long and strong association with a client.

When you think about it, it's no different than in any sport: build the basic skills and focus on learning the basics, and then the success is built on that strong foundation.

So how do you think your clients would answer that survey question?

See you on the show floor!

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